

“Student Affairs Talk” • Brooke Beidler, Campus Recreation • June 25, 2020

Q: First of all, how is COVID life treating you?

Beidler: Honestly, it's been pretty refreshing for me. I think the change of pace with life has been something that I didn't personally know I needed. But I've definitely enjoyed being able to slow down a little bit, take time for myself and not feel like I have to go to every event that's available to me. So, it hasn't been too bad. But I definitely miss seeing people.

Q: I know you ended up going to Clemson for undergrad. Retrace the steps in how you got here, what academic program you were involved in, your involvement with Campus Rec?

Beidler: All the way back to high school and making the decision, “Where am I going to go?” I was definitely interested in some kind of helping field. I was very involved with art, as well as sports. I talked to my art teacher and she introduced me to a program called art therapy, so I was looking into schools that had that. The only one that I could find locally was Converse College. As I was visiting schools, I was heading toward Converse because of that major. But one weekend, a friend of mine who I was friends with since elementary school invited me to come up to Clemson for a football game, and the same thing happened that happens to everybody. It's the (feeling of), “Oh my goodness, I have to be a part of this!” It's family. You instantly felt it when you come on campus. I then looked into Clemson a little bit more and found out they had a program called recreational therapy, which could encompass art or sports. The elevator speech of what that program is all about taking recreational activities and using them for therapeutic means. Whether it's somebody who has needs related to their mental health, physical health, intellectual health — you're able to connect them to those recreational activities that they're interested in to make it more of a lifestyle change than just a therapeutic avenue that you're going down. I thought the program was so cool, so I came to Clemson and pursued that degree.

In my experience as a Clemson student, I wanted to get a little more plugged in. I actually started working with Campus Recreation, first as a lifeguard. And then I moved around to different positions, eventually working my way up to the highest student position as a recreation supervisor. So, I got a lot of experience on the ins and outs of facility operations as well as programming. And then I decided to stay on at Clemson to pursue a master's in recreational therapy. With that, I continued to build my relationships with Campus Rec. When a full-time position opened up, I applied and here I am, almost three years later.

Q: I was told you were part of the OWL program — Organizational and Wellness Leadership — in the initial cohort. I understand that was very influential in your career?

Beidler: Yes, absolutely. That was a really cool pilot that I got to be a part of. Learning more about being a leader and what it's like to look around at the world, see where there are needs and brainstorm how you can collaborate with other people to come up with a solution. My specific area that I was interested in goes back to my recreational therapy background. Looking at accessibility on campus, specific to gameday. I got to talk with some people in the athletic department as well as the accessibility office to find out what all goes into planning a huge event like gameday. And taking into consideration the needs of people who move around the world in a different way. The OWL program also led to the opportunity for me to go to Dominica on a service trip. That was one of the spring break trips that I got to take that, again, stands out among my experiences as a Clemson student.

Q: As a recreational therapy major, I know you've taken a great interest in adaptive sports and physical therapy ... things of that nature. Tell us about Clemson's partnership with UPTSM and various academic connections you've made during your time as a staff member.

Beidler: I'll start first with the connection with the physical therapy office that is housed within our facility on campus. Part

of my role with Campus Rec is to oversee our personal training program, so I've had the pleasure of working next to our PT office due to the fact that we share an assessment space. It's definitely branched wider than just having a shared space. I've had multiple trainers who are interested in physical therapy who were applying to PT school, and got to connect them to get some hands-on experience in that office. As well as partnering with them to try and research what types of new technology for assessments could be looked into that both of us — personal trainers and physical therapists — could use. We've even had the opportunity for our personal trainers — when they have a client who maybe has a past injury they aren't super familiar with — the physical therapist will come to that initial consultation to provide their expertise and help support the personal trainers through that. Most of my trainers, this is their first job as a personal trainer. When you get an interesting case with a client, it's been really awesome to have that support from the PT office. I know my trainers are leaving with very unique experiences, in terms of the clients they see and the services they provide those clients.

Q: Adaptive sports is something you're interested in. I know you have also worked with the ClemsonLIFE program, correct?

