

No one sits out this dance class

Step. Step. Roll. Roll. That's how the American DanceWheels Foundation, whose motto is "Everyone can dance," introduces itself to visitors on its Web site.

The organization promotes recreation and inclusion for people with ambulatory disabilities by pairing them with able-bodied partners for dance instruction, fun and competition.

This spring, UD shared in the foundation's mission by offering the nation's first accredited collegiate wheelchair ballroom dance course.

"This is a very innovative course that we'd like to see continue and serve as a model for other universities," says Melinda Kremer, executive director and a co-founder of the American DanceWheels Foundation.

The foundation wrote a grant request to finance the course, and \$10,000 was awarded as a Quality of Life grant by the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation.

The class, offered in the Department of Health, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences, included ballroom and Latin dance instruction. Students met twice weekly, and the semester concluded with a dance demonstration and competition.

Kremer says her organization "applauds the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation for its support of this uniquely physical, cultural and social experience."

Participants from the University and the wider community enrolled in the class. They learned a variety of types of dance while also exploring the similarities and differences that exist between people with and without disabilities.



Courtney Holston, AS '08, practices her steps with dance partner Ray Leight, a founder of American DanceWheels. Below left, the class works on new techniques.

The close connection that builds between dance partners has been found to facilitate communication and understanding despite physical and social barriers, Kremer says.

Pat Grim, a UD staff member and one of the instructors for the class, says the course was instructive for students who plan to teach physical education but also had broader influence.

"One of the goals for these classes is to educate the community," she says. "People whose movement is limited by wheelchairs can learn to dance with a standing partner, and they dance beautifully with grace and passion. This groundbreaking University program has the potential to impact the community in an extraordinary way."

The program followed the American DanceWheels Foundation's syllabus, teaching partner dance skills that can be used at social events such as weddings, parties and holiday celebrations.

The "final exam" for the class was an evening dance program in which students from the University of Delaware, Crystal DanSport Center in New Castle, Delaware and the Atrium Dance Studio in Pennsauken, New Jersey took part.

Grim says many students were so enthusiastic about the class that, in the weeks leading up to the final performance, they spent extra hours in the dance studio, practicing with those from Crystal DanSport. "They also want to take the class again so they can learn how to teach and work with seated people," she says.

The class will be offered again during fall semester. Course registration information is available online at www.udel.edu/registrar.

For more information about the American DanceWheels Foundation, visit www.americandancewheels.org.

