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ADULT FITNESS MANAGEMENT APPEALS TO MORE UM STUDENTS by Gary Parks UM Information Services

MISSOULA--

An increasing number of graduate students in Health and Physical Education at the University of Montana are preparing for careers in the management of health and fitness programs in business, industry, and governmental agencies, according to H & PE professor Dr. Brian Sharkey.

Health and fitness program management is a growing field in which opportunities are rapidly expanding, Sharkey says, and students are responding to those opportunities.

One reason for the expansion of the field is that the post-World War II "baby boom" segment of the population has moved out of the school systems and into adult life. This population shift cuts down on the number of traditional health and fitness jobs, like coaching or teaching physical education, but creates a greater need for managers of the adult programs.

Sharkey, who is an avid runner, skier, and tennis player, also points to the increased cultural emphasis on physical fitness as a reason for the growing opportunities in health and fitness management.

Sharkey himself has been very involved in that movement, publishing three books related to the upkeep of the human body. The thrust of his latest book, published this year, is summarized in the title -- "Physiology of Fitness: Prescribing Exercise for Fitness, Weight Control and Health," (Human Kinetics Publishers, Champaign, Ill.).

(over)

Graduate students studying health and fitness program management receive practical training for fitness testing in the human performance laboratory, located in the Harry Adams Fieldhouse on campus. Here students learn to use such equipment as the treadmill, gas analyzer, and electrocardiograph to measure the fitness level of a subject.

The human performance laboratory is nationally known for research conducted within its unpretentious, cement-block walls. Research projects are usually conducted by Sharkey, assistant professor Tom Whidden of H & PE, and Dr. John Bruckner of Health Services.

Graduate students are able to take part in virtually all of this research, Sharkey notes, and these projects can be very applicable to the student's career. One example is a research project, to be undertaken winter quarter, which will study people's adherence to fitness programs. The project will deal with the psychological factors involved, and how to keep people from dropping out of the programs.

Besides the practical training, students undertake an interdisciplinary study which varies greatly according to the specific career goals of the individual. Along with the H & PE requirements students may elect to take such classes as behavior therapy, biochemistry, psychology, or business.

Sharkey calls health and fitness management "an expanding field with a bright future." Many large corporations such as Xerox, 3-M, Weyerhaeuser, and Kimberly Clark have extensive physical fitness programs for their employees, programs which need qualified people to run them.

Locally, Champion International has "evidenced interest" in an employee fitness program, Sharkey says.

Many government agencies also emphasize employee fitness. The National Park Services, for example, is conducting a pilot project in health and fitness which includes a computerized health-risk analysis.

The Forest Services has long had an employee fitness program, one in which Sharkey and the human performance lab have played a major role. Sharkey is the author of the Forest Services pamphlet "Fitness and Work Capacity," and developed the Forest Service step-test, a basic test for assessing the fitness level of employees.