

Two students' exercise psychology project helps senior citizens

Association for Applied Sport Psychology awards Student Diversity Award

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Senior citizens gather for a weekly session of exercise led by graduate students Edson Filho and Itay Basevitch. The two won an international award for their project. / Photo courtesy of Andrea Personett

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The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) will award two Florida State graduate students a Student Diversity Award for achievements on their project entitled "Exercise and Psychological Well- Being among Older Adults."

According to AASP, the Student Diversity Award is a prestigious honor that recognizes the achievements of students involved in research, service or applied experiences that focus on issues of diversity that impact sport, exercise and health.

Edson Filho and Itay Basevitch, international graduate students studying sports, exercise and performance psychology, will be presented the award in October at the 2012 AASP Conference Banquet in Atlanta, Ga.

Their area of study focuses on psychology that may improve athletic performance and the quality of life for older citizens.

In March 2011, after writing a proposal for their project, the duo was given a community outreach grant that supports community initiatives and relates to the mission of AASP.

Filho's and Basevitch's project focused on individuals from different backgrounds but targeted one age group: the elderly. With the grant Filho and Basevitch headed to Tallahassee Senior Center, a local nursing home, to start their study.

They visited the senior citizen home every week for a year. The two wanted to come up with strategies to work with individuals from different countries and cultures, and to compare different styles of playing a specific sport.

Elders from different backgrounds and ranging from ages 60 to 80 played table tennis and participated in different sessions to help their quality of life and their sports performance. Filho and Basevitch also wanted to help the elderly to enjoy sports and to get more out of playing the game. At the beginning of the project many individuals were reluctant to participate in the study, they said.

"There was about a two-month period where we came almost every week and just talked to them until we got their confidence," Basevitch said.

Filho and Basevitch focused on a group that is "marginalized" within the sport and exercise area. Other psychologists ignore or leave out this targeted age group. The AASP marked this project as a "major achievement."

Being from different countries and studying at FSU as international students played a vital role in their research.

"We became a little bit more sensitive to the challenges people face when in a different culture," Filho said. "This is a step in the direction of being sensitive to different cultures, and to work a little bit to promote integration."

Without the collaboration of Tallahassee Senior Center and the help from AASP, Filho and Basevitch said this research nor award would be possible.

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