The Wellness Center is gearing up to offer a new free program that promises to get students' brains as fit as their biceps.

While it may sound like a mysterious science experiment, Brain Gain helps students achieve success in the classroom, research has shown. The cutting-edge program uses neuroscience to channel the health benefits of exercise and meditation into academic performance.

“The program is designed for busy college students who share a common objective- to excel academically,” said Scott Rogers, one of the co-founders of the program.

The weekday classes will start Nov. 1. Each class can handle up to 20 students, who just need to show up to participate.

Brain Gain offers three different approaches to choose from: Perspire to Rewire, Retire to Rewire and Respire to Rewire. The word “rewire” is in each title because, according to Rogers, “neuroscience involves looking at the ‘plastic’ qualities of the brain- the way it changes in response to experience.”

Perspire to Rewire involves 30 minutes of exercise followed by an hour of studying in a special study room at the Wellness Center.

“They can use our space to study or they can study elsewhere,” said program co-founder Ashley Falcon, who is also an assistant director at the Wellness Center. “That's the joy of the program- it's very flexible. We’re just imparting the knowledge so students can benefit from enhanced learning ability.”
Retire to Rewire and Respire to Rewire take the kindergarten idea of nap time to the college level. Retire deals with napping and mind-wandering for up to 90 minutes, and Respire deals with meditation for up to 30 minutes through the program.

Though napping and day-dreaming may seem unproductive, studies have shown they help in problem solving.

“Mind-wandering is helpful when we don't have another task at hand. It allows our creative juices to flow as our mind is in a receptive 'searching' mode of experience,” said Amishi Jha, a UM neuroscientist who will monitor the program to further her research on brain development through brain imaging.

Rogers, who has a law degree and a master’s in social psychology, has been teaching Brain Gain classes for years through the Institute for Mindful Studies, for which he is the founder and director. The Miami Beach-based organization encourages lawyers to use skills like meditation in their careers and personal lives.

For the past three years, Rogers has also taught a UM law class called Jurisights. Ben McCulloch, a second-year law student, took the class.

“People spend so much time worrying about things they cannot control,” McCulloch said. “The class teaches people to slow down and live in the moment.”

Falcon believes the Brain Gain program can make a difference for students.

“This program shows students how making healthy choices can actually help them in the classroom,” she said. “Our students are bright and competitive-we show them how to gain the competitive edge in a healthful way.”

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