

## Robeson Neighbors Q&A: Daniel Perdue, assistant director of fitness at UNCP

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Darlene W. Natale Special to The Robesonian - June 14, 2023



Daniel Perdue, the assistant director of fitness at UNCP, checks in student Jacob Dial. Dial is scanning the QR code app instituted during COVID-19.

Photo Courtesy UNCP

Robeson Neighbors Q&A

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In the fitness realm, Daniel Perdue stands out for his focus on the campus community's health through fitness.

He stresses developing a fitness routine as a preventive measure rather taking a reactive approach as health issues arise.

Perdue, who hails from Greensboro, is the assistant director of fitness at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

The Campbell Wellness Center is open to students, staff and faculty of the university and the outside community through memberships. Perdue studied fitness as an undergrad and graduate student at UNCP from 2004-2010.

**Darlene W. Natale: Please tell me a little bit about your background beyond your UNCP degrees that helped prepare you for this type of a position?**

Daniel Perdue: I worked in the Campus Rec space all through those years at UNCP. Then I went on to teach middle school physical education in Bladen County, which is next county over, from 2010 to 2013. And then from 2013 to 2019, I worked for Southeastern, it's called Southeastern Health now, but back then it was Southeastern Regional Medical Center. I worked for their fitness center for a year and then we opened a CrossFit facility in Lumberton. I managed that facility for five years. And then I got a job here at UNCP in October 2019.

**DN: What roles does this position encompass? Because it sounds like it's kind of a large one.**

DP: It is. I manage the students, faculty and staff Wellness Center, cardio room, their gym, basically, I also manage our newly renovated fitness studio, where we host a variety of fitness classes, students, faculty and staff can partake year-round. I manage my student staff, which has grown to around 20 employees and program daily feature events for the fitness classes, special events there.

**DN: What is the most challenging aspect of that job that you have?**

DP: I would say it would be creating events to get students to buy in. Now it's a lot easier because more students are fitness minded. Versus back when I was a student, that wasn't the case. So, we're trying to create a more preventative fitness measure versus a reactive. We want to get students healthy now so they're not when they get out of school they're not running into health issues that come along with sedentary lifestyles that you can develop in college and into your professional life. It's very easy. You know, one day turns into one week, one week turns into a month. Months turn into years. And before you know it, you're running into these health issues that could have been prevented with just 30 minutes to an hour a day.

**DN: What type of fitness programs do you setup and develop?**

DP: One of our most successful ones is called F45. And that's a worldwide, technologically integrated fitness platform that we brought in about a year ago. And it's ever changing. The "F" stands for functional and the "45" stands for 45-minute sessions. So, during the summer, it's not as big, we run two classes a day, Monday through Friday. And then during the school year, we will run seven days a week, multiple classes a day. The workouts continuously change as the challenge of variety of domains in the realm of fitness. So, we touch strength, we touch cardio, we touch flexibility, there's all kinds of things. And they're all instructor led. So, it's one of the

campus and the buy-in is huge. We've almost, I'd say, doubled our numbers from last year, as far as participation goes, a lot more students are getting involved. This allows me an opportunity to develop my students professionally. So, in a sense, I've got now I've got six trainers, that I trained in the F45 space, but they've also been trained in personal training, too, that can carry over into their next steps after college.

**DN: So, you have UNCP students training to instruct in the program. How do you train these students?**

DP: They get they get trained in small groups, personal training. So, they're getting hands on experience, working with other people, leading classes, with a variety of different types of people. And then they can take that experience into the next positions when they graduate. They're automatically hireable and not just at F45 studios across the country. But they also have that experience they can put on the resume. One of my goals as a professional is to develop students into future professionals in their spaces.

**DN: Do you have any problems dealing with student workers though?**

DP: Not really. Most of mine, I hand pick them. I would say is hands on but based on observation. Okay, I see a student who is routinely in the Wellness Center, or routinely taking classes and they're genuinely interested in interested in learning this more in depth as a coach or a personal trainer.

