

# Helping our student athletes excel

## Academic advisors are coaches in the classroom for students

### A Day in the Life of an Admissions Officer

BY DALE BARBOUR  
The Bulletin

William and Catharine Booth College professor Matthew Kwok might not be spiking a ball but he's still helping the Bison men's volleyball team succeed and across the court University of Manitoba law professor Darcy MacPherson is doing the same with the women's basketball team

The twist for MacPherson and Kwok is that as academic advisors they focus on what happens in the classroom rather than on the court.

"Student athletes need to be successful with their studies and their sport," Kwok said. Bison athletes face unique challenges – like every other student they're often balancing the challenge of working part time to support themselves against the challenges of going to university. Athletics – and the extra time required that goes with it – adds one further challenge to the mix.

"Really, they have two full time jobs," MacPherson said. "When you consider the time they spend training, preparing themselves in the weight room and on the court they're easily spending 40 hours a week on their athletic endeavor." It's a level of intensity that they never encountered in their high school athletic program.

MacPherson and Kwok are both volunteers with the Bison program – Kwok is in his second year and MacPherson signed on five years ago. While he works at Booth College, a U of M approved teaching centre, the U of M is familiar terrain to Kwok: he earned his bachelor's degree in commerce, master's degree in economics and PhD in education here. Volunteering at the university now is a nice fit for an academic position that puts the focus on teaching, research and community service. Besides, he always loved volleyball and this is a good way to stay in the game.

MacPherson was drawn by a similar interest.

"I like the team dynamic. I'm a big believer that being a member of a team is always more rewarding than an individual project. And having been around athletics for so long, I've heard so many athletes say, 'I'm smart on the court, but I'm not book smart.'"

Bunk, says MacPherson. "If you can excel on the court, you're not dumb. You just need to learn how to apply it to the academic endeavor."

MacPherson said part of his technique is teaching athletes that their courts skills can translate into the



Photo by Dale Barbour

William and Catharine Booth College professor Matthew Kwok, left, and U of M law professor Darcy MacPherson, right, are helping Bison athletes excel in the classroom just as they do on the courts.

classroom.

For the basketball team, it's a not a voluntary program, rookies are required to take part in a two hour study hall every week to work them into their new study habits.

"Working with them like that also shows them that somebody cares about how they're doing academically," MacPherson said.

Arguably, the results have been showing. The basketball program has been enjoying high levels of success when it comes to having students named Academic All Canadians – which means they've earned at least a 3.5 GPA over the course of the academic year. But MacPherson said what's really happened is that academic achievement has become a target for the athletes, in the same way that winning games on the court is.

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Over on the volleyball court, Kwok has similar goals.

"I work with all levels and abilities, because there are different techniques that everyone can use to study more effectively," Kwok said. "They might already be a good student, but with a little help they could be excellent."

"While I was working on my PhD at the University of Manitoba I taught an introduction to university course for first year students," Kwok added. "As part



of that I taught a half a dozen student athletes. I found them to be very good students and I decided to see if I could take it to another level by working specifically for a team."

Kwok works directly with five or six students on the team, and broader group sessions are available for the entire team. The advising covers everything from note taking, to time management, to preparing for tests and exams.

"Students don't always realize that you need to take a different approach to studying for different courses – you don't take notes the same way in a calculus course as you do in an English course and you don't study the same way for a multiple choice exam as you would for an essay-based exam," Kwok said.

"It's a great service," Kinesiology and Recreation Management athletic director Coleen Dufresne said of Kwok and MacPherson's work. "We're hoping it shows in the students' grades."

What Kwok and MacPherson are unique in offering sport-based advising at this point.

However, University 1 student athletes can also tap into the academic advising program offered through U1. The program includes a Bison-focused version of the introduction to university course that Kwok taught while working on his PhD.

"We have a special section for Bison student athletes," Dufresne said. "The goal of that course is to help them bridge the gap between high school and university where they are facing demands that are much higher than they have ever been before."

## Putting her money where her father's mouth was

While James Zayshley dedicated most of his life helping others as he passionately "chased the cure" for tuberculosis, his family's generosity will be felt by future Faculty of Dentistry students and institutionalized residents who rely on the Home Dental Care Program.

For over three years and until his death on June 21, 2007 Zayshley, like so many other institutionalized residents, was a client of the Home Dental Care Program (HDC). Following her father's passion, Lynn Jaworski, Zayshley's daughter is putting her money where his mouth was and is promoting and supporting The Centre for Community Oral Health's Home Dental Care Program.

Both Lynn and her father hold ties with the University of Manitoba and have made contributions to university students and faculty. Not only did Lynn receive her teaching certificate here, she also tutored Chinese research students in the Faculty of Medicine. Her father, during the Tuberculosis era, in

the 60's & 70's organized x-ray clinics and tuberculin skin test surveys for U of M students, faculty & staff.

Lynn is convinced that the dental services offered by the team of dental professionals to residents in hospitals, private residences and personal care facilities, is a hidden gem worth discovering but doesn't get the recognition that it deserves.

In her mind and in her father's opinion, Jaworski believes that having all fourth year dental students & senior dental hygienists rotate through this program as part of the curriculum is important. This learning opportunity is beneficial to both students and the elderly, as both can be inspired by one another.

Just as her father touched the lives of many, Lynn hopes that the Home Dental Care program will carry on so that staff & future students will continue striving to improve the dental care of institutionalized residents.

### Posthumous degree



Photo by Bob Talbot

Cpl. Jordan Anderson, of the Edmonton-based 3rd Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, was killed on July 4, 2007 while serving in Afghanistan. A political studies major at the U of M through the Canadian Forces Program, Anderson was granted a posthumous degree by the university on Oct. 19. Flanked by, from left, Chancellor William Norrie and President Emőke Szathmáry, Anderson's wife, Amanda Anderson, receives the degree from Arts dean Richard Sigurdson.