

"An Imperfect Personal Journey"

University names 37 wellness ambassadors

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Dominique Wakefield, director for University Health & Wellness, shares the coming year's plans with the new wellness ambassadors. (Photo by Darren Heslop)

By: Becky St. Clair

“We want to be the healthiest university in the world, and you’re going to help us get there!” Dominique Wakefield exudes energy in every move she makes; even her voice gets people motivated to get up and do something active.

Since returning to campus in 2015 to fill the newly created role of director of [University Health & Wellness](#), Wakefield has taken her new assignment and run with it. From establishing a wellness lounge in the Campus Center to holding weekly 5K walks throughout the year to spearheading a campus attempt at breaking a world record for group sit-ups, Wakefield has no signs of slowing down.

“Our motto at Andrews University is ‘Corpus, Mens, Spiritus:’ Body, Mind and Spirit,” she says. “We’re doing the last two quite well, but there’s a lot of room for improvement in the ‘corpus’ area.”

She smiles as she paces the floor in front of a group of 27 of the 37 individuals who have agreed to be campus wellness ambassadors. They've gathered to find out exactly what that means and how they can help the University attain its goal of becoming the healthiest university, and they're off to a good start; the meeting is accompanied by a delicious, healthy lunch of red lentil soup, a mixed greens salad with apples, walnuts and dried cranberries, a variety of whole-grain breads and a large bowl of various fruits.

The Health & Wellness vision is to "Create a vibrant culture of health and wellness at Andrews University." This aligns well with one of the University's four core strengths, Live Wholly. The Health & Wellness mission is to "Value, emphasize and reestablish care and training for the physical body as foundational to spiritual, mental, relational and professional wellness."

"No one aspect of health and wellness is more important than another," says Wakefield. "They are all interconnected. And you as wellness ambassadors are going to help those around you understand that and encourage them as you yourself work toward living wholly."

Officially, a wellness ambassador is a representative of the University's initiative to inspire faculty, staff and students to Live Wholly through "pathways of enthusiasm, inspiration, motivation and sharing of opportunities and resources."

"Essentially, a wellness ambassador aims to be a personal example of living a healthy and fit lifestyle and encourage others to join them," says Wakefield.

Wellness ambassadors are expected to participate in and represent at events and programs sponsored by University Health & Wellness, and to invite others to participate as well. They should be aware of what the H&W program is doing so as to be able to encourage participation and answer questions.

"This does not come without responsibility," warns Wakefield from the front of the room. "People will watch you and what you do. And they will criticize."

Wakefield speaks from personal experience, as even going to the grocery store brings prying eyes to see what the University's Health & Wellness director is putting in her cart.

"The truth is that I like chocolate," she admits proudly. "And you will, on occasion, see me eating chocolate. This is because I do not in any way endorse any kind of extremism in wellness. Health and wellness should never become an obsession of every waking moment, but rather a foundation for building a healthy lifestyle and making healthy choices on a regular basis."

Though the 37 ambassadors in attendance were highly commended for their dedication to and passion for living wholly, Wakefield imagines identifying even more from the various areas of campus. Her goal is to have at least one ambassador in every department.

"I like to see people working on their health," says Licette Church, administrative assistant in [Plant Services](#) and one of the 37 current wellness ambassadors. "I like to help people when they aren't feeling their best, and to do that you have to share what you know. I want to see even more

people being healthy and actively working toward improving themselves. That's why I became an ambassador.”

Sitting next to her at the table is Justin Neu, assistant manager and textbook manager at the [University Bookstore](#). He was one of four nominated during the meeting to serve as a chief wellness ambassador, who will help disseminate information to the other ambassadors and encourage them to keep up the good work they're doing.

“I want to get involved more on campus,” says Neu. “I have quite a bit of knowledge on fitness and health because it's something I'm interested in. So this was a good way to share that knowledge with others and also be involved in something meaningful here on campus.”

The other chief wellness ambassadors are Tracy Ryan, executive assistant to the [provost](#); Deby Andvik, assistant to the dean of the [School of Health Professions](#); and Janine Carlos, administrative assistant in the [Department of Church History](#) in the [Seminary](#).

“Being a mom I want to be an encouraging example for my daughters,” says Ryan of her reason for deciding to become an ambassador. “I want to be a counterbalance to the unrealistic expectations they are often exposed to via social media and life in general. I also want to challenge the ways I have learned to think and feel about myself that are not positive or loving.”

Wakefield offered suggestions to the ambassadors for activities they could begin in their own areas to encourage activity on a regular basis.

“The 3 p.m. daily plank challenge doesn't have to be scary,” she says with a grin. “There are at least five modifications you can do, and if you can't do any of those, do a squat. I don't care what it is, just get up and use some muscles!”

She also suggested regular breaks from sitting at desks, whether it was standing and stretching, taking a walk around the parking lot, climbing a flight of stairs and coming back down, or simply disconnecting for a few minutes by shutting the door, turning down the lights, and turning off all technology in the room.

And it's not just on-campus activity; Wakefield hopes the ambassadors will encourage their colleagues and others to continue to be active when they're not at work, as well, and that the chief wellness ambassadors will be active in identifying ways for them to do just that.

“Within my circle of influence my goal is to live the example that living wholly is an imperfect personal journey, but possible,” says Ryan. “Each student, staff and faculty member at Andrews has a unique story to share that can inspire health, strength and confidence in me, just as I will strive to inspire them.”

Related Links:

- [View a full list of Health & Wellness activities on campus](#)
- [Submit an application to become a wellness ambassador](#)
- [See a list of ways in which members of the campus community can Live Wholly](#)
- [Contact the University Health & Wellness team](#)
- [Andrews FitThumb for University employees](#)

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