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GEM Piece: Wellness Program

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – In 1990, Missy Smock came to Illinois Wesleyan University with a dream and a promise, to create a wellness program that would provide activities and services that would afford life enhancement opportunities for faculty, staff, immediate family members and retirees of the University. Twenty-plus years later, the program has spread to students, alums and employees of collaborating organizations who desire the holistic philosophy offered by the IWU Wellness Program.

“Wellness goes beyond the physical component,” said Smock, director of the IWU Wellness Program. “Wellness is about finding different ways to create balance in the many aspects that make up one’s life. There will be peaks and valleys accompanied by the emotional rollercoaster that goes with the highs and lows. So, connecting with resources, social connections among other things, to gain this balance is the key to a more holistic approach to achieving life enhancement.”

The free, year-round program offers many services for IWU faculty and staff, as well as activity classes for students.

The faculty/staff program includes activity classes, fitness orientations, wellness workshops, health screenings, ergonomic evaluations and massage therapy, which is performed in the wellness office at Illinois Wesleyan’s Shirk Center. The massage therapy service is one of the few services where there is a fee required. The Wellness Program also coordinates special annual events such as the Golf Tournament and the Illinois Sustainable Living and Wellness Expo.

Smock and colleague Jeremy Spencer believe certain lifestyle changes are more achievable if approached through hands-on experience.

“Eating healthier is one such example,” says Smock. “Cooking classes that teach people how to incorporate more whole foods into their diet with quick and simple recipes in the midst of busy lives is one way to promote change,” said Smock.

As a result, cooking classes are offered throughout the year, such as the holiday Chocolate Truffles Class taught by staff members Melinda Baur and Cynthia Honegger and the Yogurt (Madzoon) Making with Carol Churukian. Additionally, the Wellness website (<http://www.iwu.edu/~wellness/>) contains a variety of healthy recipes for appetizers, salads, breads, main dishes and desserts.

The program also offers wellness workshops on relaxation, meditation, gardening, self-care, financial well-being, timely-health information and much more.

On-site health screenings are offered throughout the year including, blood pressure, prostatic specific antigen, cholesterol and lipid profile, and a digital mammography service. The results of all screenings go not only to the personal physician of the faculty/staff members, but, to the employees themselves. Over the years, the Wellness staff has discovered that this is an empowering tool to inspire lifestyle change when needed.

The program also has a broad range of activity classes held at the Shirk Center and in the dance studios in the Center of Natural Sciences (CNS), including Zumba, Functional Training, Spinning, Pilates, Ball Pilates, Step, Low Impact, Strength & Stretch, Deep Water Workout, Wee Swim, Tae Kwon Do, Tai Chi and Yoga I and II, all of which are offered in this fall, 2010.

While the faculty/staff Wellness Program is well established after years of use, the student fitness program is relatively new. When Fitness Coordinator Spencer arrived at Illinois Wesleyan in 2006, the student fitness program was just beginning. With his help, it has blossomed into an in-demand program for the active student body.

“We essentially do five to seven activity classes per week which are taught for the most part by students,” said Spencer. “It’s been very good because the student instructors here are driven, dependable and fun.” The classes, taught at the Shirk Center, include, Zumba, Core, Tai Kwon Do, Cycle, Pilates, Yoga, Boot Camp, Step, and Deep Water Workout.

Spencer recently collaborated with professional triathlete and Assistant Professor Chris Sweet, information literacy librarian at The Ames Library to implement a Triathlon Training program for faculty/staff and students.

While student participation varies throughout the year, Spencer notes that classes have been well attended, normally averaging about 10 to 20 students per class. This number explodes during May Term, when students have more free time.

“May Term is great because I think the students aren’t as overextended,” said Spencer. “We get anywhere from 35 to 50 students per class.”

To keep up with the ever-changing athletic palate of the student body, Spencer and Smock are constantly watching for the next new activity.

“I just have my eye out for what’s new and exciting,” said Smock, who received her Zumba certification after discovering its popularity. “I look for classes that I think both the faculty/staff and students would love.”

For additional information, visit the Wellness website at <http://www.iwu.edu~wellness>.