



Putting the 'power' in yoga

By Sandy Zaeh

Princetonian Contributor

Graduate student Mike Austen knows the key to a lady's heart. Ask him why he's up at 8:30 a.m. for Michael Cremone's power yoga class, and he tosses a playful smile at the woman sitting on the yoga mat beside him.

"My wife," he says.

Austen is one of six males in Cremone's 24-member class at Dillon Gym today. The one to four, male to female ratio is actually rather large for a yoga class. According to Cremone, who teaches classes in Freehold, Princeton, Kingston and Fairhaven, classes are typically 80 to 90 percent women in New Jersey, compared to the usual 50-50 ratio in states like California and New York.

Perhaps the men come because Cremone's class isn't just yoga, it's "power yoga."

"I think putting the name 'power' in it makes the class more acceptable for males," graduate student Eric Egleston said. "I mean, my roommates still make fun of me for taking the class, but I don't really care because they're fat."

While putting the power into yoga may make it more acceptable for Cremone's male students, Cremone himself claims he is unsure of what the real difference between "yoga" and "power yoga" is.

"I don't really know what 'power yoga' is," the enthusiastic Cremone insisted. "What I do know is the power we're talking about here comes from the mind. It's all about the power within."

A professional yoga instructor, Cremone became involved with yoga 10 years ago for its physical benefits. He describes himself as being "hooked from the start" because of yoga's capacity to fully incorporate the mind.

No cooties

When Cremone decided to become a yoga instructor, he was the only male in classes of 75 or 80. His first semester teaching at Princeton was in the fall, where his classes were almost entirely female.

Cremone believes the usual view of yoga as a test of strength and flexibility turns men away from practicing yoga.

"I think men tend to be scared at first. They just have to realize that we all have the ability to practice yoga in our own degree," he said.

Cremone emphasized this view in class, his voice directing students to "stop worrying" and to "take a break if necessary" over the tones of soothing rainforest music.

"It's all about doing it at your own level," he says as some members of the class attempt a near handstand. "This is not a competition. Everyone's body is different. There will always be someone who is faster or who has been doing it for longer."

He walks through the maze of students as he calls out "the cobra," his long curly hair extending past his shoulders and tattooed, defined arms aiding students in various positions. The class is filled today — students arriving late anxiously attempt to find spots on the mat.

"Relax," he calls out. "I never saw a cobra with tight butt cheeks."

Cremone's students are in a seal-like position, pushing their arms upward against the ground while letting the legs extend backwards.

Class moves quickly, switching from position to position in order to challenge flexibility and mental focus. Some of the more flexible women in the class bend like Barbie dolls, their bodies contorted in angles that seem near impossible to achieve.

The six males are not nearly as flexible as the more agile females, but they too seem to be earnestly trying to improve their flexibility.

Among the more experienced males is Fernando Riosmena, another graduate student, who has been practicing yoga for a year and a half.

Riosmena enjoys Cremone's class, especially because of the male component of it.

"I took my first yoga class at Penn, and I was the only guy in the class," he said. "I mean, it felt kind of weird at first. I didn't want the girls to think I was stalking them or something."

He says he experiences the benefits of yoga every day, specifically through a decrease in stress and increased strength.

"Other guys don't think it works," Riosmena said. "But it really does."



Courtesy of Department of Athletics

Dillon Gym yoga instructor Michael Cremone strikes a pose. After becoming involved in yoga 10 years ago, Cremone has taught power yoga classes in Freehold, Princeton, Kingston and Fairhaven, N.J.