

Lifetime Activity Programs Take Courses Outside of the Traditional Classroom Setting

LAP classes offer students a chance to learn a new skill that could be incorporated into their futures while earning two credits to use towards their degree.

Aimee Rothman, Staff Writer

While many courses offered at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) prepare students for their futures by providing information they may need for the career fields they plan on entering, the Lifetime Activity Program (LAP) offers something different that can be taken into students' futures. These courses focus on activities that enrich their well-being. LAP courses range from yoga and meditation, to fly fishing and even pickleball. Courses run for eight weeks and offer students two credits to use towards their degree.

LAP courses take learning to new places

Tucked away in rooms and studios in the Hamel Recreation Center, courses such as well-being, yoga and meditation, Vinyasa flow yoga and strength training are taught. Other courses such as fly-fishing, pickleball and ultimate frisbee are taught outside in spaces around the campus. By taking students outside of the classroom, the focus of the course becomes clear: part of student development can happen outside of a traditional classroom setting, focusing on the growth of the student's personal and mental development.

Forrest Schwartz inherited the LAP program when he became program coordinator a year and a half ago. With a background in outdoor education and recreation, Schwartz said he was drawn to this program and believes in its ability to support overall health and well-being. According to him, one of the goals for LAP was that students could find "things that bring [them] happiness outside of [their] career."

"LAP is a pretty unique thing when you look at college campuses across the country. There are a handful of universities or colleges that offer a similar type of program, but in general, it's pretty unique," said Schwartz.

He explained that survey research conducted amongst students in these courses has been positive. Students wrote that these courses helped them get in the recreation center more often and feel more engaged in new activities, allowing them to have a healthier lifestyle.



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Many LAP courses reflect the practices the UNH's Health and Wellness staff aim to spread through their work.

Schwartz explained that he wanted these courses to expose students to nontraditional activities, such as yoga, pickleball and aikido, rather than focusing on mainstream activities such as basketball or baseball.

“My paradigm of what LAP could be is really looking at ways to engage people as much as possible in nontraditional or non-conventional activities,” Schwartz said.

Schwartz believes that these courses are valuable because of their impact on students.

“If people embrace these types of activities in their life, they can support their overall well-being,” he said.



The Hamel Recreation Center is the epicenter for many LAP courses. (Aimee Rothman)

LAP courses can positively impact students' mental well-being

Dawn Zitney, well-being coordinator and counselor at UNH, teaches two half-semester LAP courses: yoga/meditation and well-being. Both courses focus on teaching students ways to nourish their minds and bodies while exposing them to a form of self-care and coping mechanisms that can be used throughout their lives.

Zitney's yoga and meditation course introduces students to these practices, while also teaching about the history and value of yoga and meditation. According to a published study by the National Center of Biotechnology Institution (NCBI), "yogic practices inhibit the areas responsible for fear, aggressiveness and rage, and stimulate the rewarding pleasure centers in the median forebrain and other areas leading to a state of bliss and pleasure. This inhibition results in lower anxiety, heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure, and cardiac output in students practicing yoga and meditation."

Zitney believes that by introducing students to yoga and meditation in courses, the university has a chance to improve the overall well-being of its students. "I think when we look at the university's strategic goals of wellbeing and success, we have to look at these lifetime activity programs as an opportunity where students are able to explore different parts of themselves outside of the classroom," Zitney said.

Her well-being course was inspired by a wellness group created by Health and Wellness counselors.

“My colleague and I had developed a wellness group, and we thought that it would be a great thing if the LAP program would want to make our wellness group into a two-credit class,” Zitney said.

The Well-being course was introduced this semester to foster student’s wellness by learning about all aspects of their well-being. The class uses the well-being wheel, which suggests eight factors of well-being that can contribute to overall wellness.

Zitney explained that both courses she teaches can be part of a preventative type of care for students who may deal with mental health issues, by teaching them skills that can contribute to an improvement in mental health and well-being. By offering two credits, the university can encourage more students to feel incentivized and motivated to learn these skills, she continued.

These two courses take her work in Health and Wellness out of the clinical setting, allowing it to reach a wider audience.

“They both really reflect the work that health and wellness does and reflect what I enjoy teaching,” Zitney said.

Is there room for these programs to grow?

Despite campus-wide budget cuts that have impacted the UNH community, the LAP hopes to continue to expand its program. Both Schwartz and Zitney believe that these courses are valuable to students by teaching them more about themselves and their well-being. This, in turn, could affect their future careers and lifestyles.

These courses can offer a space to try something new and encourage students to focus on taking care of themselves.

“I want students to walk away from all my classes feeling like they’ve learned a skill, feeling like they gained knowledge, feeling like they gained a greater sense of who they are and what they value, and I hope they have a felt sense that it was a space where they belonged,” Zitney said.

Schwartz explained that he hopes the program can continue to evolve with students by listening to student feedback to create courses that attract students and nourish their interests.

“People want the classes, so at this point, it’s a matter of if the university is going to prioritize it and support it moving forward. We feel they will, but there’s always that question,” Schwartz said. “We’d love to see it grow. I think students want to see it grow. Every time we add a new class, it fills up.”