**Accountability: Becoming a Compass for Others**

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*Isn’t it interesting that educators and, in particular, academic exercise physiologists believe they are members of a learned profession, yet they are not held accountable in the performance of their duties.*

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 NDERSTANDING what to do is not enough. Pain, happiness, disappointment, and courage must be shared. Everyone has talent, and everyone has knowledge, even more so than most people are aware of. However, having knowledge is not the same as sharing knowledge. Becoming a compass for others is all about “sharing knowledge.” It is beyond ambivalence. It is a personal reflection and sharing of what is necessary for others to survive and to prosper. It is transforming the injustice of others to give witness to the mindfulness necessary to ensure growth and success.

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The ASEP leadership understands the importance of shared knowledge. They and the

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| ***Is it possible that college teachers in an exercise science department should be held accountable in their duties in accordance with the standard of care of other learned professions?*** |

ASEP members help to galvanize and affirm the necessity for professionalism in exercise physiology. Driven by their passion for something better for all students of exercise physiology, they work alone when necessary or collectively where appropriate to break the maze-like tunnel misinformation. They get that exercise science is not exercise physiology, and that a major in kinesiology with a minor in exercise science is not an exercise physiology degree.

This failed thinking has persisted too long, and it must be correct because it is bad for the future of college students. Students graduate from college with an academic degree, but not all degree programs are equal. It is not a simple matter of is the glass half full or half empty. The college degree is either the passageway to a credible career opportunity or it is not. Unfortunately, many college degrees are simply useless when it comes to finding a credible career. In fact, it is harrowing time in the life of students who finally wake up from the academic groupthink.

**The Tuition Bomb**

Think about it: If you are a student, imagine that you have just graduated from college with $100,000 in tuition debt to realize there are no credible career opportunities. What are you going to do then? Perhaps, it is as simple going on to graduate school. If that is what you want, then, maybe there is not a problem. However, if going back to school presents major financial costs and unnecessary time lost outside the workforce, one must conclude that the undergraduate degree was “useless.”

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| ***Do the faculty of an exercise science and related departments have a duty to provide students with an adequate education and career opportunities?*** |

If students had the opportunity to journey out of the meaningless degree programs into the light of credible, hopeful, and optimistically oriented degree programs, they would do so. But, the choice of which degree program is helpful in finding a credible career is conflicted and confusing. Why, because of the decades of lacking a compass to guide students appropriately. Yes, this is the point of this article. There are only a few good men and women willing to light a lamp of opportunity, help, and counseling. Yet, high school students are told to go to college to be financially successful. In this case, what they don’t know will hurt them more than they realize.

This slow awareness of the “career” dilemma is crisscrossing slowly among students. Some students are more curious than others, but in general most have only a foggy sense of their reality. When thirsty, water to drink is the answer. When lost in the woods of academia, a compass is the answer to survival. Comfort and strength in life are both fundamental to happiness, and yet neither is likely without being able to find one’s way back home. “Finding” is the essence of having a compass to avoid tragedies and to provide life-giving career opportunities. It is the gift to knowing there is hope. It provides students with the necessary states of mind for a true relationship with the faculty, the academic major, and the profession of exercise physiology.

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| **There are standards for teaching through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Should there be standards that allow for instructional duty and job opportunities owed to students?** |

 The ASEP leaders realize more than ever that exercise physiology is a profession. But, it is apparent that only a few academic exercise physiologists understand that exercise physiology represents the 21st century healthcare profession of exercise as medicine! The leadership believes it is a matter of time, however slowly it is inching upwards. Society and other healthcare professionals will get the ASEP vision. As a result, it is also just a matter of time that the next generation of students to journey the exercise physiology path will transcend the swirling, misty bits of exercise physiology “look-alike” programs. They will be the forerunners of a new exercise physiology; one that will overshadow all that is negative. It will be comforting for the students, their parents, and the faculty.

Here is a great idea! Why don’t the academic exercise physiologists as faculty members in the Department of Exercise Science, the Department of Kinesiology and Sports Science, or the Department of Human Performance with an Exercise Science degree share with the department chair and/or dean the importance of updating their academic offering to the degree title – Exercise Physiology? Then, why don’t the administrations acknowledge that the heart of ASEP is to empower college students by accrediting the exercise science degree programs as exercise physiology degree programs? Naturally, to do so requires significant changes in the academic curriculum. Yet, this is the best way to shut down the past and create a better future for the students.

**ASEP: The Professional Compass**

A wise old college teacher recently reminded me that, “If you want to take on the healthcare professions, you have to play their game.” She was referring to professionalism issues and what is necessary to create a profession. Although it probably should have been apparent, my friend was not aware of the work of ASEP. She was not aware of the ASEP Code of Ethics, Accreditation Standards, Board Certification, and Standards of Practice. But, nonetheless, I listened and learned of the importance of continuing to share ASEP’s vision with others. Think of ASEP as the professional compass if you will. Think of it as the 21st century expression of the professionalization and socialization of required of exercise physiology.

