

Walking the walk, talking the talk at meetings on the move

By Paul Francuch

“Let’s go,” waved David Marquez as he and Angela Odoms-Young led a bundled clutch of graduate students from the Applied Health Sciences building into a chilling rain.

Even the inclement weather, however, couldn’t dampen the lively discussion that followed.

Welcome to KN-501, the “walking journal club” for graduate students of Marquez and Odoms-Young, both assistant professors of kinesiology and nutrition.

The weekly meeting where students and professors discuss an assigned professional journal article used to be an indoor, sit-down affair. Now the class talks shop while walking a block or more, exercising both muscles and minds.

With umbrellas in one hand and copies of the “Benefits of authoritative feeding style” published in the journal *Appetite* in the other, graduate students Eduardo Bustamante, Nefertiti Oji-Njideka, Summer Porter and Sparkle Springfield, along with kinesiology project coordinator Jameika Sampson, began their recent meeting.

They headed west to Damen, then south to Roosevelt before circling back as the wind picked up. Discussion of the topic du jour never waned.

“It’s a good way to keep up on journal articles,” says Marquez, who originally made the suggestion to meet on foot, rather than in seats.

“We’d be talking about ways to boost physical activity, but we were just sitting,” recalls Bustamante.

“We read about walking meetings outdoors, with pleasant scenery. We don’t have that here. But we still have fun.”

“It’s kind of hard to hear sometimes if you’re under the L tracks and a train is going by,” says Porter. “Sometimes we don’t all fit on the sidewalk so we break up into groups. But overall, I really like it.”

Oji-Njideka says when the walking meetings started last fall in nice weather, she embraced the idea. But she cooled to it as temperatures started to drop.

“It was like, ‘Dude, I don’t know about this walking journal club!’ But if you bundle up, it’s fine,” she says, adding that walking chang-



Photo: Al DiFranco

Members of the walking journal club (from left): Eduardo Bustamante, Nefertiti Oji-Njideka, Sparkle Springfield, Angela Odoms-Young and Summer Porter.

es the “chemistry” of the discussion, sparking ideas often overlooked in a more lethargic, seated indoor environment.

“I think people contribute a bit more. You have to work a little harder and talk a little louder when you’re outdoors walking.”

Springfield, a native Californian who was a bit apprehensive about her first Chicago winter, is now sold on walking meetings.

“Initially I thought they were joking,” she says, but now she looks forward to the strolling discussions.

“When you’re done, you feel rejuvenated and ready to get back to work.”

Health experts recommend everyone walk at least 10,000 steps a day to keep fit. Marquez strapped a pedometer on for a 30-minute walk and clocked over 2,300.

“I wouldn’t have gotten that sitting at a table,” he says.

“Our journal club is one of the highlights of my job,” he adds.

“We can speak openly and honestly. Nobody holds a grudge if there’s a disagreement. It’s refreshing to be around a group with such passion for decreasing or eliminating health inequities.”

He and Odoms-Young hope other journal clubs will embrace the walk-and-talk format.

“We’ll often be walking and other faculty members will see us and ask what’s going on,” says Odoms-Young.

She thinks the format works well for her group.

“We’re in health promotion,” she says. “We’re trying to set an example.”

francuch@uic.edu



Photo: Al DiFranco

“Our journal club is one of the highlights of my job,” says David Marquez (left), with student Summer Porter.

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