

# Fitness and Wellness Workshop Series for Graduate and Postdoc Students

## 2015-2016 Professors for the Future Program

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### Project Description



The need to strike a balance between work and self-wellness is relevant to the lives of graduate and postdoctoral scholars. Fitness and wellness are important components of coping with the competitive and demanding nature of our profession, but herein lies the problem: in a profession that demands so much time and energy, how can we (1) even justify spending time on fitness and wellness, and (2) make fitness and wellness become a lifestyle rather than an intermittent goal?

To address this challenge, I created a three-part workshop series for graduate and post-doctoral students in partnership with the UC Davis Athletic and Recreation Center (ARC). The purpose of the workshop series was threefold: first, to introduce current research on the benefits of fitness and wellness; second, to link the research to exercises that can be done at the ARC, at home, or at the office; and third, to create a network of graduate students interested in pursuing a holistic approach to finding a work/life balance.

### Workshop #2: Intro to Cycling



Participants got their hearts pumping with a low-impact and fun workout in the indoor cycling studio! Attendees learned how to properly set up an indoor bike and were introduced to the perceived exertion resistance scale to enhance cardio endurance and strength. Together we experienced riding technique and alignment for hills, power climbs, and sprints during a 35 to 40 minute ride.

#### General Cycling Tips and Technique

- Refrain from gripping your handlebars. This can lead to tension in your neck and shoulders, and improper alignment.
- Keep your weight distributed over your pedals, not your handlebars.
- Keep your chins up! It is very common to see folks dropping their heads down (while gripping the handlebars really tightly). This will keep your core engaged, and prevent neck/shoulder pain.
- Remember to have fun!

### Impact

Overall, approximately 50 graduate students and postdocs from 20 departments attended at least one workshop. According to the workshop evaluations, participants appreciated the emphasis on form and technique in a slower pace environment. In addition, participants also appreciated the handouts I created with sample workouts, music, and alignment/breathing cues. We ended each workout by setting goals and sharing strategies and ideas for obtaining fitness goals. Almost all participants wrote one specific fitness or wellness change that they will make as a result of the workshop series.

### Opportunities for Fitness and Wellness

All student-fee paying graduate students and postdocs are eligible for the following opportunities at the ARC:

- **Quarter-long group exercise passes for only \$25!** There are over 60 classes offered on a weekly basis at the ARC including cycling, cardio, strength, Zumba, and kickboxing—the pass gets you into all group exercise classes!
- **Summer session group exercise passes are only \$12.50!**
- **Free and confidential consultations with a certified nutritionist.**
- **One-on-one personal training sessions with certified personal trainers.**

Find more more information and additional opportunities at the UC Davis ARC website:

[www.cru.ucdavis.edu](http://www.cru.ucdavis.edu)

### Workshop #1: Intro to Strength Training



This workshop emphasized functional and dynamic strength training to build muscle endurance and core strength. Participants learned how to strengthen major muscle using proper form and technique, using both dumbbell weights, balance, and body weight. Together we completed two circuits in the workshop. The first circuit targets the legs, and the second circuit targets upper body and core strength.

### Workshop #2: Intro to Core and Lower Back Strength



Sitting in chairs for long periods of time can exacerbate back pain and create tension in our bodies. In this workshop, participants learned how to build core and lower back strength to combat poor posture and alignment that is often endemic to desk jobs. We completed 25-30 minute class with two core and lower back circuits, followed by 10 minutes of stretching and alignment practice.

#### Example Core and Lower Back Strength Circuit

- Movement #1: Slow full sit-up on mat (1 minute)
- **Cues:** inhale coming up; exhale down. Keep heels on floor at all time.
- Movement #2: Woodchoppers side to side (45 seconds total; last 15 seconds lift feet in air)
- **Cues:** tap your hands to your hip or mat to maximize oblique movement; the lower you go, the more challenging it is for your core. If your lower back bothers you, sit up a little higher
- Movement #3: Extensions on mat (45 seconds on mat)
- straight extension (single or double leg): inhale legs and hands in a line away from core; exhale back to center
- Movement #4: Bicycle (8 counts slow; 16 counts fast (repeat x2 or 3 times))
- **Cues:** try to reach your shoulder to knee to get deeper in the exercise.

### Workshop Facilitator



Christy Cahill is the workshop series organizer and is the primary exercise instructor. Christy has worked in the fitness industry for over nine years at large universities (including UC Davis for five years) and at private studios. She is currently certified in group exercise and cycling, and has taken continuing education courses in a variety of fitness fields including high intensity interval training, barbell strength training, cycling, and functional and dynamic fitness.

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### Thank you!

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Teresa Dillinger and Jean-Pierre Delplanque for their support of this project. Thank you for your help in making this project possible! I would also like to express my appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor at the Activities and Recreation Center, Brian Luu, for the time and effort he put into making this workshop series possible. Thank you so much Brian! Lastly, I would like to thank all of Professors for the Future fellows for such a fun and rewarding year. It will be so fun to see the great places you will go, and the impact you have on the academic community!

#### Circuit #1

- Squat with alternating knee lift
- Alternating lunge with a bicep curl
  - Modify by separating moves; challenge by combining moves
- Plie squat with an upright row
  - Modify by separating moves; challenge by doing upright rows in isolated plie squat

#### Circuit #2 (on mat)

- Chest press with alternating leg taps
  - Advanced Option: chest press in a bridge position
- Triceps overhead extensions with alternating leg taps
  - Advanced Option: both legs move together during extensions
- Sit-up with shoulder press
  - Modify by keeping lower back on floor; challenge with full sit up and weights

# Professors for the Future, 2015-2016

**PFTF Fellow: Christy Cahill**  
**Program: Political Science**  
**Major Professor: James Adams**  
**Project Mentor: Brian Luu**



**Project Title: "Fitness and Wellness for Graduate Students and Postdocs."**

## **Project Summary:**

The need to strike a balance between work and self-wellness is relevant to the lives of graduate and postdoctoral scholars. Fitness and wellness are important components of coping with the competitive and demanding nature of our profession, but herein lies the problem: in a profession that demands so much time and energy, how can we (1) even justify spending time on fitness and wellness, and (2) make fitness and wellness become a lifestyle rather than an intermittent goal?

To address this challenge, I created and implemented a three-part workshop series for graduate students and post-doctoral scholars in partnership with the UC Davis Athletic and Recreation Center (ARC). The purpose of the workshop series was threefold: first, to introduce current research on the benefits of fitness and wellness; second, to link the research to exercises that can be done at the ARC, at home, or at the office; and third, to create a network of graduate students interested in pursuing a holistic approach to finding a work/life balance.

The three workshops were (1) Intro to Strength Training, (2) Intro to Cycling, and (3) Intro to Lower Back and Core Strength. Overall, approximately 50 graduate students and postdocs from 20 departments attended at least one workshop. According to the workshop evaluations, participants appreciated the emphasis on form and technique in a slower pace environment. In addition, participants also appreciated the handouts I created with sample workouts, music, and alignment/breathing cues. We ended each workout by setting goals and sharing strategies and ideas for obtaining fitness goals. Almost all participants wrote one specific fitness or wellness change that they will make as a result of the workshop series.

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