

STATE AND LOCAL

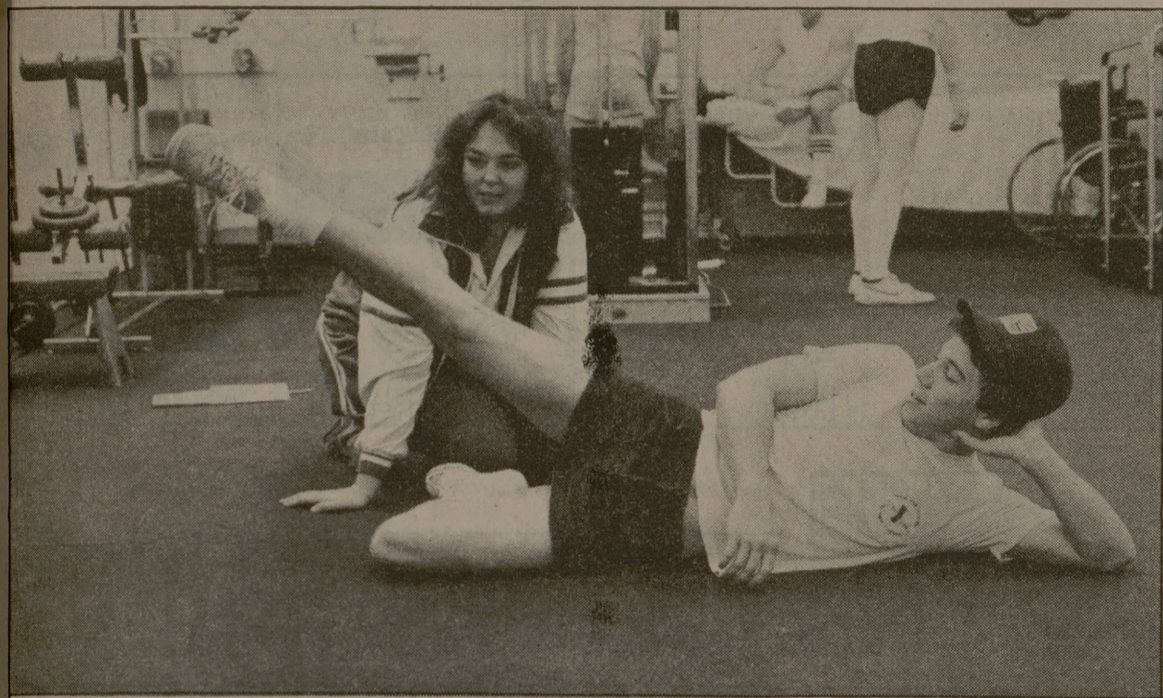


Photo by ANTHONY S. CASPER

Ann McGowan helps Kyle Dewitt in warm-up exercises.

Adapted P.E. program

Exercise for the disabled

By JENS B. KOEPKE
Reporter

Texas A&M is one of the few universities in Texas which offers a physical education program for students enrolled in activity classes who are injured during the semester or who are chronically disabled.

Adapted physical education is an alternative for those A&M students who are chronically or acutely disabled by injuries.

"In most universities, if you get hurt in physical education, you have to drop the course or take an incomplete," said Anne McGowan, coordinator of the adapted physical education program.

The class starts the semester with 100-125 students, but ends with 150-200 students, McGowan said. The larger class at the end of the semester is the result of students who join the class because of injuries, she said.

Each student who transfers into the program from another physical education course is given an individual exercise program tailored for his injury, McGowan said. Weight training, aimed at strengthening the injured muscles, is combined with warm-up and flexibility exercises.

By transferring into the adapted program, injured students avoid losing credit in their regular P.E. class.

Grading is determined by the instructors in both the adapted section and the student's regular section that the student was in, she said.

Since she cannot follow every student through his exercises, some students may not work all the time and may consider the class a "blow-off", McGowan said. But all students who spend more than four weeks in adapted must write a 8-page term paper, she said.

