Michael McKeough’s career path to Sacramento State nearly five years ago was atypical. The peripatetic professor of physical therapy has five college degrees from three institutions, one of which he earned while he was teaching fellow students. His professorial journey includes the University of New Hampshire, the Medical College of Georgia and Shenandoah University, Virginia.

The self-described Army brat was born in Tokyo during his father’s tour of duty there. While earning his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Education and Exercise Physiology at the University of New Mexico he was a varsity gymnast whose aspirations to make the Olympic team were dashed by a career-ending knee injury. Soon thereafter he enrolled at Columbia University, earned a second master’s degree and a doctorate in neuroscience.

McKeough came to Sacramento State in 2006 partly to be closer to his ailing father, who died just before he arrived. His return to the West was premised on the promise that the Physical Therapy Department would create a pro bono clinic where faculty-supervised students provided care to community members whose movements were limited due to neurologic damage. After five years the Mock Clinic has a waiting list for prospective participants because of the program’s success in helping them.

He’s justifiably proud of the clinic, where graduate physical therapy students get hands-on experience while providing rehabilitative care for participants whose insurance benefits have expired. This semester McKeough and faculty colleague Bryan Coleman-Salgado are monitoring 26 students and 13 adults with stroke and brain injury.

The students work in pairs, helping individual participants improve their walking, balance and strength. The eight-week rehabilitative program helps participants to become more mobile. “That’s crucial,” McKeough says, “because most of the folks we serve are susceptible to falling and serious injury.”

Service is what this program is about. “We concentrate on those participants whose needs are the greatest,” McKeough says. “Nearly all of them want to continue from semester to semester, but some improve to such a degree that they no longer need our help.” He’s also proud that many of the department’s upper-class students return as teaching assistants. And that many students voluntarily make home visits to clinic participants to provide additional treatment.
The Sacramento State students who earn a master’s degree in physical therapy are destined for jobs in their specialty. “We have a 100 percent placement rate,” McKeough notes, adding that they have a 98 percent passing rate on the licensing examination -- 11 points above the national average. “None of our PT grads are flipping burgers,” he says.