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Unique safety program wins governor's award

October 12, 2004



Biofeedback machine attached to her right arm, staff member Sarah Chaput listens as Erik Peper describes proper posture for healthful computing

The Ergonomic Safety Program Team at SFSU was recently awarded Gov. Schwarzenegger's Employee Safety Award for its groundbreaking program that helps employees practice healthy computing habits.

The six-week program, offered every spring, combines basic ergonomic principles with instructions on how to break unhealthful work habits. Staff members who complete the two-hour-per-week training become coaches equipped with the knowledge and skills to train their co-workers or employees. As of today, more than 150 employees have been trained.

"There is no other campus I know of in the CSU that has a program in which employees train other employees," said Michael Martin, director of risk management. "SFSU's Ergonomic Safety Program is relationship driven and ongoing, and through the program we have completely eliminated all of the back-logged requests from employees regarding pain or discomfort resulting from work. We have helped hundreds of employees on the campus."

Through the use of biofeedback monitors, they learn to gauge unnecessary and excessive muscle tension in the arms, neck, wrists and shoulders, which commonly occurs while computing. They also learn how a workstation should be set up to avoid excessive strain on the muscles and eyes. In addition, they are taught healthy computing habits, such as taking breaks and

breathing deeply.

The program includes many quick tips -- from dropping the hands to the lap every 30 seconds to blinking at the end of sentences -- which computer users can incorporate into their daily routines. Developing healthful work habits is very important, says [holistic healing studies](#) director Erik Peper who helped create the program.

"Just because you're sitting in the best ergonomic position doesn't mean inside you're doing the right things," Peper said. "We developed the program to incorporate self awareness so that behaviors change -- because so many of us get busy and forget about our bodies while we work."

Since completing the training and receiving an ergonomic adjustment last spring, Advancement services coordinator Patricia Okamoto says the arm pain she had been experiencing disappeared.

"Adjustments to my work space and taking breaks have made all the difference," Okamoto said. "Now that I have completed the training I'm ready to train other employees. My confidence in the program -- due to how much it has improved the way I feel -- really helps with my approach to coaching others."

Employees interested in the program should contact Teri Liming at 338-1683 or tliming@sfsu.edu.

-- Student Writer Elizabeth Davis with [William Morris](#)



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