

"Fitness for Life Program"

March 7, 1985

If Jack Douglass has his way, every member of next year's freshman class at the University of California, San Diego will be wearing a blue T-shirt with yellow lettering spelling out "All Around Excellence - Undergraduate Affairs - UCSD" sometime during the school year.

The "All Around Excellence" the T-shirt extols is not only brain power. It also refers to physical fitness.

Dr. John H. (Jack) Douglass, a supervisor in the Department of Physical Education at UCSD, and Dr. Nolan E. Penn, professor of psychiatry in the UCSD School of Medicine, are using an ambitious program to find out what kind of physical shape the students are in and to get them to adopt a continuing program of exercise, stress management and proper diet.

To get their attention, Douglass is offering a free T-shirt to all freshmen students who complete the preliminary testing giving him the information he needs to design a program for their future.

The project is part of the "Fitness for Life Program" sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Affairs at UCSD. It is operated through a committee made up of Penn; Dr. John Giebink, head of psychological counseling and student health services; Dr. Lowell Storms, professor of psychiatry in the UCSD School of Medicine, and Vicky Newman, director of the Prenatal Nutrition Project at the UCSD Medical Center. Dr. Joseph Watson, vice chancellor for undergraduate affairs, helped start the program to "introduce students to the ways and means of attaining a healthier lifestyle."

In the introduction to a student handbook outlining the fitness program, Watson writes, "This voluntary program is designed to help you establish and maintain a healthy and physically fit way of life by providing information and guidance for the sound development of your body as well as your mind. The program focuses on three major components of a healthy lifestyle: good nutrition, regular exercise and effective stress management."

Douglass, who holds a Ph.D. in education, is interested in instilling in the students a lifestyle that will include proper exercise and diet long after they have left the UCSD campus.

In addition to his work on the campus, Douglass is currently conducting a study of the retirement homes in San Diego County to find out what kind of exercise program they offer to their residents, including those who are bedridden.

"It has become apparent to us that the elderly people who are still exercising are the ones who exercised when they were young and have kept it up," Douglass said.

His study of the 78 retirement homes in San Diego County is based on the work of R. Atchley who, in his book "The Social Forces in Later Life," states that people who exercise as a youngster tend to continue as they get older. But, Atchley adds, the idea is that you have to socialize people into doing such things.

Socializing freshmen may not be as easy as it sounds. The first attempt by Douglass to get the students interested in the program last fall was not a great success.

"Only 55 people signed up in September during Welcome Week," Douglass said. "Of those, 34 went through the preliminary screening and 20 completed everything and were given the T-shirts."

Another 60 freshmen joined the program in January at the start of the winter quarter giving Douglass a total of 80 students currently in the program.

"In our first attempt the program was just one of the events that the kids could choose during Welcome Week," Douglass said. "Next fall we hope to make it a regular part of the Welcome Week schedule."

According to Douglass, the program is a three-part procedure of testing, lectures and follow-up. The physical tests involve an EKG of the heart, pulmonary screening of the lungs, flexibility through an exercise-strength test, and a 1.5 mile run to further test the heart and lungs.

"Based on this material, the students can plot where they stand among all 17- to 25-year-olds in the United States," Douglass said. "Next we bring them back to prescribe an individual exercise program."

The exercise program includes a class on stress management taught by Dr. Lowell Storms, professor of psychiatry at the UCSD School of Medicine, emphasizing the self management or self control of stress and tension.

A class on nutrition is taught by Newman and Diana Dann, a health and fitness expert in the UCSD Department of Physical Education, which points out that eating right can help the students do more than just shed unwanted pounds. Increased energy level, clearer skin, shinier hair, and more of a sparkle in the eyes are among the benefits listed by Newman and Dann.

Douglass said the follow-up procedure is the most time consuming part of the program.

"We check with the students each quarter to see which of them are taking exercise classes," he said. "We call them to see what else they are doing on their own, to see how much exercise they are getting, to see if they are following the program we have set out for them."

According to Douglass, the first group of students to go through the program broke into fairly rigid selection levels.

"First were the students who like to exercise and who tend to sign up for exercise classes anyway," Douglass said. "Some of them were in excellent shape."

"The largest group to sign up were not in the greatest shape but were interested in their health," he said. "I would call them average."

"The last group really didn't know what kind of shape they were in but were interested in how they could improve. We want the middle and the bottom groups to get involved but we need some models from the top group in addition," Douglass said.

If Douglass is successful in securing a grant, he plans to hire two full-time people to run the follow-up portion of the program.

"Then we wouldn't have to worry about the number of students we get to sign up," he said. "We could go after every student who goes through the UCSD campus. In the long run we want to make exercise automatic for all UCSD students who wish to participate."

Douglass said he has a supply of blue T-shirts with yellow lettering on hand but he hopes that by this time next year he will have to order a lot more. Enough, he says, for the entire freshman class.

(March 7, 1985) For more information contact: Paul W. West, 452-3120