

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AT MERRIMACK COLLEGE, SPRING 2004

UNIQUE UNDERGRAD COURSE LOOKS BEYOND TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

By David Rattigan

An innovative class at Merrimack is teaching students to look beyond traditional medical treatment methods and introducing them to alternatives that include herbs, needles, and touch. "Integrated Approaches to Sports Medicine," offered for just the second time, presents knowledge outside the Western realm, from Chinese herbal therapy to acupuncture, chiropractic, massage therapy, and more.

"Medical schools are beginning to introduce concepts of non-traditional medicine into their curricula," said Marcia Walsh, Ph.D., chair of the Biology/Allied Health Department. "But this is the only undergraduate program that we're aware of that offers this level of training and insight to students."

Dr. David Sollars, one of the class instructors, said this is another indicator of an evolution among medical practitioners, with more willingness to coordinate care using traditional and alternative treatments. That is a message he has espoused for many years, as a practitioner of acupuncture and homeopathy.

"One of the messages in this (class) is that times are changing," Sollars said.

The course is team-taught by members of the staff at FirstHealth of Andover, Mass., a health and wellness center that offers complementary and alternative medicine treatments that include acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic, massage, Chinese herbal medicine, and other modalities. For eight years, FirstHealth practitioners have served as guest lecturers in Merrimack's athletic training program. The course developed from that relationship.

"We realized we had an incredible resource close by," Walsh said. "We recognized their interest in education, and together with our desire to develop opportunities for students, it seemed like a good fit." She added, "This may really broaden the options for career development for students."

Sollars said that by presenting a hands-on class taught by practitioners in the field, they provide the students with a more complete understanding of different practices.

"We can present the research and trends in the industry, but also speak of the day-in, day-out experiences of those that perform the therapies," Sollars said. "We can give case studies, and go beyond the literature."

That approach is appreciated by Ursula Gromek '04, a sports medicine major who took the class last semester. Like many of her classmates, she found herself more accepting of the techniques after she'd investigated and witnessed the methods and results. "It is useful knowledge," she said, noting that an athlete is the type of person that likes to use all of his or her options when it comes to rehabilitation. In a quest for swift and sure results, the athlete is traditionally open to modalities outside the norm.

"In the training room, if an athlete asks 'what do you think of this?' I can honestly tell them what I think," she said. "At least I know what it's about, and we can go from there."

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