

1-19-2007

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Recommended Citation

Office of Public Affairs, "GSU Physical Therapy Students Reach Out to the Community" (2007). *Press Releases*. Paper 226.
http://opus.govst.edu/press_releases/226

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Date: January 18, 2007
 Contact: Lindsay Gladstone
 Governors State University
 Phone: (708) 534-7090
 Fax: (708) 534-8399
 Email: l-gladstone@govst.edu

For Immediate Release

GSU Physical Therapy Students Reach Out to the Community

University Park, IL. January 19, 2007 -It has all the makings of a perfect university class. It provides a learning opportunity for its students, the professor enjoys teaching the class, and the community benefits from the knowledge and hard work of the students.

The dry title of Physical Therapy 760: Interaction and Education for Patient Care tells nothing about the teaching, learning, and community spirit that infuses this Governors State University class.

A major component of the course gives students the opportunity to teach various aspects of wellness and good health to larger audiences. The students divide into small groups, identify an educational need, and take the lesson to the community.

"This course is non-traditional. Physical therapists usually work one-on-one," explained Ann Vendrely, Associate Professor of Physical Therapy at GSU. "The students had to figure out the best way to teach a large group which can be an efficient and effective preventative."

The student groups chose topics and audiences based on needs they identified. One group of GSU students visited a Hindu Temple in Lemont to discuss the benefits of exercise and tailored the workout to fit the age of their audience.

"We explained what physical therapists do and the benefits of exercise to the elderly. We did sitting exercises, marching exercises, and offered safety tips," said Brandi Oitker of Bourbonnais.

In teacher Rajrani Chand's fifth grade classroom at Indiana Elementary School in Matteson, university students taught back pack safety, and encouraged the children to carry their books with the least chance of causing injury.

"First, we assessed what the kids knew and then discussed anatomy, posture, back pack weight, and lifting. All the kids wanted to assess their posture," said university student Kim Lall of Richton Park, "We really had fun with the kids and the teacher asked us to come back next year."

Another group of GSU students visited a weight lifting class at Providence High School in New Lenox. They demonstrated proper body mechanics for various lifts, presses, and exercises. In a physical education class at Homewood Flossmoor High School, university students demonstrated how the loss of limb function alters physical ability. Using scooters, they orchestrated a game during which students could not use selected arms and legs to propel themselves or score.

Governors State University students also visited a Purdue University exercise physiology class to discuss the training and career opportunities of physical therapists. GSU students also developed instructional and resource materials to help physical therapists communicate with Spanish speaking patients.

"One of the most important aspects of this class is to learn how to teach a particular concept to a group of people," said Vendrely. "Our students also learn to go above and beyond as professionals. They put a lot of effort into these projects and give a lot back to the community."

Vendrely frequently receives requests to have students return and repeat the lessons next year.

"We can't always do that as we let the students pick their projects. Every year they identify a new need and a new audience."

Vendrely also noted that students have the opportunity to explain what a physical therapist does and the training needed to become one. Governors State University recently replaced its Master of Physical Therapy program with a doctorate level program.

"We are very excited about the new program. It is a three-year, full time course of study. It will continue our tradition of educating highly qualified physical therapists."