

## UNC Student News Release

### A Reflection on Interdisciplinary Service in Tyrrell County

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Twelve University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill graduate students from the School of Nursing, Division of Physical Therapy, and Gillings School of Global Public Health teamed up to perform service in Tyrrell County during their spring break. This was the fourth year that the UNC group had chosen Tyrrell County as their trip destination. From March 11 to 14, the students and two UNC professors worked with community partners on health promotion, health education, environmental and beautification projects.

One project transported the graduate students back to gym class. A team of six volunteers spent two days at the Columbia Middle School gymnasium talking and moving with more than 175 energetic middle and high-school students. Niobra Samuel-Peterson, a former Carolina track-and-field athlete who recently earned a master's degree in sociology, worked closely with Terry Donoghue to plan engaging health and fitness activities for participants in Grades 6 - 9.

On their first day, the UNC students and Dr. Sonda Oppewal set-up and manned four health stations to promote smart dietary, fitness and personal health choices to students during four physical-education classes. Columbia students rotated in groups between stations and were greeted with a variety of health challenges such as: guessing how many cubes of sugar are in a 20-ounce soda, relating muscle and fat models with dietary choices, reading a nutrition label, and correctly performing the high-intensity, mountain-climber exercise. The eighth and ninth grade students were also led in a jeopardy-style game about college. At the conclusion of each session, the students participated in a fun mix of exercises and dance moves to Beyonce's popular "Move Your Body" song. As the music played, every class performed the high-energy fitness routine twice alongside Ms. Donoghue and the UNC team.

The following day, the Carolina students returned to share their personal stories as well as college preparation, funding and success strategies with the seventh, eighth and ninth-grade

students. Afterwards, the middle-school students introduced the graduate students to “pinball” and allowed them to be honorary Wildcats while playing several rounds of the fast-paced, dodge-ball game. Before the day ended, several students signed-up for a nutrition challenge posed by Lisa Roberts, a nurse practitioner and post-master’s certificate student. After receiving advice on how to reduce their intake of sugary drinks, more than 40 students agreed to consume healthier beverages, such as drinking more water, and were rewarded with a sports medal as a reminder of this commitment.

Nearby, another team of graduate students focused on increasing awareness of fall prevention among senior citizens. At the Tyrrell County Senior Center, under the direction of Dr. Vicki Mercer, the students assessed seniors’ fall risk and educated them on effective ways to prevent life-threatening accidents. Sarah Yancey, a third-year, physical therapy student who conducted risk assessments shared: “I love our state and I have always felt a calling to serve its residents, especially the growing elderly population. This trip allowed me to gain a better perspective, to some degree, of what it is like to be an aging adult in a rural area and what can be done to decrease health disparities among this demographic.”

Among the flurry of activities, student volunteers found time to work with patients at Columbia Medical Center. A collaborative team of second and third-year physical therapy students addressed physical therapy-related problems affecting patients. While there, the students also interacted with the medical staff. Michelle O’Neill, a third-year physical therapy student, delivered a presentation and provided the staff with educational materials highlighting current concepts on wound care.

Additional efforts with the medical center included home visits to clients in need of physical therapy and several older-adult, Meals on Wheels program participants. During these visits, one professor and a small group of public health, nursing and physical therapy students assisted community members by answering questions about health conditions and behaviors, reviewing medications, assessing balance and risk for fall, and making suggestions to prevent falls in the home.

The Tar Heels also rolled up their sleeves and picked up paint brushes and trash bags to help encourage residents and visitors to use important resources in Tyrrell County. Students

added paw prints to the Columbia Fitness Trail and painted other community spaces, including the basketball backboard and tennis court lines at Columbia Playground; markers along the Wildcat Fitness Trail; and the outdoor classroom at the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. The UNC team also worked for one day in Dare County with park rangers to transplant foliage and remove dead branches and litter along the beautiful Soundside Trail in Jockey's Ridge State Park.

Inspired by the dedication of their partners, friendliness of residents, and each other, the UNC students welcomed an opportunity to speak with members of the Columbia Rotary Club about their service. Jen Tooher, a third-year physical therapy student admitted, "I didn't know what to expect, but I really enjoyed interacting with both the youth and older adults in the community. I am thankful to have been a part of a trip with such a wonderful mission."

Many of the student volunteers will graduate with advanced degrees this May. Reflecting on their time in Tyrrell County, the group shared that while the trip had a few challenges, overall it made an impact on the way they will consider working with clients, patients and communities in the future. The memories they created around Main Street, in residents' homes, on the gym floor, at the dunes, and winding down at Colon Bailey's establishment will remain far into the future. Tooher added, "Working within the community brings to life the value of our hard work and our dedication to serve others; it is rewarding for all those involved." Appreciative of the assistance provided by community partners and the warmth of residents, the faculty and students look forward to forgoing Cancun and other spring-break destinations to return to Tyrrell County in 2014.

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