Gainesville, FL – Dr. J.O. Spengler, a full Professor in the University of Florida’s College of Health and Human Performance, and American Heart Association Volunteer, recently served on a policy statement writing group for a paper published in the American Journal of Public Health entitled “Promoting Physical Activity Through the Shared Use of School Recreational Spaces: A Policy Statement from the American Heart Association.” The statement addresses the issue of physical activity and access to sport and recreational resources, and provides recommendations for federal, state and local policy makers to support and encourage the shared use of school recreational and athletic facilities to improve the health of communities.

Dr. Spengler is at the forefront of research addressing the concept of shared use, which is defined as opening school recreational facilities and grounds during non-school hours for community use. The concept of shared use is supported by organizations such as the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The writing group consisted of scholars from peer institutions such as the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and the University of California, Berkley; and from disciplines such as epidemiology, law, sport and recreation management, urban and regional planning and public health. Over the course of a year, the writing group conducted meetings via email and phone to assist with writing efforts on the project.

The multi-disciplinary nature of the writing group brought unique and varied insights to the policy paper. Dr. Spengler was very impressed with the intelligence and dedication of his fellow writing group members, and says that “science-based evidence is critical to informing and developing supportive policies for shared use. “ He also recognizes that the work does not end here. “It will take the continued, combined efforts of scientists, legal technical assistance providers, policy advocates, and decision and policy makers to increase opportunities for physical activity through shared use in a meaningful way” says Spengler.
The primary mission of the American Heart Association is to build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. The general public can recognize the organization through their primary campaigns, “Go Red for Women” and the “Power to End Stroke.” The AHA continually publishes new policy and scientific statements that are both used and recognized at the federal, state and local levels as heart health public policy. This particular policy statement is currently available online (see http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301461) and is scheduled to be released via hard copy next month.

The Department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management is committed to national and international excellence in the generation, dissemination, and communication of knowledge in tourism, recreation and sport management. The Department is also dedicated to excellence in the preparation and training of future industry and academic professionals, and providing relevant outreach to stakeholders.

If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Dr. J.O. Spengler at spengler@hhp.ufl.edu (352.294.1671) or Arielle Gousse (Marketing and Public Relations) at agousse@ufl.edu (352.392.3992).