**DN: How long does it take the students to be prepped to instruct F45?**

DP: So, the first few students that I had, it was self-paced. So, once I hire them, they I create their accounts and they have to go through-self-paced a variety of modules to get them prepared on the knowledge part, from there, I'll pair them either with myself or one of my student leaders to shadow and learn how to just kind of flow through the class. They learn to spot movement flaws or learn how to spot like something that they can correct when and how to correct it appropriately. And then they challenge them to see those things themselves.

**DN: Do you have any real challenges with teaching the students?**

DP: No, no, not at all. Because most of the students that I teach, are already willing to learn and want to be in that spot.

**DN: Good. Are there any issues that you have to deal with on the fitness floor like conflicts or complaints about someone being on a machine too long?**

DP: No, no, not at all. Because we and our Wellness Center has a ton of different machines. And we have a lot of treadmills, for example. We've got eight of them. The ellipticals, we have I think six bikes. Yes, we have a good volume of equipment. So, there's never and there's never really the kind of volume in the space that would require people to wait, if that makes sense. There's always an open machine, or an open bench or dumbbells that are available. There's there's all that stuff.

**DN: How does the Wellness Center differ from the Fitness Studio?**

Studio is where we house our fitness program and so it's a separate space The fitness studio is just for our fitness program—our fitness classes.

**DN: What are the fitness programs offered?**

DP: F45, Yoga, Zumba. Basically, any class that we can develop. We house it in that space. It is only for the campus community.

**DN: What is your preferred workout? How often do you do it?**

DP: I've been in the functional fitness ("CrossFit") space since 2013, generally 5-6 days a week.

**DN: Do you like to listen to music during your workouts? Genre? What would your typical playlist include?**

DP: I can workout with or without music. If I am listening, its generally Rock, Rap or Techno.

**DN: Is there a certain tune that gets you pumped up?**

DP: Anything upbeat.

**DN: Do you have a particular workout routine? For instance, warm up on a bike, circuit of machines, cooldown on a treadmill...? Do you do legs one day...?**

DP: The style of workouts I take part in are constantly varied, meaning they're ever changing. Keeps things from getting stagnant. Workouts target the total body, I don't usually restrict it to one group.

**DN: Do you use a fitness app, watch, etc.? If so, why? Why not?**

DP: I do use a MyZone heartrate strap around my chest. I like to study the science behind how exercise affects my body and how my body responds under the duress.

**DN: What are your outside fitness activities? Do you walk, hike, jog...?**

DP: There is usually some form of fitness in everything I do. Whether in the gym, playing golf, or being outside. My whole goal in fitness is to be generally physically prepared for life.

**DN: Do you have to handle budgets, marketing and social media?**

DP: Yes. Marketing and social media, yes. Budgeting I'm starting to wet my feet in. Mostly that's handled by my director. But I've been trying to kind of open some branches under my professional growth, trying to learn that stuff. Because it will only help me develop as a professional and help me help the department.

**DN: Tell me about your marketing? You're trying to reach out to students and who else?**

Now with our Wellness Center, we do have we do have local community memberships that we reach out to. For the general specific is everyone on campus and commuter students.

**DN: What is your preference for leisure activities?**

DP: Spending time at home with my family, seeing friends, whatever comes our way.

**DN: What is something about yourself that you think may surprise your fitness clients and trainees?**

DP: I haven't always looked the way I do now. I was overweight most of my young life up until around my senior year of college. I got tired of not being ok with my self-image and I made a change. I am no different than most, I saw a path to change and I took it.

