

NARRATOR: Wellness on today's college campus is nothing like the gym classes students used to be required to take. On this edition of Intersections: The RIT Podcast, Michelle Schrouder, director of Wellness Education, talks with student Richa Khanolkar about how the wellness options of today – everything from badminton to yoga, from managing your stress to managing your finances – is helping students learn new skills, make friends and have fun.

MICHELLE: As we know, students have to take two wellness classes before they graduate. Your wellness classes have certainly exceeded that. How has your wellness developed? And why did you go ahead and take that third class, and the fourth, and the fifth?

RICHA: I took badminton because I had an eye-tracking problem, so I thought if I started with badminton, I could see how my eye-hand coordination went. Since that improved gradually over time and I was losing a drastic amount of weight, I was like, let's continue it. Then, Josh, my friend, he said, "I'm doing this 120-day challenge. Come and do it with me." And I was like, "Yeah. Sure." So, I signed up for that. After a while it was like, I did badminton pretty well. Let's try tennis. And then tennis went really well to the point where I kept doing it over and over and over again until you introduced drums, and then that became my new best friend.

MICHELLE: Are you taking anything next semester?

RICHA: I'm taking advanced tennis and advanced badminton.

MICHELLE: Both advanced. Okay. And I met you in the 120-day class. At that point, there was a whole new group of students that I had never met before, you and another wellness ambassador. And the two of you had significant changes in your eating, your sleep, your fitness that semester. Tell me a little bit more about that class. Teaching it is one thing. But then seeing and hearing the results from...

RICHA: What I liked about that class was that it helped tone my body a little bit. Because I had already lost that weight, but the shape wasn't there. So, that was more like the building class. Getting all the weights and all the exercises you had us do helped form my body better.

MICHELLE: I think a class like that and some of these fitness classes we have – they're not easy.

RICHA: That wasn't easy.

MICHELLE: I think the environment we create with the instructors, especially with the fact that it is 120 days of consistent exercise, so you're doing three days with us and then two days you're committing to on your own to getting some cardio in. Because of the commitment you're making to register for a class like that, I think students stick with it. And then we have a lot of alumni of that class, students who come back and take it

over and over. I know a lot of our classes create an atmosphere where the motivation is high. What do you think about the social aspect?

RICHA: I take all my wellness classes for the social aspect as well because I make so many friends in my wellness classes. I made friends in drums, tennis, badminton. Any class I've had I've made a friend. From two of my tennis classes, I'm still hitting with them outside of class.

MICHELLE: So, Richa, how have taking these classes impacted your habits and your lifestyle as a college student?

RICHA: It's definitely a big de-stressor for me. Like, the last three semesters, I took like 18 credits of classes, so I used to go crazy. Drums was the biggest one because I was banging my stress out. But tennis also helped because you're always hitting your racquet. And I used to play outside of class, too, so I felt I was getting more energized, essentially.

MICHELLE: You took a music class this last semester, you took the steel drums. We have five music classes now because we're partnering with the department of performing arts and visual culture, so we have five new music classes. We have the steel drum and the guitar from last semester. We added play, sing and produce; gospel ensemble; and African drums for the spring. And I think it's interesting, too, because taking a 14-week class to learn something they've never done – I know the students who took guitar had never picked up a guitar before, but in high school they were athletes, so they didn't have time for music. Now, they have time for both, which in my mind is a benefit. We've been talking about stress reduction a lot. And I think it's great for their stress reduction to leave the classroom, and you don't necessarily have to do something physical.

RICHA: And banging a drum is an amazing stress relief. [laughter]

MICHELLE: And the CPR, the first aid, I think those classes, students will choose those because it's a life skill. Instead of choosing something else, they'll choose those as their second. Those classes fill every semester.

RICHA: So, how does a new wellness class become a wellness class?

MICHELLE: A lot of our classes are proposed by students. A student will come in and say, "I've taken this class and I'm really ready for an advanced section of this. Can we do advanced?" Right now, they just came and asked if we can do advanced fencing. So, advanced fencing is on our list to take to our curriculum committee. We have a committee that meets once a semester that looks at the course outlines, the course descriptions, the topics, our learning outcomes, our objectives, our assessment methods. So, we look at all of those to make sure the class would fit because it has to be instructional and not just play. Once the course is proposed by a student – most of the time it's a student. If not, it's a staff member who talks to the students in classes and

realizes we're ready for something new or a different variety. We started with yoga, just yoga, and now we've added different varieties of yoga. So, there's functional yoga, there's sunrise yoga that's more of a sport-related-type yoga. So, we have probably seven different varieties of yoga when we started with just yoga. Our variety has changed, and it's not only based on what the students have asked, but the students have talked to their instructors and asked for some different things. We also follow some trends of what's happening, especially with fitness, when you're watching TV with the ninja warrior show and with *So You Think You Can Dance*? Now we've got all these dance classes that are more competitive. So, a lot of what we're adding as well is from what we're seeing in the trends that are showing up in the media. You know, we have fitness classes and dance classes and recreation classes – a lot of these students want to get good at something fast. They want to lose weight quickly. They want their fitness level to change where they see differences in two or three weeks. And I always tell students it's not a magic pill; this is not going to happen overnight. You need to commit to something for a good amount of time to see those changes. What kind of advice would you give to a first-year student coming in? What would you tell them as a new student starting about their patience? That it's not a quick fix. That it's not easy. How would you advise them to take some of these classes and what their patience would have to be like?

RICHA: I feel like for every class, everything takes time. No matter if it's an academic class, a wellness class, a music class, everything takes time to master. You can't just be like, "Yes! I'm a master now!" You've got to be patient, you've got to wait, you've got to practice or else you're not going to get anywhere.

MICHELLE: Exactly. I had a student in my office a couple weeks ago, and he was very frustrated that he hadn't seen the results that he thought he would. Then when I started asking him questions about his sleep and his stress level, and just how he was feeling when he carries his backpack that weighs 50 pounds around campus. The things that he noticed that were functional and less obvious to him instead of how his clothes were fitting or how people were noticing some changes. It was more about how things were changing for him because he was sleeping better because he was exercising now. A lot of things had changed but weren't noticeable. I also think with students there's taking time out of your day and out of your week to focus on your own personal wellness. If you don't do that, things can really spiral. And that's something, I think, as a college freshman coming in, when we meet with them at orientation we definitely make it clear, don't wait to take a wellness class. Don't take it when you're a third-year. Take it maybe your second semester your first year because you'll miss this opportunity to be active in any of these areas.

RICHA: I would have done mine sooner had I known about it earlier. I only realized in my second year that we need to take wellness classes. I had to figure out which ones to take and then I kept going. I would not have taken 10 to 11 to 12 now next semester if it wasn't an enjoyable experience. A lot of people have a negative view on it because they feel like they're taking gym class – like going back to high school. I've heard a lot of people say, "Oh, I have to take a wellness class. It's going to be like going back to high

school gym.” But once they take it, they realize it’s nothing like gym class at all because it’s your choices, it’s your flexibility, you choose what you want. No one’s saying you have to do all these sports. You just go and you have fun.

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