

Spotlight on Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Continued

The students' original concept was to create an online fitness and wellness center for the community at large. However, the students identified the SIUE community as a target population. The goal was to be a helpful resource to the university community during these uncertain times. Additionally, they identified social media as the platform of delivery for a variety of exercise and wellness-related topics.

Vanderbunt contacted Campus Recreation Director Keith Becherer to see if there was any interest in collaborating on the project. Becherer directed her to Hawkins.

"The internship objectives are for students to apply academic coursework, theories, and principles to gain knowledge and skills through observation and application in a real-world environment," Hawkins said. "They develop and enhance professional skills such as communication, motivation, organization, and self-discipline, and gain a better understanding of facility management and business operations."

After brainstorming sessions and reflective research, the students determined that they wanted to do more than provide resources and encouragement for physical activity, such as daily workouts. They created a plan to teach proper form, dispel myths, and expose students to the science behind physical activity, while providing resources to help with overall wellness such as mindfulness, stress, sleep, nutrition, hydration and how to use physical activity to help facilitate learning.

The team quickly organized inside Microsoft Teams and simultaneously learned new software for collaboration and content creation, organizing themselves and their topics, and created the first set of content released the week of May 25. They are also developing a website where they can review various resources, such as fitness and wellness apps, and publish the more in-depth content in the form of blog posts.

A variety of students are benefitting from sharpening their social media skills. "I'm excited to learn how to make more professional content since social media and the use of electronics is a part of everyone's daily lives," Marianne Durkin said. "By going through this online experience without face-to-face contact, it shows that you can make a difference and do some great work with a large group of people remotely."

The students intend to publish two to four posts per day across the campus recreation social media accounts. The emphasis will be on increasing student engagement by including challenges, daily calls to action and encouraging the use of hashtags. Students are divided into groups:

- Workouts: Create daily workouts and challenges, reviewing resources
- Outdoor recreation: Create a minimum of two outdoor activities and challenges per week, reviewing apps and resources
- Exercise knowledge base: Provide the more educational-informative content, teach proper form, dispel myths
- Wellness, mindfulness and stress: Provide daily tips, tricks, education and motivation for leading an overall healthy lifestyle, including general wellness, nutrition, hydration, study tips, anxiety and stress, sleep, motivation, and self-care
- Interview spotlight: Highlight SIUE students who engage with the content, interviewing faculty on exercise and nutrition-related topics
- Social media: Responsible for final edits, approval and posting of content, as well as closely monitoring student engagement

"This virtual internship opportunity is allowing our students the ability to develop their professional skills and apply what they have learned in the classroom, while also helping campus recreation continue operations with a reduced staff," Vanderbunt said. "Despite the lack of face-to-face interaction, this experience will meet the original objectives of the internship and will prepare these students for their careers after graduation."

Tyrone Johnson of Edwardsville sees the benefits of learning skills for creatively connecting with people, taking engagement to a new level.

"We can give our students a sense of community even while at home, motivating alumni, students, and the school to interact in a way that bonds us," he said. "If I can do this here, then when I run my own physical therapy clinic, I can feel confident creating my ideal environment no matter the variables."

"I look forward to learning the behind-the-scenes of how campus recreation creates and maintains a student-engaged community through social media," Magali Coreggia said. "Rather than just being a student in the audience, I get to experience seeing and creating the content through a new perspective and gain skills that I can use in my future."

Meanwhile, Sabrina Burch of Bethalto is looking toward a career in corporate wellness. "This internship will help me gain experience in that department," she said. "As a wellness coordinator, it is your job to keep the employees motivated and healthy by giving them insight to exercise and nutrition and promoting challenges with incentives to keep them physically active. It is also more than just exercise, it is the well-being of each person.

"Each group within this internship is a collective representative of what health and wellness is all about. This is going to give me an inside feel of what it may be like for a future career in the wellness field."

Vanderbunt said the internship allows students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to confidently navigate the online fitness, health and wellness marketplace, setting them up to be leaders in their chosen fields.