Beidler: Yes. I've had connections in terms of keeping up with the recreational therapy department. I helped out with a research project which we actually traveled to Thailand for. On our side, we learned more about adaptive sports and took a couple of undergraduate students with us as well. As a grad student, I helped lead that creative inquiry for those students, learning about adaptive sports. Once we got there, we ran a program for college students that were in Thailand working on becoming PE teachers. The whole thing was, they were teaching PE to students. But what happens when they have somebody with different abilities? So, they don't get that education. How do you adapt things for people who might be in a wheelchair or may have only one arm? We went in with the model of train-the-trainer. We taught those students how to implement adaptive sports, so that

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when we leave, they can continue to run summer camps to gain that experience. We did adaptive archery, tennis — lots of different things. We also took probably about a dozen high school students that are adaptive athletes across the country. So, they got to come with us and be the hands on deck to teach these students how to play these sports in Thailand. Other hands-on experience with my internship was working at a gym specifically geared toward people with disabilities. We had tons of adaptive sports, as well as actual interventions with clients and things like that.

In terms of ClemsonLIFE, in my role with Campus Rec, I've helped to be a connector. I started an assessment project with them. ClemsonLIFE students were already coming over to do group fitness classes together, but we wanted to make it more beneficial in the long term. I started talking to people on the ClemsonLIFE team, trying to find out what the parents cared about and what the students cared about. For the students, they want to have fun. For the parents, they want to know that the group fitness classes are benefitting their children. We set up some assessments and implemented it at the beginning, middle and end of each semester to see where people were at — were they changing or improving? Assessments ranged from functional things, like going up and down the stairs doing burpees. Naturally, you think “What if I fall down? Can I get back up?” And then things like sit-ups and strength tests, cardiovascular health as well.

Q: The launching of F45 has been a big part of your role. Can you tell us a little bit about the history and the evolution of that program in a relatively short amount of time?

Beidler: I came on board literally during the summer F45 was first coming to our campus. None of us on the fitness and wellness team had heard of it, but our leadership — Dave Frock and Jenny Rodgers — were at a conference and saw it there. It kind of got the gears turning. We decided to invest in that, bring it to campus and it's been amazing. F45 is a fitness franchise that was started in

Australia. It's the fastest growing fitness franchise in the world. The reason why it's so enticing to people and interesting is because it's super quick. It's 45 minutes, as its name suggests. F stands for functional. People who created it were former rugby players. They were missing that athletic and competitive piece in group fitness classes. But also, if you want to just come in and be guided through a workout, it doesn't have to be competitive. You can follow along on the screen. You have rest time, and then you rotate. It really is open to a wide range in terms of audience. You have competitive people or people who just want to move better. I've been able to work with our trainers, meaning the recruiting, hiring and training. I also do the training, to make sure I'm still in the game. I've also really enjoyed getting to meet the members and seeing how it's impacted them. I have a handful of people who come to mind right off the bat who've completely turned their lives around through this program. I've really enjoyed being a part of it.

Q: One of the biggest parts of your role is overseeing student fitness assistants and personal trainers — which we touched on. How do you think your experience as an undergrad really prepared you for the role you have now?

Beidler: I would say I bring something a little bit different. I didn't work as a GA within Campus Recreation. I was really on the other side. The person coming to the gym and experiencing the programs. Coming from the recreational therapy side, my brain instantly goes to “Well, what if this person walks in the door? How would we be able to serve them?” I've been able to be a person my fellow staff members can come to and ask questions. Whether it's better serving ClemsonLIFE or even having staff members who are in a wheelchair or have autism. How can we make their job just as beneficial as anyone else? I love that I'm someone people confide in and can talk about how to speak to somebody with a disability and ask them, “Are you able to do this?” without offending them. I've had those types of conversations with people I work with. Being somebody that can be that safe space to ask questions so they can better serve the people that

are coming through our doors is one of the things that my background in recreational therapy has definitely helped our team with.

Q: Earlier this year, we had a chance pre-COVID to visit and talk about Fit3D and body screening. How has that added to Campus Rec's inventory of services to students, faculty and staff?

