

University Students make a Blueprint for a Healthy Workplace

May 2008



Vancouver Island University's (formerly Malaspina University-College) Faculty of Management (FOM) now has a workplace wellness plan for employees, thanks to four groups of recreation and tourism students.

While the university's Nanaimo campus has had a successful workplace health committee since the 90's, its impact had gradually tapered off. However, with the creation of the Faculty of Management in 2006 and the construction of the Faculty's new home – the LEED-certified Faculty of Management Centre – Dr. Wayne Pealo, Professor of Recreation and Tourism Management, saw an opportunity to re-start an active, healthy living initiative.

The process of developing a workplace wellness plan has spanned two years and involved four groups of students and multiple professors. The first steps had the post-secondary institution joining the

provincial active living movement by registering as an Active Community through the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA). Following this, students in one of Pealo's classes, studying the management of a healthy workplace, then conducted a needs assessment of the faculty and staff in the FOM.

"Through that we knew what the interests and needs were," Pealo said.

The following semester, the results of the needs assessment were passed along to six Recreation and Sport Management diploma students who eventually developed the Guide to Workplace Wellness targeted at the staff and faculty. The wellness plan was created as a term project for the Leisure and Active Lifestyles course which required second year students to work with community groups in the development of plans to increase physical activity and wellness.

"We greatly value getting our students working in the community and doing real-world projects," said the students' instructor, Aggie Weighill, Professor of Recreation and Tourism for the Faculty of Management.

The development of the plan coincided with the Faculty's move into the Management Centre in early 2007, so the students were able to take the unique features of VIU's newest building into consideration. For instance, completion of the energy efficient and environmentally sustainable building brought the departments under one roof for the first time, and is now home to approximately 1,100 students and 50 faculty and staff. With more than

- Students did a needs assessment of the Faculty of Management
- Students developed a wellness plan for faculty and staff
- Faculty of Management faculty and staff were piloted for a workplace wellness initiative
- Student wrote a grant application for Active Communities funding
- On-campus health and wellness committee

Vancouver Island – Vancouver Island University



80% of the Centre's spaces having access to natural daylight and windows that let in fresh air, the new building has also provided a healthier space for learning. The building's design includes active transportation friendly features such as access to change rooms and showers, bike racks, lockers, and a nearby bus stop. These amenities make it easier to bike, walk, or take transit to work.

Using the BCRPA Active Communities Workplace Workbook as a template to help them develop the plan, the students built a case for workplace wellness, citing the positive impacts on productivity and stress reduction. The plan emphasized individual responsibility to set goals and make behavioural changes, while noting the importance of having supportive systems to keep people motivated.

The section on raising awareness cited different channels on campus for spreading healthy living messages: newsletters, bulletin boards, posters, on-campus events, and challenges between participants. The appendix contains informational posters and resources on healthy eating with tips, including healthy food choices for meet-

ings, and sheets to track the number of fruits and vegetables eaten in a day. An important aspect of the plan was the suggestion to take advantage of existing programs, simply modifying them to fit the FOM context.

Themed months throughout the year such as Nutrition Month are listed as opportunities to tie in active living events or programs on campus. The plan also identified funding and granting opportunities. Work environment wellness is also highlighted, noting the need to review smoking policies and ensure ergonomic workspaces for employees sitting at desks. The appendix also included sample workplace wellness policies and procedures.

The plan suggested strategies to reach the faculty and staff in each of the departments under the Faculty of Management umbrella: Accounting, Economics, E-management, Financial Services, Hospitality Management, Human Resource Management, International Business Management, Marketing, Masters of Business Administration, and Recreation and Tourism Management.

The workplace wellness process continued in the fall of 2007, when Pealo supervised applied research students who gained valuable experience through writing a grant application for the BCRPA Active Communities grant. He also had a volunteer management student develop a pilot workshop engaging faculty for active workplace week.

"All of this has been student-driven," Pealo noted. *"They did an excellent job. It was a very comprehensive plan. It was well put together."*

Reflecting on the process of developing a plan and preparing for implementation of that plan, Pealo stated, *"It's been a really good sharing and learning experience for both our students and faculty that have been involved with it. I think the key thing is to have all of this in place first before moving forward."*

Next, Pealo hopes to connect with the campus' health and wellness committee to help implement the workplace wellness plan. The committee members represent students, Student Services, Health and Safety Services, Human Resources, and

Vancouver Island – Vancouver Island University

the gym's Fitness and Lifestyles Activities, as well as the faculties of Health and Human Services, Physical Education, and Nursing.

"The intent was to see if we could get this operational as a pilot and then use the model and the information to be able to go wider on campus," Pealo said. "We are looking to bring it to the larger campus and try to move forward with it that way. There is definitely a demand on campus."

Note: VIU's Faculty of Management workplace wellness plan is posted as a sample Active Community plan for post-secondary institutions and workplaces at www.activecommunities.bc.ca under Programs and Tools.



"We greatly value getting our students working in the community and doing real-world projects,"

- Aggie Weighill

Vancouver Island University Highlights

- Recently gained university status and re-named Vancouver Island University
- Campuses in Nanaimo, Cowichan, Parksville and Powell River
- New Faculty of Management building officially opened in 2006 with \$7 million from the BC Government and \$2 million raised by the college
- Faculty of Management building houses departments of Accounting, Economics, E-management, Financial Services, Hospitality Management, Human Resource Management, International Business Management, Marketing, Masters of Business Administration and Recreation and Tourism Management
- Wide variety of programs and courses, including academic, vocational, and trades

www.viu.ca/rectour, www.gov.bc.ca