U.S. Navy, School of HPER
team up for SHAPE

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Theresa received her B.S. in Kinesiology with an emphasis in Fitness Specialist from Indiana University. Theresa is a Fitness Specialist in Norfolk, VA.

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Brady received his B.S. in Kinesiology with an emphasis in Fitness Specialist from Indiana University. Brady is a Fitness Specialist in San Diego, CA.

Kelly Baute instructs an IU Fitness Specialist major in the use of the “body age” system located in the School of HPER.
The U.S. Navy and Indiana University's School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation have entered into a unique partnership to implement a program designed to help sailors get in better shape. SHAPE (Senior Health Assessment Program Enterprise) is a project targeting active-duty service members 40 years of age and older. Launched at three navy installations (Pearl Harbor, HI, San Diego, CA, and Norfolk, VA) in September of 2008, SHAPE's mission is to educate and motivate senior personnel to achieve long-lasting health through permanent behavior change. SHAPE is also an example of a community-based participatory evaluation project. As our school transitions to a School of Public Health, projects like SHAPE align well with our mission.

The idea for SHAPE originated with a presentation by Carol Kennedy-Armbruster (Senior Lecturer in the Department of Kinesiology) that captured the attention of a Navy representative. Kennedy-Armbruster gave a lecture, "The Future of Fitness," at the American College of Sports Medicine Health and Fitness Summit. A Navy Morale Welfare and Recreation administrator, also an IU graduate, was in the audience. After learning the focus and goals of the Fitness Specialist Degree Program through this presentation, he approached Kennedy-Armbruster about a potential collaboration to recruit more Fitness Specialists into the Navy Fitness Program. He asked her to present "The Future of Fitness" to the Navy Fitness staff at the Athletic Business Conference.

Soon after this presentation, the program idea was underway: The School of HPER (with Kennedy-Armbruster as the principle investigator) was awarded a service contract by the U.S. Navy. Six Fitness Specialists - five of whom earned a Fitness Specialist bachelor's degree from the School of HPER - reported for duty to the three selected naval bases in August 2008. The Fitness Specialists are employed by IU but allowed to live rent-free on the Navy base in Navy housing.

For the young employees, moving onto a naval base was an unexpected but very welcome career opportunity, particularly since the Navy could choose to hire them after their one-year contract. Once the program began, it became clear that the opportunity was even more than a good job to the new hires.

"To be able to give back is an awesome thing," says Rusty Early, who was the first IU Fitness Specialist to work at the San Diego installation. Early, like some of the other Fitness Specialists, said he has friends and acquaintances who have served in Iraq, which makes the program especially meaningful.

Kennedy-Armbruster says the contract is an example of the real world "give-and-take" that's critical to the success of the six-year-old Fitness Specialist degree program, one of only a few such four-year programs in the country. It demonstrates how the program's curriculum and standards have practical applications and also helps to guide those standards to ensure that graduates are well prepared to apply their skills.

For instance, SHAPE utilizes a "body age" assessment system during the initial consultation and a post-training assessment. The assessment examines various measures of health, such as body composition, strength, flexibility, and aerobic capacity, to calculate a "body age," based on health outcomes. Using the results of the participant's health assessment, the SHAPE Fitness Specialist designs a fitness program that focuses on improving the client's overall health.

Having seen the practicality of the "body age" assessment, the School of HPER purchased a "body age" system and now incorporates training on this assessment tool within the Fitness Specialist and Kinesiology curriculum. Such opportunities to determine which practical applications are needed, and then to bring that knowledge back to HPER students to enhance their learning, is a part of the win-win advantage of a service contract of this proportion. Both the Navy and the School of HPER benefit.

Part of the motivation for SHAPE stems from the fact that the military is seeing an increase in active-duty members contending with weight control issues, parallelizing similar increases in civilian communities. SHAPE had great success in addressing these issues its first year. Outcome data demonstrated that approximately 500 sailors had fitness assessments and almost 10,000 one-on-one training and small-group session contacts occurred. Of the participants who received pre- and post-assessments, there was an average increase in strength of 10 percent, an increase in aerobic capacity of 13 percent, an increase in flexibility of 16 percent, and a decrease of 7.5 percent in body fat. One sailor who worked with Brad Roberts, one of the fitness specialist alumni at the Norfolk site, said their work together has helped him accept new ideals of physical training and reach several personal goals, including running without having hours or days of knee pain afterward. The measurable outcomes, along with such personal testimonials by sailors, led to a contract renewal for a second year.

This second year, Kennedy-Armbruster will work with Lisa Sexauer, Mission Essential Branch Head for the Navy, who resides in the Washington, DC Command, Navy Installations Command (CNIC). They will create a system for monitoring best practices regarding the mission readiness and general health and wellness of the sailors. Several of the day-to-day practices within SHAPE are already tracked through IU Oncourse. A new database has also been created and will track program participation related to outcome data, providing the Navy direct access to evidence of the success of the program. In addition, a SHAPE newsletter will be centrally produced for all sites, as well as a website to promote the program.

There are currently three IU Fitness Specialist graduates working with SHAPE: Brad Roberts, '07, Theresa Collison, '09 and Brady Singleton, '09. Brad Roberts continued for a second year as a SHAPE employee at the Joint Forces Staff College fitness center in Norfolk, VA. Theresa Collison joined Brad in Norfolk, VA. Brady Singleton traveled to San Diego, CA. The Navy hired one SHAPE employee from last year, who became a FitBoss on the USS Ronald Reagan. For more information on this program, visit the SHAPE website at