

Yoga taking over Keating three times a week

By Ashlie Ingold

STAFF WRITER

Yoga classes at IIT are extremely popular. This past week, I stopped by Keating Sports Center to interview the school's three instructors - Hellen Lee, Natasha Holbert, and Katrina Ryan - to find out about their passions for (and background in) yoga.

Hellen Lee

How long have you been teaching yoga? Almost three years.

How long have you been teaching yoga at IIT? A bit over a year.

What do you like about teaching yoga here? Yoga means union. These cerebral students are from all over the world and it is wonderful to see them coming together on their mats to breathe, let go, and find a little peace for themselves. It is really a beautiful thing.

What are the benefits to taking a yoga class, and what type of yoga do you teach? There are so many wonderful benefits to yoga. It can be both relaxing and energizing. Yoga can also have powerful healing effects on a physical, mental, and emotional level. The type of class I teach is generally a Hatha/Vinyasa class, but I incorporate elements from various forms of yoga that inspire me. I will sometimes throw in some Yin, Anusara, Forrest, Iyengar and occasionally I will throw in some dance elements.

How did you get into yoga? I was first introduced to yoga in a modern dance class and theater rehearsals in 1999 while attending the University of Hawaii. It was not until I was back in Chicago that I went to my first yoga class in 2004. I then went on to get my teaching certification at Chicago Yoga Center a few years later.

What do you hope to accomplish by teaching yoga? What a big question...there is so much to accomplish. I hope that students will walk away from the class feeling lighter, more energized. I also hope that students possibly learn something about themselves, and others, each time. Maybe igniting curiosity to further their yoga practice by studying the eight limbs of yoga.

Yama : Universal morality

Niyama : Personal observances

Asanas : Body postures

Pranayama : Breathing exercises, and con-

trol of Prana

Pratyahara : Control of the senses

Dharana : Concentration and cultivating inner perceptual awareness

Dhyana : Devotion, meditation on the divine

Samadhi : Union with the divine

Do you teach outside of IIT and where?

Yes, I teach at Yoga Now North, Bend Movement and Yoga Center, Chicago School of Hot Yoga, and Barre Bee Fit.

What days and times are your classes at Keating? Tuesdays 1-2 p.m.

Tell me something about yourself. I also teach Barre classes and yoga with weights. I dance for two dance companies, The Humans and Clinard Dance Theatre, and I am the Artistic Director/Choreographer of Momentum Sensorium. In my spare time I enjoy drinking a variety of tasty beverages, trying to sing like a bird, and wiggling my toes.

Natasha Holbert

How long have you been teaching yoga? I have been teaching yoga for almost 4 years (it will be 4 in September).

How long have you been teaching yoga at IIT? Almost 2 years.

What do you like about teaching yoga here? I love the students. Their willingness to try something so healthy for their body and mind definitely inspires me. It's a win-win!

What are the benefits to taking a yoga class, and what type of yoga do you teach?

Stress Reduction: One of the biggest benefits of yoga is that it helps one reduce their levels of stress and anxiety. High levels of stress can cause high blood pressure, difficulty sleeping and even panic attacks. Yoga helps you reduce these symptoms of stress and anxiety. By focusing on your breath and body in poses, you learn to focus the mind. It's also a great way to have fun in a supportive environment and nurture yourself when you need it.

Increased Physical Fitness: In general, you will notice improvements in your health, strength, flexibility and quality of life. Because yoga classes involve moving your body through poses and balances while breathing evenly, it helps increase your physical fitness. A toned and flexible body can resist injury in everyday life, while also improving your performance in sports, dance, or other athletic endeavors (even singing).

Chronic Health Condition Management:

Anyone can practice yoga! Many forms of yoga are very therapeutic for the body, especially for those who have ongoing health conditions. For example, I have lived with asthma my entire life. Yoga has definitely helped improve my asthma over the years. This is because my body is healthier and my breath capacity has increased.

Weight Loss: Practicing yoga can also help you control your weight. More importantly, you became more aware of your body when you practice yoga. Over time you will become more aware of the food you eat and this may lead to long-term weight loss.

Community: Most yoga classes and places to practice yoga encourage a sense of community among practitioners. There are so many yoga poses and forms of yoga that you will never get bored - there is always something to learn! This is a great environment to explore poses and meet new people. Another resource is <http://www.abc-of-yoga.com/beginners-guide/yogabenefits.asp>

I teach various forms of yoga. My formal training is in Hatha and Vinyasa Flow. I recently completed a teacher workshop where I was introduced to adaptive yoga (<http://www.matthewsanford.com/>). In the near future, I will do more in-depth study of adapting yoga for disabilities.

How did you get into yoga? I used to play contact sports (rugby and football) and increasingly experienced knee and back pain as a result. A physical therapist suggested that I try yoga. I wasn't immediately hooked. It took me a couple of years to actually enjoy and do a regular practice. There are so many forms of yoga and teaching styles. I explored a lot and finally found a form of yoga and teacher that fit me. I love learning from teachers that interject humor and everyday life into the class. If you have ever taken a yoga class or seen pictures of yoga poses, there has to be some sort of humor to it. It's not every day that you are in line at the store and see someone in eagle pose!

What do you hope to accomplish by teaching yoga? I love teaching and practicing yoga. I hope that through teaching, I can share that love and joy I experience with others.

Do you teach outside of IIT and where?

Yes, I teach at the Chicago Park District (Daley Bicentennial Plaza and Women's Park), Wicker Park Fitness, and I sub at Bloom Yoga Studio.

What days and times are your classes at Keating? Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m.

Katrina Ryan

How long have you been teaching yoga? 20 years.

How long have you been teaching yoga at IIT? Since the beginning of the program (two years).

What do you like about teaching yoga here? The thing I like most is working with the mix of international students.

What are the benefits to taking a yoga class, and what type of Yoga do you teach? There are so many benefits to yoga, flexibility strength, balance, vitality, self-confidence, stress reduction. I teach a blended style because I have a dance background and a massage therapist so I bring them both into my style of Yoga.

How did you get into yoga? A really severe car accident. On my way back from school, for Christmas, five of us hit black ice and went over a mountain. None of us were killed but it took 14 years to get my body back into good condition. Yoga helped me so much that I ended up studying it.

What do you hope to accomplish by teaching yoga? First of all, yoga is not really goal-oriented. It separates itself from a traditional gym workout in that way. Yoga means connecting or joining, so yoga connects mind, body, and spirit. The idea is through simple breath we quiet the mind and become fully present in the moment. With active physical poses we meet our body's limits, and with non-judgment and self-acceptance we learn how to expand them. All of this results in a more balanced life and greater vitality.

Who was your main influence to begin teaching yoga? Teaching is a calling for me. I've always had an interest in the body and that just grew as I began to understand the connection of body and mind.

Do you teach outside of IIT and where? I teach in the dance department at Columbia College. I have been there for 18 years. I also teach privately.

What days and times are your classes at Keating? Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. and Thursdays at 5:30 p.m.

(Photo courtesy Graeme Port)

