CalStar Yoga: Helping People with Disabilities to Practice Yoga

COURSE DESCRIPTION
CalStar Yoga is a student-led course where DeCal students serve as yoga assistants for community members with disabilities as they engage in an authentic yoga practice. During this course, DeCal students learn practices and concepts related to yoga, shiatsu, and Thai-massage. They then apply that training by helping our community yoga students into various yoga postures, giving massages, and generally helping their bodies and minds to feel both relaxed and stimulated.

As yoga assistants, the DeCal students will help community members with disabilities get up and exercise for what might be the only time of the week where they aren’t either in bed or a wheelchair. Stretching, loosening, and relaxing the body for a few hours eases pain, increases flexibility and coordination, and helps stimulate all the under-stimulated tissues of the body. The potential long-term benefits for people with disabilities are great. Increased energy, stamina, flexibility, appetite, and more are possible.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
DeCal Students who participate in this course will:
1. Gain an understanding of key relaxation, massage, and yoga techniques and their physiological and psychological benefits;
2. Learn to adapt yoga and massage techniques to persons with severe medical conditions and disabilities often with limited strength and mobility;
3. Increase comfort level with persons with different bodies and abilities;
4. Increase receptive attitude toward and accommodation of persons with different bodies and abilities;
5. Become familiar with common neurological and/or musculoskeletal disorders such as multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, osteoarthritis, and strokes that can challenge movement and mobility; and
6. Learn to work with other DeCal students, the facilitator, the community yoga students and the guest yoga instructors in a collaborative manner.
MEETING TIME AND LOCATION
This class meets from 1:10 pm to 4 pm on Fridays in the Recreational Sports Facility Combatives Room. In addition, three Saturday workshops from 1-4 pm for students enrolled in this course for the first time. On-time arrival and remaining for the full length of the class or workshop is expected.

TEACHING METHODS
This class will be led by the student facilitator, Jessica Dong, with assistance from two guest yoga instructors who serve as guest speakers. Prior to class, DeCal students will complete brief reading assignments to learn about various meditation, yoga, and massage methods and their health benefits. In class, verbal instruction and visual demonstration are given to the DeCal students so that they learn the main poses and massage techniques and can apply and adapt them effectively to and with the community yoga students. Following instruction, DeCal students are expected to gather in small groups to apply the poses and techniques to their assigned community yoga student. While doing so, on the spot feedback is given to help the DeCal student progress in his or her ability to assist the community yoga students. In addition, a written paper that is reflective in nature is required.

STUDENT REQUIREMENTS
Because this is a service-based, experiential course, punctuality and attendance are required. In advance of each class, DeCal students are expected to complete assigned readings and to be prepared to discuss them. In addition, this course involves physically assisting community yoga students which can include lifting, bending, and applying pressure and massage-related touch. A collaborative, positive attitude is required for this course, which includes the ability to remain attentive to and sensitive to the community yoga students, to work effectively with peers, and to follow the direction of the student facilitator.

REQUIRED TEXTS
A reader referred to as “The CalStar Yoga Handbook” will be available for purchase at Krishna Copy Center by the second week of class and is required. The reader contains a collection of brief articles, readings, and helpful illustrations. DeCal students are expected to read materials in advance and participate actively during in-class discussions. And, on the floor with the yoga students, we will often refer to images in the reader to enhance the learning that’s happening moment-to-moment through clear instruction and close guidance from the student facilitator.

GRADERS
This is a 2-unit course that is graded on a Pass/No Pass basis. Because of the service focus of this course and its experiential nature, consistent, punctual attendance and constructive participation are required to earn a passing grade. Passing grades are determined by meeting all three of the below requirements and achieving an overall percentage of 70% or higher:

1. **Attendance and Participation (60%)**: This course has a strict policy of no more than 2 absences total per semester including classes and workshops in order to achieve a passing grade. Any absence beyond the two allowed will be excused only in very rare cases of emergency. These must be authentic and well documented and rectified by make-up
assignments. Attendance will be strictly taken by the student coordinator and monitored by the student facilitator and sponsoring faculty member. Each time you arrive at class on-time and stay for the full duration, you earn pro-rated percentage points toward your course attendance grade.

