Abstract
Western Carolina University (WCU) experienced an increase in the number of students with depressive symptoms over the past few years, an upsurge that is congruent with national trends. In an effort to combat the pressure put on Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and to provide a more comprehensive approach to student mental health, Campus Recreation and Wellness partnered with CAPS at WCU to develop an improvement effort. The purpose of the improvement effort was to implement an exercise intervention for traditionally-aged undergraduate students with mild to moderate depression to reduce stress levels, ultimately resulting in a reduction in depressive symptoms. In this improvement effort I sought to address three questions: 1) What are the barriers that prevent WCU students with depression from pursuing a regular exercise program? 2) Does an exercise intervention decrease the prevalence of depressive symptoms in WCU students with depression? 3) Does an exercise intervention assist in the development of regular exercise habits for WCU students with depression? Eight participants, age 18-25, with a clinical diagnosis of mild to moderate depression completed participation in the intervention. Overall, the results of the data analysis support exercise as an intervention for depression and assessment of the program supports the continuation of such a program with recommendations for expansion at WCU.