A Body in Motion…
Doug Hochstetler

“Explore what we learn about ourselves and others through movement and sports.”

Stroll into any health club or fitness center in the country and you might observe a particular ritual take place again and again near the bank of cardio machines. Perhaps you even perform this ritual yourself. You approach your fitness contraption of choice, if your gym is so equipped, you turn on the ceiling-mounted television to your favorite channel. You also don your earbuds or headphones and proceed to crank up the “workout” playlist on your iPod. Then, mounting the treadmill/bike/elliptical/other, you begin to walk/pedal/run/row. Congratulations! You are traveling to absolutely nowhere and have successfully distracted yourself from doing so with as many visual and audio stimuli as possible.

Why do we do this? Why do so many of us feel it is necessary to detach ourselves from the process of moving our bodies? Dr. Douglas Hochstetler, associate professor of kinesiology at Penn State Lehigh Valley, has focused his research on answering these and other types of questions that fall into a field known as sport philosophy.

If pairing those words seems like an oxymoron to you, you’re not alone. “As a discipline, kinesiology can be somewhat confusing,” says Hochstetler, who has taught at both Lehigh Valley and Berks campuses since 2002. “Kinesiology involves studying the science of human movement. Sport philosophy can be seen as a sub-discipline that applies mainstream theories, such as values and ethics, to human movement.”

He offers, for example, the fact that in the era of “no child left behind,” many school districts feel forced to sacrifice their physical education programs to boost resources elsewhere in their curriculum. Sport philosophy may help make a case for how those programs fit into the school curriculum not just for preventing obesity but also for the social and cultural contributions they make.

Hochstetler did not set out knowing his path would lead him to study this field. An avid runner and athlete, he obtained a bachelor’s and master’s degree in physical education from Northwestern College, Iowa, and West Chester University, PA, respectively, and has an extensive background in coaching teams. However, a senior year class on the sociology of sport sparked his curiosity into looking at why we move instead of just how.

This new area of interest led Hochstetler to combine his background in coaching and physical education and philosophy to successfully complete his Ph.D. in kinesiology at Penn State in 1999. Since then, Dr. Hochstetler has focused his research on looking at the philosophical implications of team sports and physical activity. He is widely published in the field, with writing that examines such topics as, “can we experience significance on a treadmill,” and “Replacing ‘did you win?’ with ‘how did you play?’”

Now Hochstetler is looking forward to expanding his research on a sabbatical planned for Fall 2009. During this time, he will travel to his undergraduate alma mater, Northwestern College, to do field work on the subject of coaching philosophy in the context of an institutional setting. The aim of the research is to discover how an institution or athletic department develops and shapes its coaching philosophy, and, in turn, how that philosophy affects different issues.

“Certainly, the physical benefits of activity are part of the equation. But with the advances in technology and healthcare, who knows what might be solved in the future by simply taking a pill. So why move at all?” asks Hochstetler. “This is why I feel it is important to look at the process, not just the end result – to explore what we learn about ourselves and others through movement and sports,” says Hochstetler.

In the meantime, Dr. Hochstetler continues to enjoy teaching these concepts and general physical education to Penn State students. Some in his jogging class will apply his teaching directly to the pavement in the annual Lehigh Valley half-Marathon and 5K. Others, like the elementary education majors in his phys. ed. methods class, are learning how to incorporate movement into the classroom.

Whatever the outcome, Dr. Hochstetler is helping to ensure that future generations will understand the value of movement and be inspired to keep moving – iPod or not.