"My program is the only one with a term paper, which is worth 50 percent of the grade," McGowan said.

Chronically disabled students also participate in the program.

McGowan said that for these students, an individual exercise program is designed based on their abilities and not their disabilities.

Stroke victims, for example, do flexibility exercises to increase their range of motion and jump rope to improve their coordination and balance, she said.

An aquatic program, although not a permanent part of the adapted program, is an activity especially useful for wheelchair students, she said. These students suffer numerous medical problems due to their lack of locomotion.

The aquatic program negates the pull of gravity on the body and increases circulation and blood pressure.

This program also can be useful to adapted program students with acute injuries, such as dislocated shoulders, twisted knees and sprained ankles, McGowan said.

Exercising damaged joints or

muscles is much safer in the water than through weight training. During aquatic exercises, a person can only stretch as far as his body will let him.

Dr. Charles Powell, coordinator of handicapped and veteran services, said that the influx of handicapped students at A&M in the last five years has made the adapted program increasingly important.

The growth in the number of handicapped students at A&M can be traced to passage of a federal law passed during the 1970s mandated that universities make their campuses accessible to the handicapped, he said.

Tom Van Dyke, a senior computer science major from San Antonio, has been in the adapted program twice. He transferred into the adapted class as a freshman, following a knee injury suffered during military training.

Since Van Dyke wore a cast for three months, he spent most of the semester exercising his upper body. When his cast was removed, Van Dyke was able to begin strengthening his hamstring and quadriceps muscles.

While recovering from knee surgery a second time, Van Dyke returned to the program this semester after he tried to participate in aerobic running.

"I think the biggest difference is that everybody in here (adapted) is doing his own program," he said. "There's also a lot more interaction between students."

Offshore oil platforms useful as artificial reefs

University News Service

Obsolete offshore oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico and along the west coast could provide the foundation for a lucrative sport-fishing industry, says a recreation and parks expert.

Rather than scrap the huge rigs, Dr. Robert Ditton of Texas A&M suggests leaving some of the structures in the ocean because they act as artificial reefs which attract a variety of fish.

"Fifteen to 30 years ago the fish were distributed all over the Gulf of Mexico," Ditton said. "Then the oil and gas industries came in and built these vertical steel columns which attracted the fish that attracted commercial fishermen and spurred the development of a recreational fishery," Ditton said. "Now we're at the point of wondering what's going to happen when these platforms are removed offshore Galveston, for example."

Ditton, who serves on a National Academy of Science panel looking into a variety of alternatives for disposing of the platforms, said there is

The platforms are preferable as artificial reefs because the vertical steel columns come up through the whole water column, providing a large diversity of fish. — Dr. Robert Ditton

considerable interest in retaining some of the structures for fishery enhancement purposes.

"The platforms are preferable to using ships because if you sink a ship for an artificial reef it doesn't come up that high in the water column and there's really not the same diversity of fish," Ditton said.

"When you're talking about an oil structure from the surface to the bottom, you've got a good fish profile."

Serious fishermen learned quickly that the platforms provided good

fishing grounds and often dock around them, Ditton said.

He said this is true in the Gulf of Mexico where there are more than 4,000 petroleum structures. About 1,000 of them are major structures.

Once drilling is complete, oil and gas companies are required to remove the platform and usually do so to eliminate their insurance liability.

"There are thorny issues involved in keeping the platforms in place and the main one is liability issues because there are few precedents in court," Ditton said.

Ditton said companies and federal agencies are ironing out differences where liability, tax breaks and other issues are concerned, to increase the number of artificial reefs off the country's coasts.

"Artificial reefs date back to the ancient Chinese who threw piles of rocks in the water to create vertical profiles," said Ditton. "Since then we have thrown lots of things in the water for reef development, only in recent years we've been doing it carefully."

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