SETTING THE BAR HIGHER

Through KIN 468 Adapted Physical Education, UA students create custom fitness and training plans for young adults with physical and intellectual disabilities and form valuable relationships while putting their strategies into action.

BY ALICE DETERS | PHOTOS BY MICA AGUILAR AND ELIZABETH WOODRUFF

University of Alabama students in KIN 468 Adapted Physical Education are proving the sky is the limit by helping young adults with physical and intellectual disabilities reach new heights in physical fitness and sports.

UA students in the course adapt fitness principles, health concepts and skill-development exercises for participants in Crossing Points, a collaboration between the University of Alabama’s College of Education and the Tuscaloosa city and county school systems that provides transition services for young adults, ages 18 to 21, with disabilities. Some students also work with other community organizations, including the Tuscaloosa Park and Recreation Authority’s therapeutic recreation program, and with UA’s adapted sports teams.

Students who partner with Crossing Points are assigned to an individual in the program and design customized fitness, strength and conditioning plans for him or her. KIN 468 students then work with Crossing Points participants, who also are UA students, for an hour and 15 minutes two a week to implement the plans, which are aimed at improving overall physical fitness.

“This experience has changed my outlook on how I view individuals with disabilities,” says Kristen Spence, a senior majoring in exercise science. “I sometimes think because someone has a mental disability that means that they will not be able to perform physical activity as well, but students in this program proved me wrong. I loved getting to form a relationship with a student with disabilities through this program. It was an awesome experience getting to serve them and watch them improve.”

Amy Williamson, a lead teacher with Crossing Points, says the adapted physical education lessons are a favorite among her students. “They love the program for so many reasons,” Williamson says. “They really enjoy the chance to get active and the chance to work with another UA student. They really develop a friendship.”

“The classroom component of KIN 468 teaches students about disability sport and physical-education programs and the roles of various service agencies, state and federal legislation and inclusion strategies in the education of those with disabilities. Students also learn to apply academic knowledge of conditions, diseases and injuries in order to adapt physical activities for individuals affected by them. “This service-learning experience allowed me to put into practice what I had been learning in class,” says Spence, who plans to become an occupational therapist and work with individuals with disabilities. “I was able to put concepts into practice when modifying exercises for the student with whom I worked.”

Elizabeth Woodruff, clinical instructor in sport pedagogy, added a service-learning component to KIN 468 after participating in UA’s 2009-2010 Faculty Fellows in Service Learning program, offered by the Center for Ethics & Social Responsibility. “The amount of growth I see among my students who partake in service-learning is unparalleled,” Woodruff says. “There is something about getting out there and actually putting what they are learning into practice that really causes them to improve their skills much more than they would if they only came to class each week.”

Since Spring 2011, 317 UA students have worked with 80 Crossing Points students and have logged 7,249 service hours in various adapted-physical-education or adapted-recreation settings. In Spring 2014, 81 students dedicated approximately 1,400 hours to teaching adapted physical education lessons and serving the community in adapted recreation settings.

Kolson Lamb, a senior majoring in exercise and sport science, began working as strength and conditioning coach for the University of Alabama Women’s Wheelchair Basketball team through KIN 468. After completing the course, she continued her role with the team through other service-learning projects and a volunteer internship. Lamb is responsible for designing and implementing sport-specific strength and conditioning programs that aid in functional athletic development for each team member. In 2015, the team won its fourth national championship in seven years.

Lamb says that while she appreciates the professional experience the class has given her, the full impact of her involvement goes much deeper. “The most rewarding part of my experience has been the opportunity I have had to watch the women put forth a grueling work ethic to accomplish major feats they had never considered themselves able to conquer,” Lamb says. “I love motivating, encouraging and pushing them beyond their perceived limitations. It has been incredible to try, try and try again, finding what works and what does not. Nothing worth having comes easy in life, and these girls truly understand that.”

For more information on KIN 468 Adapted Physical Education, contact Elizabeth Woodruff at 205-348-7452 or ewoodruff@ua.edu. Woodruff and Oleg Sinelshikov, associate professor of sport pedagogy and 2011-2012 Faculty Fellow in Service Learning alumnus, coauthored “Teaching Young Adults with Disabilities through Service Learning,” which was recently published by the European Physical Education Review.