Wellness Ambassador of the Month

Paul Terry – Graduate Studies

How long have you worked at UC Davis?

My first position at UC Davis was as a student production assistant and then an academic peer adviser, about twenty years ago.

What does wellness mean to you?

Wellness is a process of humility - a constant betterment and lifelong process examining how to improve various aspects of health for yourself and those around you. I look at wellness through several lenses of the social determinants of health, diversity, communication, and volunteerism. It’s important to remember that the breadth of wellness goes far beyond disease prevention; wellness is about reaching points of success physically, mentally and emotionally, and being able to connect with others along the way. We know that altruistic activity can improve our own health giving rise to one of my personal mantras: Volunteer with the people you love and engage in the activities you are passionate about to bring more joy into this world.

Why did you become a wellness ambassador?

I’ve always been interested in health communications, particularly on how accessibility to online resources and social support impacts our personal motivations or can connect you to the other side of the world. Emergencies and health outbreaks are pinpointed through Twitter or Yelp, people in rural communities can find online groups to support healthy living, organizations and communities can provide incentives to participate, overcoming barriers of self-worth, anxiety, and fear of not belonging. This program has allowed me to be a part of health communication within my own community.

How long have you been a wellness ambassador?

When I began my position at Graduate Studies, my colleagues knew I had previous experience working with wellness programs, so they appointed me as the department wellness ambassador after my first two hours on the job! I’m now going on my second year as a wellness ambassador.

What has been rewarding or positive about your experience thus far?

Volunteering as a wellness ambassador has been an excellent way to learn about the vast backgrounds, motivations, and incentives for participation of my coworkers.

What are some of the challenges you face as a wellness ambassador?

Other organizations that are wellness-based often provide high incentives for participation, which this program doesn’t yet have the means to provide. However, the strength of this program is that it has robust social capacity to encourage people to participate and stay engaged.

What is one piece of advice you would like to share with new wellness ambassadors?

Wellness programming is tricky because we all have our own reasons to participate, and not everyone has the same motivation or fulfillment from the vast number of activities that contribute to health, and
that's ok. Take some time to collect data in creative ways and ask the deeper questions about why people want to improve health. Don't be afraid to experiment!

Staff and Faculty Health and Well-being aims to build an environment that makes the healthier choice the easier choice, while providing staff and faculty with the required support to make UC Davis the healthiest community. How do you feel you have contributed to our mission?

I think I've been successful in helping my colleagues change the way they perceive wellness. Often times the concept of wellness is confined within a box that only allows people to relate it to physical fitness, but I like to encourage people to think beyond those confines and link wellness to what brings out their passion and allows them to feel connected to their community. Especially on a large campus such as this, it can take sufficient effort to connect with others, but once you attain that social support and realize the resources that are offered, you can recognize how to holistically improve your wellness.

What is your favorite thing to do in your spare time?

Brewing ginger beer, singing opera, folding very tiny pieces of origami, riding along the American River Bike Trail, just to name a few.