



DBU senior Natalie Holmes with a student from Green Oaks School

Teaching Physical Education to Special Needs Students

written by Sara Thetford

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Green Oaks School, located in Arlington, Texas, is a place where students with Down Syndrome can have their individual learning needs met and can excel academically, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Since the fall of 2009, Dr. June Elms and her Adapted Kinesiology (KNES 2309) classes have spent afternoons teaching physical education to Green Oaks School students with Down Syndrome. They teach 11–18 year olds, with an average of PK-2nd grade motor skills.

The first step of the service-learning project was for the DBU students enrolled in Adapted Kinesiology to research Green Oaks School and learn about the students' characteristics, the admission requirements, and the curriculum. The DBU students then began creating lesson plans for one of the following areas: motor skills, games and sports, rhythmic activities, or physical fitness. The lesson was to be taught on an assigned date to the Green Oaks students. Each student spent at least two hours working in a physical activity setting within the school. Along with teaching a lesson, the DBU students observed the strengths, challenges, stereotypes, and other aspects of the Green Oaks students' daily lives.

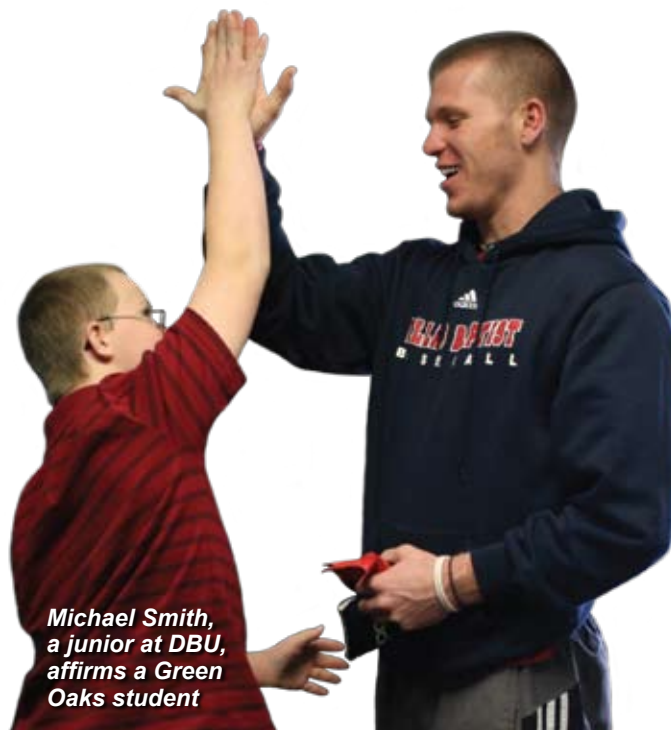
Through this experience, many of the DBU students discovered their lesson plans did not work for this special needs group of students and had to quickly adapt the lesson to fit the environment and students. Since many of the DBU students are studying to become future teachers or physical therapists, learning how to modify and adapt their lesson

plans to accommodate a variety of needs is a key skill. DBU students were able to personally experience and learn why adaptation is important and how to successfully alter plans to meet the students' prevailing needs.

DBU senior Haddon Norris stated, "This service was not just beneficial to the kids with special needs; it was also neat to see the DBU students enjoying it and learning how to deal with all sorts of different students."

The final part of the service-learning assignment was to write a reflection paper on the activity they taught. The students evaluated how effective their lesson plans were, if the Green Oaks students were engaged and motivated, and if the DBU students could have improved their lessons. They also had to determine if the Green Oaks students grasped the main points of their lessons or if they should be taught again.

In their reflections, the DBU students spoke about the respect they gained for the teachers that work with special needs children. Many of the Adapted Kinesiology students wrote that they now have a special place in their hearts for the students and educators at Green Oaks School. They raved about how much they learned about creating an atmosphere that accommodates these special needs, allowing the children to feel successful and encouraging them to excel despite disabilities. "I loved my experience, and anyone who is looking for a place to serve should try visiting this school," DBU senior Brandon Williamson wrote. "It is worth your time, and you will realize how truly special these kids are."



Michael Smith, a junior at DBU, affirms a Green Oaks student