An underwater photograph of a swimming pool lane. The lane lines are made of plastic rings in various colors: white, yellow, red, green, and blue. The water is clear and blue, with light reflecting off the surface. The lane lines stretch from the top left towards the bottom right of the frame.

# *Versatile* **FITNESS**

by David Vinson, PhD

My older brother warned me about the “Freshman 15,” and I should have listened. But I was young and eager to be on my own, and I lacked the self-control to resist the buffet style pizza options and the all-you-can-eat soft serve ice cream at the campus cafeteria. Had it not been for my university’s swimming pool, I’d have needed a new wardrobe by the end of the school year.



The indoor facility I so frequently attended on campus became not only a refuge from the stifling heat of the Deep South, but it was a place to relax and unwind after I completed my laps for the day. And because I grew up along the Alabama coast, where my fondest childhood memories are of the long summer days I spent in Mobile Bay, there was something about the pool that eased the homesickness of my freshman year.

In terms of providing gorgeous, versatile aquatic centers, private universities and colleges have come a long way since I was an undergrad. Students now have access to aquatics-based amenities and equipment that can maximize their experiences in the water, whether the goal is simply to have fun or to practice good fitness habits.

### Keeping Body and Mind Healthy with Aquatics-Based Exercise

It is well known that exercise in the water is a great way for students to burn calories and tone muscles while enjoying a complete body workout.

An additional benefit of swimming is it can help reduce anxiety, which itself is becoming more common among the student body. According to a study by the American College Health Association, 65.7% of students reported the feeling of “overwhelming anxiety” during the 2019 school year. If swimming can play even a minor role in positively impacting students’ mental health, it is our duty to promote aquatics-based activities as an avenue for good health, both of body *and* mind.

Not only can swimming help reduce anxiety, it can also improve sleep—a precious commodity for our students, and one that is undoubtedly related to stress, anxiety, and depression.

Students with physical challenges can also benefit from swimming, including those with asthma. The humid environment of indoor pools may help with breathing, and breathing exercises learned from swimming may even translate to expanded lung capacity.

Moreover, students with muscular sclerosis (MS) may find swimming beneficial since water allows limbs to become buoyant, thereby helping to support them during exercise. In one study

(“Hydrotherapy in the Treatment of Pain in People with Multiple Sclerosis” by Castro-Sanchez, et al.), a 20-week swimming program resulted in significant reductions of pain for those with MS. Those involved also reported improvement with symptoms like fatigue and depression.

The use of the swimming pool as an inclusive space ties into broader, campus-wide efforts to promote inclusivity, thereby giving everyone the opportunity of benefitting from aquatics-based fun and exercise.

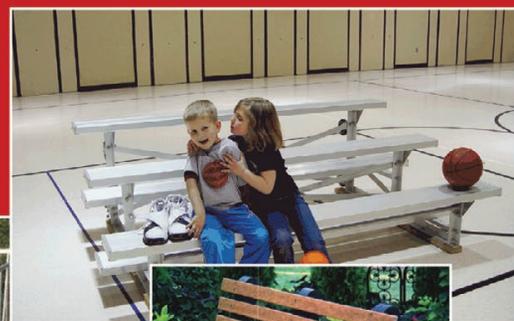
### Options for Aquatic-Based Equipment

While swimming provides a great workout, fitness-based aquatics equipment can make water workouts more engaging and versatile. Provided below is an overview of the equipment that can be incorporated:

**Jogger buoyancy belts:** A jogger buoyancy belt comfortably suspends the swimmer at shoulder level, allowing for normal breathing as one performs a wide range of water exercises, all of which are impact-free.

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For student-athletes, it is key that water workouts are impact-free. The absence of impact reduces the likelihood of injuries during training, and when combined with land-based workout routines, student-athletes are empowered to reach levels of peak performance.

Aided by a jogger buoyancy belt, water running promotes cardiovascular exercise free of impact and weight bearing limitations. Moreover, student-athletes who are rehabilitating from injury can enjoy the very same benefits, thus facilitating safer and potentially faster recovery times.

**Aquatic dumbbells:** These represent another means of enjoying engaging and versatile water exercises.

Aquatic dumbbells are made of foam and plastic. They're light out of the water but heavy underwater due to the natural resistance that water provides. They're also widely adaptable and can be used to tone arms, legs, or even abs.

With an increase of resistance underwater, the weights provide an intense workout from both ends of the pool, whether in shallow or deep water. And while most people associate workouts in a pool with swimming laps, water aerobics is a great alternative for low-impact training.

For those who have suffered from injuries, who are overweight or have sensitive joints, such low-impact workouts are ideal.



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**Pull buoys:** The pull buoy can be used to improve a swimmer's power. A buoy is typically held between the thighs to float the hips and legs at the surface of the water. The action of swimming with a buoy is called "pulling" because only the arms are used for forward momentum.

Anyone interested in increasing arms strength and upper body power can benefit from pull buoys, and it is easy to imagine the appeal of this equipment to student-athletes—not merely competitive swimmers, but any athlete in need of building upper body strength.

Any regular swimming set can be transformed into a pulling workout: long or short repetitions, fast or slow intervals, ladders or descending pace. Also, because leg muscles consume significantly less oxygen while pulling, hypoxic breathing sets can be easily incorporated.

**Aquatic cuffs:** These are like the name suggests, in which cuffs are weighted and designed for use during aquatic exercise.

While the swimmer can still enjoy the benefits of buoyancy and pain-free joint movement, aquatic cuffs help to build strength, endurance, and muscle tone. An added benefit is their versatility in terms of weight and because they can be worn on either arms or legs.

**Exercise balls:** The equipment options here are ample, but a standard example is a 9-inch inflatable ball that is both soft and light. What matters most is that the ball floats to create resistance that must be overcome during a workout.

To increase arm strength, stand in the water and press the ball below the surface, holding it for as long as possible; another option is moving the ball in a figure-eight pattern as it's submerged. Using a larger ball increases the resistance.

To burn calories and strengthen core muscles, stand at one end of the pool and hold the ball in front with both hands. Walk forward and simultaneously move the ball in circles along the water's surface. One can make

the exercise more challenging by jogging, running, jumping on both feet, or hopping on one foot.

### Equipment Exercise for All

Aquatics facilities are a space for fun and relaxation, and for keeping our bodies and minds healthy—and given the diverse needs of the student body, private universities and colleges should be sure they are providing aquatics-based exercise equipment that addresses the full range of their students' needs.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** PUPN staff writer Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, husband, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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