



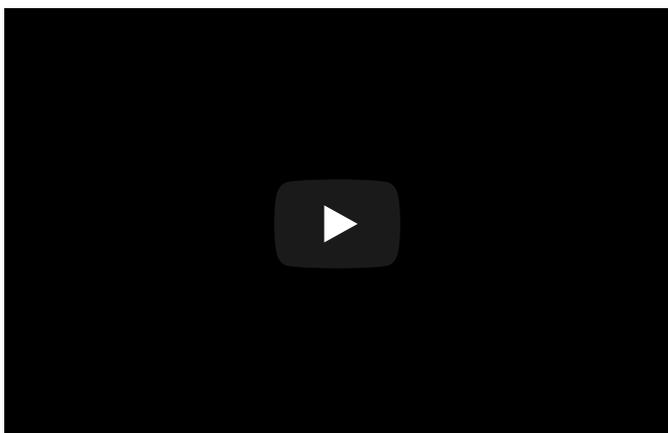
A Space to Play

UC San Diego Recreation classes go virtual through ‘The Playground’

Five weeks have passed since the official stay-at-home order was issued in California in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people have begun to go stir crazy from being confined within four walls as they diligently commit to the safety of others. Movement and social interaction remains a basic need for everyone, and UC San Diego Recreation has created a space for both. Called [the Playground](#), it welcomes all campus community members to dance, meditate, compete in esports, learn to draw and more through free virtual classes.

“Instead of simply creating a page that lists helpful resources, we wanted to create a themed space that would inspire others to stay positive, active and healthy during these hard times,” said Mari Chosich, marketing director for Recreation. “The Playground is a place where we can all hang out, be ourselves, learn and play.”

Launched on March 25, the Playground is designed by Recreation’s Lauren Lara. It now offers [nearly a dozen live classes each weekday](#), ranging from high-intensity workouts such as circus conditioning and barre HIIT to a multitude of dance lessons such as ballet, hip hop and ballroom. Sessions designed to help people slow down, include restorative yoga, tai chi and healing meditation. Additionally, the campus community also can tap into their creative side with guitar lessons and drawing courses.



“It is so important to have physical activity in my life, and I really don’t want to lose the strength I’ve worked so hard to gain” said Hannah Grunwald, a doctoral candidate in Biological Sciences who regularly participates in the virtual circus conditioning classes. “I think it’s useful to have a daily routine, to have something to break up either the monotony or the crazy work.”

All of the live courses are held via Zoom, and most of them happen at the same time each week, offering a sense of regularity for those

who may be struggling with feeling grounded. Live classes on the Playground can be part of a remote work strategy, cultivating positive emotions and promoting productivity, according to Alexia Cervantes, director of Recreation’s FitLife Program.

“During the quarantine I have heard a lot of people say things like ‘I don’t even know what day it is anymore,’” she said. “The monotony of being at home and not changing your environment can really warp your sense of time. Your schedule should include work time, exercise time and social time, just like it would normally. I also think the more we can stay connected with our UC San Diego colleagues and friends, the more hopeful we will remain!”

Recently, the Playground expanded to feature activities for children. “Knock Around on the Playground” is a virtual camp space where kids can engage in activities such as arts and crafts, yoga and dance, scavenger hunts, LEGO building and more, led by camp counselors. Parents can request a Zoom link by emailing the class instructors, and also find [recorded activities on YouTube](#).

Campus online gaming community thrives

Only one sport has survived the wrath of the coronavirus: Esports. Short for electronic sports, Esports draws students together into virtual realms where they work as a team to defeat competing opponents at universities across the nation. [New intramural esports have been added to Recreation’s Playground](#) for those interested in casual competition. Games offered through the Playground include soccer team games FIFA 2020 and Rocket League as well as League of Legends, a multiplayer online battle arena game.

Combining complicated strategy with a tight-knit community, online gaming has become a source of key social interaction in a period dominated by seclusion. “Esports create a special opportunity to give normalcy and respite in the current social situation the world faces,” said Spencer Louie, vice president of UC San Diego Esports and a senior studying cell biology and psychology. “Online interaction is at an all-time high and gaming is fulfilling a social requirement that humans have.”

According to Louie, the UC San Diego gaming community is one of the strongest nationwide, with thousands of members plugged into Triton Gaming, a student organization created in 2014. The group hosts the Triton Gaming Expo annually, which garnered 1,300 participants last year. A varsity gaming team was formed in 2019, called UC San Diego Esports, which competes in tournaments against universities across the U.S.—with neighboring UC Irvine being one of the top rivals.



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“We are the only sports club at UC San Diego currently allowed to compete, due to the nature of competition being online,” explained Louie, who has been involved in gaming for as long as he can remember. “What drew me the most was the sense of community there is in gaming and how that community can grow into competitive Esports. While some people may be born gifted for specific sports, Esports is a place where anyone with talent and skill can rise to the top.”

Get Up Tritons!

We all know how it feels. A knot in the shoulders, an ache in the low back, tension in the neck. Sitting for hours throughout the day while working in an office or remotely at home can take a toll on the body. To help counter the negative effects of sitting, UC San Diego Recreation created “[Get Up Tritons!](#)” to both educate and motivate the campus community to get up regularly throughout the day.



To counter the effects of sitting for long periods, Recreation launched the “Get Up Tritons” video series to introduce quick stretching exercises as well as nutrition tips and mindfulness practices.

The daily video mail is sent at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m. and includes short exercise videos that can be followed from the comfort of your home or office. Led by Recreation trainers, no professional equipment is needed; however, some of the exercises do employ chairs, desks and walls. Stretches range from shoulder mobility, facial massage, wrist rotations, yoga moves and more.

A new element of the “Get Up Tritons” program is “Learn at Lunch.” The noontime newsletter has a different theme each day, including Mindfulness Monday, Trainer Tip Tuesday, Triton Dines nutrition tips on Wednesday, Tritons

Flourish on Thursday and Self-Care on Friday. Each includes a quote or affirmation, a video with a workout or meditation led by a trainer, as well as an article with topics like “Using Imagery to Create Positive Emotion,” “Pantry Meal Ideas,” and “Setting an Intention for Your Workday.”

Come out and play

The Playground is designed to be flexible and fun during a time when our lives have become immobile and uncertain. While hobbies and adventures are on hold, virtual spaces like the Playground offer a chance to explore new activities, or perhaps rekindle a former pastime.

Rickie Emilie Farah, a Recreation instructor and third-year transfer student studying theatre arts and psychology, believes this is the perfect time to try something different. “In some ways, I think the virtual platform makes some of my students more comfortable to be able to try something new while in the comfort of their home with no one watching them,” said Farah, who teaches cardio dance.

Whether you enjoy dancing, online gaming or tai chi, the most important thing is maintaining interaction with others. “Social distancing is hard!” said Farah. “We need to connect with people and sharing a class through the Playground is a great way to feel connected to others.”

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