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University of Dayton

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**NEWS RELEASE**

**ADAPTED PHYSICAL EDUCATION BRINGS BLESSINGS, BENEFITS TO UD STUDENT INTERNS AND YOUNG STUDENTS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

DAYTON, Ohio — While many of his peers look forward to Fridays and a couple of days respite from classes each week, University of Dayton sophomore Timothy Mulligan looks forward to Tuesdays. On Tuesdays, Mulligan hooks up with his young friend John, a Trotwood-Madison High School student, for a little basketball and workout in the Frericks Center gymnasium.

Because John has Down syndrome, Mulligan works with him on the gym floor to help the young man achieve an improved state of well-being. But when he talks about his weekly sessions with John, it is with a deeply heartfelt smile borne of the irony that it is Mulligan whose life and well-being have been so enriched by his contact with his "incredible young friend."

"I get an amazing feeling when I see John succeeding and, more importantly, having a good time," said Mulligan, one of 27 UD student interns who work with students with developmental disabilities in the University's adapted physical education program. "Seeing him smile gives me a great feeling, and that feeling is the reason I look forward to going to that class every Tuesday."

Now in its third year at UD, the cooperative adapted physical education program is designed to provide students with multiple handicaps and from multicultural backgrounds with quality physical education. At the same time, the program is designed to provide UD student interns, comprised of a blend of physical education and special education majors, with valuable training and experience in working with special-needs students.

This spring, 57 students ages 8 through 18 from Trotwood-Madison and Patterson Kennedy International Heritage Academy come to UD for a weekly workout with their "personal trainers." At the beginning of the seven-week program, the young students are assessed in locomotor skills, such as running, hopping and skipping; manipulative skills, such as kicking, catching and throwing a ball; and in cardiovascular and physical fitness, including flexibility and muscular strength and endurance. Each student is then prescribed a regimen of

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exercise and activity suited to individual abilities and goals and is guided through that regimen by his or her UD mentor.

Since its inception, the program has proven more successful than anticipated, said instructor George DeMarco, assistant professor of physical education and coordinator of the physical education major program in the University's department of health and sport science.

"What we've experienced in this program has been far beyond our most hopeful and heartfelt expectations," DeMarco said. "We have quantitative evidence showing that the fitness levels of these young students are improving, and we have empirical evidence that indicates their behavior is improving.

"But even greater are the non-measurable rewards, such as seeing these beautiful children experience the joy of socializing and increased self-esteem. In turn, the gifts these children give us surpass the pedagogical; they provide an ineffable grace and remind us we all need one another.

"We expected to see fitness levels increase," DeMarco added. "What came as a surprise was the depth with which humility and gratitude have been expressed by both our students and their young charges."

Debbie Baker, an educational aide for students with multiple handicaps at Trotwood-Madison, said UD's adapted physical education program provides "a wonderful opportunity" for socialization with new people and in a different environment than their familiar school setting. "The UD students have always been fantastic," Baker said during a recent workout session at Frericks. "It's obvious our students feel very comfortable and secure here, and that helps them feel better about themselves — especially when they're approaching new people."

Nan Crawford, a special education teacher at Patterson Kennedy, said the personalized attention her students receive from their trainers at UD is invaluable physically and psychologically. "Our students get the special one-on-one help to work on gross- and fine-motor skills at UD that we can't provide for them in a large gym class at school," Crawford said. "And you can really see the positive effect this sharing time has on their self esteem. The UD students treat our kids with respect, and that means so much to them. It builds a confidence that they carry with them back to Patterson Kennedy. I see them trying to do what they learned in class here on the playground, trying to improve all the time. It's wonderful."

DeMarco credits Lloyd Laubach, chair of health and sport science at the University, with full support of the program, which DeMarco based on the teachings of his Bridgewater State College mentor, Joseph Huber, and his experience as an adapted physical education teacher in public schools and state institutions in Massachusetts. The philosophy and curriculum of adapted physical education are in keeping with the characteristics of Marianist

education as defined by the Society of Mary, DeMarco said.

“This program is guided by the shared University and Marianist mission to ‘link learning and scholarship with leadership and service.’ It transcends the clinical and goes right to the mission, giving our students an incredibly important real-life experience with these wonderful children.

“As each course progresses, we watch our student interns become even more sensitive to and capable of working with exceptional children. That’s incredibly important, because we want our students to come away from the University with the professional competencies of assessment, prescription and programming, but we also want them to come away with tolerance, acceptance and the ability to celebrate individual differences. If they develop that sensitivity here, they’ll be better able to share that with their nondisabled students in regular physical education classes that include students with disabilities.”

Tim Mulligan agrees. “Of all the ideas that Dr. DeMarco has taught us, the one that seems to stick in my mind the most is that ‘disabled’ does not mean ‘less than.’ It strictly and simply means ‘different,’ and we all have qualities that make us unique.

“I’ve also learned from my class experience that children with disabilities are beautiful individuals who have the same feelings and needs that we all do — to be treated as equally as possible to others.”

Mulligan said he’s gained more from the course than he anticipated, and recalled a recent moment in class that he said will stay with him forever.

“It was a good class, and John was showing signs of great improvement. I could see he was having a good time, and he smiled the entire period. At the end of class, while we were waiting to leave, John started to laugh. I have no idea what he was thinking, but it didn’t matter — I knew he was thinking about something that made him happy. I’ve rarely seen John show any emotion, and laughter is one of the greatest outlets of emotion a person can have. Being with John at that moment gave me one of the best feelings I’ve had in a long time.”

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