**South Texas College**

December 2019 News Center: Kinesiology

**Conquering Fitness *and* Career Goals:**

**New Personal Trainer Certificate Launches Healthy Careers**

It’s typically around the second week of January that *something* happens—a morning too cold for a run, maybe, or a particularly delicious pie—to shatter our New Year’s fitness resolutions into a million pieces.

Luckily, according to South Texas College Department of Kinesiology student and aspiring personal trainer Mark Gonzalez, *that’s totally OK!* In fact, he says breaking those big fitness objectives into tiny shards is not only healthy, but also *essential* to maintaining a successful exercise plan.

“You have to make small goals: short-term and long-term goals,” says Gonzalez, currently working toward his professional certification in STC’s brand-new Personal Trainer program—the only one of its kind south of San Antonio. “So when you’re trying to reach your long-term goal, you have your short-term goals that you’re completing as you go to keep you motivated.”

For Gonzalez, conquering his short- and long-term fitness goals is just the beginning as he works toward his *dream career*. He’s aiming for a Bachelor’s degree in kinesiology so he can one day become a high school coach in his all-time favorite sport, baseball.

South Texas College is helping him achieve that.

Step one is to get his Personal Trainer Certificate at STC under his belt, so he can start working at a gym and hone his professional skills in the field. Step two will be to earn his STC Associate degree in kinesiology.

With a solid plan and a vision for the future, Gonzalez knows he has the muscle and motivation to succeed. It’s that same dedication that pushed him to work hard every day for *two years* to build up his strength and lose 60 pounds.

“I’ve got to be honest—it was difficult, but I pushed through,” Gonzalez says about his own fitness training. But he never gave up, thanks to the strategies he learned at South Texas College. His secret: he built himself up with short-term goals of shedding the weight and building strength, a little bit at a time. It’s the kind of motivation he plans to begin sharing with his trainees very soon.

It’s the kind of moxie he’s learned from STC Kinesiology instructors like Brent Angangan.

“The idea is to set goals, so that you keep moving slowly and slowly and slowly toward your major goal,” says Angangan. It’s a motto that holds relevance both for working out *and* advancing careers. That’s why he and his colleague Dr. Rebecca De Los Santos created the Personal Trainer Certificate, giving students more building blocks to reach their long-term career goals.

Because the personal trainer program only takes two semesters, it’s an ideal option for students who want to enter the workforce quickly. It also makes them eligible for a national certification exam, through which they can prove their mastery of the art and science of personal training—a major boost on résumés. With the certificate, students can work in commercial centers and even open their own gyms.

The program is the perfect way to open the door to an entry-level job as a personal trainer. Once graduates like Mark Gonzalez are working in the field, they can recalibrate their goals to include an associate degree in kinesiology—or something more advanced.

“We also want them to get their Bachelor’s in kinesiology,” says Angangan, who suggests that working as a personal trainer can help offset the costs of the degree. “Then they could get the next certification, and they could move up to a strength coach, [which is] basically a personal trainer but for maybe 100 athletes at a time.”

Besides strength coaching, there are a lot of opportunities in the field, according to Angangan. Students can start exploring such avenues in an internship during their second semester, thanks to the department’s robust partnerships with local employers. Students “shadow” personal trainers at one of the many partnering gyms, getting real-life, on-the-job experience working with clients and designing fitness programs.

Many fitness-related business leaders are already on the program’s advisory committee, and they are eager to recruit qualified students for their centers.

“They're the ones that said, ‘yes, if they have this degree, and you send them to us, not only will we intern them, but we will hire them,’” says Angangan about STC‘s regional industry partners. “So the community is behind it, too. We're developing the workforce for them.”

In this area, there is a dire need, says Angangan. “Our area was voted number one in obesity... I would say that there is a health crisis looming.”

He’s referring to a recent study done by WalletHub, which found that the McAllen, Texas metro area had the highest number of obese adults in the country *and* the highest number of physically inactive adults. In “State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America” by the Trust for America’s Health, Texas was ranked 10th in the nation for obesity rates.

Part of the problem, according to Angangan, is lack of access to physical education.

“Physical education is not required in the state of Texas,” he says. “Some schools offer it, but most don't. So we're seeing probably two generations of people who don't have basic movement skills.”

And without those skills, people with the best intentions can injure themselves. “They're going into a gym and just using a bunch of machines…and thinking that they're actually improving themselves,” warns Angangan. “And in some instances, they're making it worse.”

The solution is certified personal trainers that meet industry standards. From running assessments to studying a client's gait, trainers can help the health-conscious create and achieve their fitness goals like pros. They can even help with simple things like making sure clients have the right shoes, saving them from preventable ailments like shin splints.

At South Texas College, personal training students are learning every angle of the profession, right down to marketing, legal, and psychology. Meanwhile, they are becoming fitness leaders in their communities.

“That's why we're all in this business,” says Angangan. “One way or another, it’s to help.”

Gonzalez agrees. With the support of faculty like Angangan, Gonzalez is finding his way into the rewarding field of fitness, one small goal at a time.

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Athletic Trainers: $57,930

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Coaches: $44,430

Physical Therapists: $91,060

Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary: $107,590

Recreation and Fitness Studies Teachers, Postsecondary: $63,040

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