2. **Participation (20%)**: In-class participation must demonstrate an attentive, collaborative, and constructive attitude toward other students, community yoga students, and the guest yoga instructors. DeCal students who are unable to participate effectively and who are unable or unwilling to respond to feedback may be asked to withdraw from the course.

3. **Written Assignment (20%)**: A 2-5 page writing assignment that is reflective in nature must be submitted at the end of the semester.

If you have an extenuating circumstance that may interfere with your ability to meet any course expectations or should you need accommodations, please discuss this proactively with the student facilitator at the beginning of the course or at the time the circumstance begins. Reasonable accommodation that ensures you will obtain the necessary competencies can usually be interactively determined. Potential DeCal students living with their own disabilities who would like to help the disabled yoga students in this class are encouraged to obtain a formal accommodation letter from the Disabled Students Program (DSP) and to communicate with the faculty sponsor.

**COURSE ATMOSPHERE**

During class, a small group of DeCal student helpers gather around each community yoga student to help with the exercises through holding, stretching and pressing, from all sides if necessary. Some of the yoga students need to be lifted out of wheelchairs onto the floor mats. Others arrive in class using lighter mobility aids. They all need help getting up and down and moving about. We breathe deeply and relax together. There is plenty of verbal encouragement from all sides and lots of conversation and laughter. The atmosphere is warm and friendly. A great deal of mutual respect and camaraderie arises from our time together, as social and psychological barriers dissolve. The community yoga students are very appreciative of the help they receive. Many DeCal helpers come to feel that they benefit from the class even more than the yoga students do. Most DeCal students quickly come to understand that this class is primarily about love and respect. And, we have a lot of fun!

The exercise format is carefully designed for safety and security, while providing maximum benefit. The student facilitator and guest yoga instructors work alongside the DeCal students, providing constant close monitoring and ongoing encouragement. New DeCal students may at first feel unsure about touching or even talking to someone with a disability, but fears dissolve after a class or two. Feel free to ask the students about their exercise needs and be sure to find out about their lives! They will ask you about yours! And, feel free to ask questions of the student facilitator, who is very approachable.

With regard to the techniques we use, the class consists primarily of assisted yoga postures, which we combine liberally with Thai Yoga Massage, Acupressure, Massage, Muscle Resistance, Range of Motion and occasionally, the use light free weights. We open and close each meeting with everyone -- students and helpers alike -- practicing a little more internally though breathing exercises, relaxation, visualization and meditation.
Given the unique nature of this course, it may not be of interest or appropriate for all undergraduate students so please consider whether or not this type of experience would be right for you or speak to the student facilitator early on in the semester. Since this is an elective course, there may be other DeCal courses for you to enroll in if this does not feel like the right fit.

**KEY PERSONS**

**The Community Yoga Students**
The yoga students are a diverse, lively and intelligent group. Their ages range from early 20s into 80s, but mostly in-between. Many are graduates of Berkeley. They’re regular people who have disabilities. They’re all very friendly and interesting and would like to get to know you, so feel free to talk them.

The Yoga students have a range of disabilities such as Multiple Sclerosis, Cerebral Palsy, Post-Stroke symptoms, and injury-related problems. Most of their disabilities are physical as opposed to mental. Some were born with disabilities and some acquired them later in life. A few have speech impairments, but with no lack of intelligence. Please feel free to politely ask people about their disabilities.

**The Student Facilitator**
Jessica Dong is a junior majoring in Molecular and Cell Biology. Any questions and/or concerns regarding the course can be directed to her at: dongjessica@berkeley.edu.

**Guest Yoga Instructors**
Saraswathi Devi and Claire Lavery each have years of experience teaching this very hands-on style of adaptive yoga. They provide vital guest lectures on key concepts.

**The Instructor of Record and Sponsoring Department**
Greg Merrill, LCSW, Lecturer in the School of Social Welfare, is the instructor of record and maintains responsibility for overseeing the course and determining grades. Concerns, complaints and grievances that cannot be resolved by the student facilitator may be addressed to him at gregmerrill@berkeley.edu. His phone extension is 510-643-6397, and his office is located in 313 Haviland. To learn about the School of Social Welfare and our undergraduate major, go to: http://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/bachelor-arts-social-welfare.

**STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**
As students at this leading university, we hold ourselves to the highest standard of integrity and accountability. Since this class is a service we provide to vulnerable members of our community, students are expected to embody the highest level of accountability, presence, warmth, respect, and collaboration. Students are expected to abide by all course expectations as made clear on this syllabus and to communicate their questions and concerns in advance. Plagiarism, failure to attend regularly, failure to participate constructively, failure to complete an assignment, and/or other acts that constitute irresponsible or unethical student conduct may result in failure of this course and/or disciplinary action.
## COURSE CALENDAR  Spring 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1</td>
<td>1/26/18</td>
<td>Course Introduction and Overview, Requirements and Expectations&lt;br&gt;Initial Instruction in Transfer, Postures, Movement, Relaxation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>2/2/18</td>
<td>Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise&lt;br&gt;Review Syllabus, Requirements and Expectations, Questions and Conversation&lt;br&gt;Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles&lt;br&gt;Assisted Yoga Practice&lt;br&gt;Clean-Up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop 1</td>
<td>2/3/18</td>
<td>Yoga Postures and Acupressure Techniques&lt;br&gt;Reading Before Workshop 1:&lt;br&gt;Thai Massage Manual, Lessons One and Two (p 1-33)&lt;br&gt;Thai Massage Manual, Lessons Three and Four (p 34-47)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 3</td>
<td>2/9/18</td>
<td>Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise&lt;br&gt;Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles&lt;br&gt;Assisted Yoga Practice&lt;br&gt;Clean-Up&lt;br&gt;Reading Before Class 3:&lt;br&gt;Prana Yoga Practice Pages (p 93-123)&lt;br&gt;(Select two techniques from these pages, practice them at home and be prepared to be called upon to demonstrate and discuss - how they feel, their benefits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class 4</td>
<td>2/16/18</td>
<td>Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise&lt;br&gt;Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles&lt;br&gt;Assisted Yoga Practice&lt;br&gt;Clean-Up</td>
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Workshop 2  Going Deeper, Shaping the Practice, Addressing Individual Needs
2/17/18

Reading Before Workshop 2:
Thai Massage Manual, Lessons Five and Six (p 48-67)

Class 5  Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise
2/23/18
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles
Assisted Yoga Practice
Clean-Up

Reading Before Class 5:
In the reader – disability descriptions from online resources (p 155-206)
(Choose one disability, read about it and be prepared to describe what you read and understood.)

Class 6  Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise
3/2/18
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles
Assisted Yoga Practice
Clean-Up

Reading Before Class 6:
The Bhagavad Gita (ancient text on practical yoga philosophy w/ modern commentary)
Chapter 1

Class 7  Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise
3/9/18
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles
Assisted Yoga Practice
Clean-Up

Reading Before Class 7:
The Bhagavad Gita
Chapter 2
Workshop 3  
3/10/18  Small Group Project – Collaboratively design a practice for one of our students, then demonstrate it for the rest of the class w/ rationale.

Reading before Workshop 3:  
Thai Massage Manual, Lesson Eight (p 82-91)

Class 8  
3/16/18  Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise  
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles  
Assisted Yoga Practice  
Clean-Up

Reading Before Class 8:  
Yoga: A Lifestyle for a Lifetime (p 125-131)  
Yoga for MS (p 132-141)

Class 9  
3/23/18  Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise  
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles  
Assisted Yoga Practice  
Clean-Up

Reading Before Class 9:  
In the reader – disability descriptions from online resources (p 155-206).  
(Looking again at the reading assignment for Class 5, select another disability to read about and be prepared to discuss what you understood)

3/30/18  Spring Break/Cesar Chavez Day  
No Class

Class 10  
4/6/18  Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise  
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles  
Assisted Yoga Practice  
Clean-Up

Class 11  
4/13/18  Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise  
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles  
Assisted Yoga Practice  
Clean-Up
**Class 12  4/20/18**
Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles
Assisted Yoga Practice
Clean-up

**Class 13  4/27/18**
Last Day of Instruction: Final Class Meeting
Set-Up, Relaxation Exercise
Group Discussion of Key Reading and Principles
Assisted Yoga Practice
Clean-Up

**5/4/18**
**WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT DUE:**
6pm  
Your CalStar Yoga Expression (2-5 pages of reflection)