**DN: Do you or have you had any issues working with the diverse clientele that you have or do things arise at all with that?**

DP: Not at all. I mean, some of the issue we've had, I'd say the only issue we've run into was that we changed with COVID, we changed from a touch point process as far as scanning into the Wellness Center, where you would hand your student ID. We did away with that. And we developed an app that we use in our department that has a QR code that we digitally scan, now instead of handing the cards back and forth. That's been tough, because some of the older population that we work with aren't as technologically inclined. So, it's a little bit harder to set up. And it takes a few minutes. I would say that's the biggest issue.

**DN: What was the toughest day you've ever had in this position?**

DP: I have to say it would be dealing with the, the regulations or restrictions that we were handed down from COVID.

**DN: How did that change everything for you?**

DP: To require a mask in the facility at that time because it's hard to breathe with those things on. And fitness, you're gonna breathe heavy, and you're having that breath trapped by a mask. it gets hot and get sweaty, but part of our job was to keep the environment safe. And you would have to say, "Hey, pull your mask up." They can't enter without a mask, you know, those kinds of interactions were tough. Because on a personal level, I understand what their issues are with them and wearing them in the space. At a professional level, you know, I have an obligation or responsibility to enforce those restrictions until I'm otherwise told not to. I have to do it. And, it was just one of those things where we just had to push through it.

**DN: Could you explain how you mentor or provide guidance to new members.**

DP: So, I mean, it happens all the time. It's just they come in, they don't know what to do, or they have a specific goal, they just don't know how to get started. And my whole role is to just help them get comfortable. And the first step is to come in. To get their feet in the door, right? Because it can be overwhelming for sure, if someone comes in and let's say they're a little bit overweight, and they want to lose weight, well, then my job is to make them comfortable being

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they might see somebody lifting a bunch of weight and that intimidates them, my job is to make them feel comfortable in their own skin to go and do that. Now, that could look different for a lot of different people. It could mean me just taking them in the fitness studio, do a one-on-one session with them just to kind of get them the ropes, I can help write that program for them. Just something that they could follow on their own. I can suggest times when we're not as busy as other times when we can sneak in there and not feel so intimidated by other people being in there.

It depends on the situation, and you know, how I would react to it or how I would tell one of my students to observe it. And that's one thing is like students like working with other students. So, if I have a student email me about a personal training program, I will take that student and refer them to one of my student personal trainers and have them reach out and just establish that connection.

**DN: Are there any slow times when those uncomfortable with crowds could workout?**

DP: Early in the mornings or late at night. So, like during the school year, we open up at seven. A lot of students don't get up that early. So, our professional staff will go in there in the morning before work. Or sometimes we're dead, like right after lunch. Summers always dead.

**DN: Do you get many faculty and staff?**

DP: Yeah, yeah, a lot.

**DN: When you say a lot, what do you mean? Like? As a percentage of your membership?**

DP: That'd be it's a small percentage that I would say, I'd say maybe 25%.

**DN: You spoke of community memberships. How many community members are there?**

DP: It's a lot smaller, because once COVID hit, we had to cancel all of it. We weren't allowing the outside community to come in. So, September this past year, we just started rolling the community membership back out. So, I would say we only have probably like 10 or 15 community members.

**DN: Is your job stressful for you?**

DP: No, I love it. I mean, I love what I do. I've stayed in it for this long. So, you know, fitness has been a big part of my life since I'd say probably 2007.

**DN: Can you tell us your goal for the fitness program?**

DP: I mean, we're constantly improving and making changes to our facility to better help the next generation move forward. And hopefully healthier. So, I think that's our number one goal, and I think we do a really good job of it.

DP: Atomic Habits, by James Clear & Mind Gym by Gary Mack

**DN: Tell us about your family if you are comfortable sharing.**

DP: I've been married to my wonderful wife, Hannah, for 5 years and this past December we welcomed our beautiful baby girl, Indiana into the world. We also have a dog, Jackson. He's a knucklehead.

**DN: Any advice for people who do nothing right now, whether it's students or faculty or the community?**

DP: It's to just get started! And if they need the help, reach out to me, I'd be happy to help.

**DN: Thanks, Daniel!**

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