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HOPE Program Helps Older Adults Get Fit



Older adults interested in getting in shape are often stymied by a simple question: What do I do next?

Figuring out how to develop an exercise regimen can be challenging, and hiring a personal trainer can be expensive.

The School of Health and Human Sciences' Kinesiology program has a solution – its HOPE (Helping Others Participate in Exercise) program, which primarily serves adults who are 50 and older. Launched nearly 15 years ago, the program offers UNC Greensboro faculty and staff, as well as members of the Greensboro community, an affordable option for working with a trainer.

The program helps prepare undergraduate students, who serve as personal trainers, for career success.

"This is a great way to provide guidance to adults who want to exercise but aren't sure how to go about it. At the same time, it gives students a chance to practice their training skills and also become better communicators," says Dr. Anne Brady, an assistant professor of kinesiology who directs the HOPE program.

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"I didn't see the results right away. It took some time, but now that work is really paying off." – SHEILA WILLIAMS



Currently, the program serves about 25 adults. It is looking to expand in the spring as more undergraduate students become involved.

Adults who enroll in the program need to receive clearance from their doctor and provide a self-reported medical history. Based on that information, a health assessment, and the goals of their enrollees, the student trainers develop customized exercise routines that might focus on cardiovascular health, strength training, flexibility or other areas.

Adults in the program can work out up to three times a week at UNC Greensboro's Student Recreation Center, including individual sessions that are supervised by student trainers and group exercise classes focused on strength, balance and flexibility. Per semester, the program costs \$100 for UNC Greensboro faculty and staff and \$140 for everyone else.

During the academic year, sessions are held from 6 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The program runs on those same days from 6:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. during the summer.

Participants also have access to the "Hope Talks" lecture series, which

features guest presentations on a wide array of topics, including dealing with injuries, caregiving, retirement trends and health care. Incentive programs encourage participants to exercise during holiday breaks, and occasional social events help participants get to know one another.

Greensboro resident Sheila Williams joined her husband in the program a year ago and has worked out three times a week since then.

"I saw the progress he was making and thought I should probably do this, too," Williams says. "The great thing about it is that you have a variety of things to do, so exercise doesn't get boring."

The even greater thing: Williams is seeing results.

Since joining the HOPE program and paying attention to her diet, Williams says, her blood pressure, cholesterol and other important health indicators have all improved to normal levels or better.

"I didn't see the results right away," Williams says. "It took some time, but now that work is really paying off."

The program has been rewarding in different ways for students like Justin Haller '14, who earned his degree in kinesiology with a concentration in fitness leadership. During the past spring semester, he worked in the HOPE program two or three days a week, serving two clients.

"I didn't think I was interested in working with older adults at first," Haller says. "But now I'd rather work with them than other groups of people. They're really willing to listen and they want to get better."

Haller, who now works as a personal trainer at a local gym, hopes to own a gym eventually that serves both older adults and children. One of his key missions: helping combat obesity.

"It was a great experience," he says of the HOPE program. "It really helped me decide what I want to do with my career."

For more information about the HOPE program, e-mail hope@uncg.edu.



Maynard McMillian, a longtime participant in the HOPE program, does an upright row with a bar.