



At it at 8 a.m.: Yoga for the devoted at Dillon Gym

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It was all of 8:30 on a Thursday morning, and the vast majority of the Princeton campus still slumbered, catching those last minutes of precious sleep before calculus. I had never risen before 9 a.m. since my arrival at Princeton. Never, until that day, the day I lost my yoga virginity. ¶ That morning, I joined a very special minority of students and faculty as they crowded into the aerobics room at Dillon Gym, as they do every Tuesday and Thursday at 8:30 a.m. About 20 of them calmly spread throughout the room, traces of last night's study session evident in their heavy, determined steps. They are the converts, these rugged individuals, who forsake the glorious snooze-button-shuteye for a Princeton phenomenon known as power yoga. ¶ After unrolling cushioned mats, the mark of any yoga class, students lowered onto them and assumed "Child's Pose," the first of many "asanas," or poses. After an extensive series of warm-up poses, the class progressed into more difficult asanas that stretched, strengthened and centered their bodies. The last part of the 90-minute class involved a cool-down and relaxation period.

Power yoga, a 10-week, \$65 course, is billed by the Department of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation as "a vigorous, strength-building style that sequences asanas (postures) with the breath creating a vinyasa/flow," and "a moderately paced class with emphasis on Sun Salutations, coordination of breath with movement combined with internal awareness that paves a path for releasing stress and tension."

Despite its technical description, the class is accessible to all levels of yoga practitioners. This is why I, as a first-timer, was able to jump in, however awkwardly, and participate.

Instructor Michael Cremone said, "90 percent of the people are new to it all." He's right. When one attends a class, one is just as likely to stand next to the girl with her leg wrapped twice around her shoulders as an inflexible middle-aged professor.

So for the yoga neophyte, was it worth waking up so early? Yes. Will I do it again? Dream on. Well, maybe someday . . . when midterms are over.

"Michael is a great teacher," said Sarah Schrank, assistant professor of history. She added that he is, "encouraging and hilarious, which is highly unusual in a yoga instructor."

Class itself may be dandy, but really, how does anyone voluntarily wake up so early to get there? A strong contingent of self-proclaimed early risers mingles with those who reluctantly accept the ungodly hours for the mental and physical benefits achieved through yoga practice.

"It's not that bad when your friends . . . are going! That's definitely incentive not to sleep in for me" Ysa Rodriguez '05 said.

Once there, students are hooked. Power yoga provides cardiovascular benefits, while simultaneously stretching and toning the muscles. Far from being a breeze, the class is an addictive and often difficult workout, suitable for all types of students.

"I find it to be an excellent type of regular exercise. It gets my heart rate up, I sweat and I can feel myself getting stronger. And it does it all without strain on joints, although I definitely feel it the next day in my muscles, but in a good way," Schrank said.

"It's a break from the elliptical [and] stairmaster routine," Rodriguez said. "I leave feeling relaxed, but also like I really worked out. We're always sore the next morning."

The 90-minute transformation from groggy to energized is an amazing event to witness and experience.

"Before class, I tend to feel sleepy, cold, and my body is a little stiff. After class I also feel I'm walking a little taller, my body is warm, and I feel relaxed, ready to face the day," Schrank said.

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