Beidler: What's been really cool about Fit3D is that it has attracted a population that typically isn't active in our program. The people who come in and already have a baseline of what they do in the gym, they know how to use the equipment, they're already finding some avenue for their programming. They're not the ones coming to group fitness. They're just walking through the doors, doing their own thing and leaving. I've seen more activation with that group using Fit3D because it's quick. You come in, essentially do a body scan and get all this data to be able to track your progress. And, of course, the people who are active in group fitness programming are super excited as well. I think the main attraction is being able to see if what you're doing is actually making a difference. You can look at the scale, but that really doesn't always tell the whole story. If it's going in one direction, that can be good or bad depending on if it's muscle mass or fat mass that is increasing. Fit3D gives you that insight into those numbers.

Q: How have you, Jenny and the various folks involved in fitness and wellness been able to transition workouts into the virtual setting?

Beidler: We've definitely transitioned into online workouts. We do virtual classes that are pre-recorded as well as live. Jenny primarily has been heading the group fitness classes, so they've done a variety of things like yoga, kickboxing and HIIT. I've been helping run the F45 side by making sure our intern is scheduling out who's in charge of pre-recording and writing the workout for the day, as well as leading Zoom classes. In addition to that, I do have a handful of students who need to work remotely. Some need to pay bills, they're part of a federal work-study or some are managers helping me with projects to

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prepare for life when it returns a little more normal. It’s been very interesting changing my job. It used to be most of my day was on the floor working directly with students and guiding them. Now it’s backing up, reassessing things I am involved in, and looking at the things we can adjust now that I have time to actually look at it, assess it and update it. I’ve been doing that, as well as maintaining that connection with the fitness and wellness classes.

Q: How do you see rec changing in the fall when we aim for a full return. It could be in a limited capacity within your facility walls, or you have different protocols and restrictions you’re following. How is the team managing those conversations at this point?

Beidler: That’s definitely a constant conversation and needs to be one happening on a small level and a big level. For the programming, we need to know what facilities decisions are on protocols because it will help us with decisions on how many people can be in a room and how many times we are cleaning. Keeping that open communication is definitely important. It’s been a key factor in us moving forward. I definitely think we will continue to have more online options. But who knows how long it will take for some people to feel comfortable. Some may feel more at-risk and remain in their homes and they will want to have those online options. I personally have done some research about online platforms for personal training and what that looks like. I think post-COVID and even into the fall, we’re going to have to continue to be creative, look at new things and realize that it’s not just going to be a flip of the switch back to what we had before. Definitely keeping up with communication and being creative.

Q: My experiences with your staff have told me that Campus Rec is a tight-knit team. There’s not an overabundance of full-time staff, so describe for me that dynamic about the way you guys work together and support one another.

Beidler: It’s been really awesome being part of a team that is close-knit. To lay it out, we have our admin team. They’re the ones having conversations at the highest

level, and then it trickles down. We have our facilities and programs as two separate areas. Under all three of those umbrellas are a lot of things I won’t necessarily get into. But, we all have to have different conversations within our own areas. During COVID, at the very beginning, every single week we were meeting and checking in — even if we didn’t have huge updates about what we were doing work-wise — making sure everybody was good. I’ve really appreciated having leadership that has said, “We will keep you in the loop as much as we can,” in addition to giving us the option of talking to them if we’re not feeling comfortable. Or, when we do move into a phase where we’re back on campus, keeping that communication open to what your specific life circumstances are. I’ve greatly appreciated being part of a team that definitely cares about me as an individual, as a professional. I have plenty of people I can call about personal or professional life.

Q: Outside of work, when it’s not COVID time and you’re not limited to the types of activities you can get into, what sort of hobbies or interests do you have?

Beidler: As I mentioned earlier when we talked about my interests in high school, sports and art are still hobbies of mine. Although, I guess sports have kind of transitioned to fitness. I really enjoy strength training and that’s been a huge part of my life since I played sports in high school. Art still is. I love to paint. Oil painting is my favorite form of art. And also pottery. I got connected in the Clemson area to a pottery community, which is something I’ve definitely missed during all of this. Additionally, I would say travel. I love international travel and I’ve had the blessing of being able to do that. But even going away for the weekend to Charleston or whatever; I love being able to change the scenery, go visit people and get new experiences.