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| ***Think About It:*** In 1998, California citizens passed Proposition 227, titled “English Language in Public Schools that opened the door to educational malpractice. If parents or guardians can now sue teachers who do not provide “nearly all classroom instruction” in English, why can’t they sue teachers, departments, and/or academic institutions for failure of the students in finding credible careers when they graduate? |

The ASEP organization is doing what it needs to do to keep the dynamics of the change process moving. One could think of ASEP in light of Gertrude Mueller Nelson’s statement, “…nothing of value comes into being without a period of quiet incubation….” The idea of “incubation” can be view several ways. Aside from the obvious, why not think of it as constantly moving and non-stoppable. The edge of greatness begins with truth and necessity. Both are always the first step. It is all about giving heart and putting a new spirit of opportunity into exercise physiology. This point is like magic, or on the flip side, it is important to believe in the magic of exercise physiology as a viable academic degree.

Exercise physiology is at the edge of greatness. The ASEP leadership and the organization itself have provided the opportunity to visualize exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. The state of the profession of exercise physiology is different from exercise science and other so-called exercise physiology related academic programs. The ASEP exercise physiologists have increasingly stated that exercise science is a problematic degree with inadequate career opportunities. It is no wonder that students are talking about seeking restitution of their money paid to colleges throughout the United States. Some are even talking about seeking restitution for emotional distress (i.e., the claim of damages in lawsuits for injury due to negligence or intentional acts of another).

**Educational Malpractice**

Although legal claims against academic institutions for allegedly not providing career specific instruction or adequate preparation to find a job after college have usually failed, this is not likely to be the case in the near future. Educational malpractice is increasingly a major concern, regardless of the fact that college administrators say the problem exists with the economy or the students who sabotage their job search. After all, even though higher education institutions have done everything to convince the public that a college education is the secret to employment and financial success, the administrators state emphatically that “The academic degree does not provide legal assurance of employment.”

No wonder some students get the feeling of being used or worse.

If academic institutions are defined and marketed as the compass to finding success, should the institutions be held accountable for the credibility of educational services? While it has been gradual, there is a clear trend for greater accountability from academic departments and colleges in general. More parents believe that their tax dollars and their children’s tuition dollars should not be a paid if decent jobs with decent salaries are not likely. In fact, in many ways, it is no different from the legal work of Cesar Chavez and the plight of migrant workers and food, Rachel Carson and protection of the environment, and Ralph Nader and traffic safety [1].

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| ***Malpractice holds professionals to accepted and required standards of care when working with their patients or clients.*** -- Terri A. DeMitchell and Todd A. DeMitchell [2] |

The plight of students who major in exercise science, sports science, and similar degree programs is presently invisible to many of the college administrators, faculty, and Americans. This will not always be the case. Today, students are without a voice to promote change in higher education. But, it is simply a matter of time that students will find ways to facilitate legal reformation and increase the accountability of academic department. The challenges faced by college graduates will not always be invisible. The breach of duty by academia may result in the filing of a lawsuit.

The ability of academic exercise physiologists who work in non-exercise physiology degree programs to take on the professional responsibility (aside from the single historical emphasis on research) of arguing for the conversion of academic degree exercise science to exercise physiology is integral to increasing career opportunities for college students. In particular, there should be less of the traditional physical education courses in the exercise science curriculum and more business courses merged with exercise physiology courses. The faculty and chair must work positively with the administration to create the exercise physiology degree.

The traditional focus on athletics may well be viewed as too much. Some faculty and parents believe this has been the case for a decade or more. They believe more emphasis should be placed on “exercise as medicine.” Also, it is crucial that emphasis is placed on professionalism and accountability in exercise physiology. This does not mean that the interest in athletics is pushed aside, just that it is placed in proper context of the profession. Taking responsibility in this regard is a demonstration to the public sector that winning at all costs is not the desired outcome of studying athletics. The idea that performance enhancing supplements, drugs, and similar topics are as important to sensible methods of psychophysiology training is likely to be considered as either unethical or improper. There is too much focus on athletics, not enough on healthcare.

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| **Given the confluence of standards, department marketing content, and the potential for litigation for malpractice, “accountability” may well be the key that protects students from college teachers who believe their job is to do research and little else.** |

It is no longer proper or reasonable, regardless of society’s interest in athletic teams, players, and win-loss records that exercise physiology educators place their emphasis on providing students with classroom information about how to run faster, jump higher, and build bigger muscles. The students’ education must be about more! That is why this article is so important. It states, perhaps, for the first time in exercise physiology that accountability for educational outcomes is now becoming a new public policy. Professionals are held accountable based on the quality of the services rendered [2].

To understand this thinking, first, it is important to admit that the majority of the doctorate prepared exercise physiologists teach in exercise science and related departments throughout the United States. Second, as college teachers, academic exercise physiologists are educational professionals who are held accountable for what they teach as well as the purpose of the degree program as stated by the department and/or academic institution. Third, that it is conceivable that legislators and the public will demand that the students’ failure to find a credible job in accordance with the expectations of earning a college degree may well be the breach of duty that results in the filing of a lawsuit. Why, because, fourth, faculty members are expected to live up to a standard of care recognized by the academic profession and that of the academic institution. While it isn’t presently mandated by college administrators that every student will find a credible job, it may very well become a popular expectation given the economic conditions of society. Fifth, failure to live up to the standards of care forms the basis for malpractice, especially if the degree program is a legal cause for the students’ failure.

In sum, becoming the right compass for others means addressing the potential for malpractice liability. All exercise physiologists must gain a broader understanding of the factors that impact their work potential (particularly, core exercise physiology courses and hands-on laboratory experiences) and that of the students’ job expectation as ASEP board certified professionals. Thus, the exercise science degree should be an exercise physiology degree. It means identifying and supporting entrepreneurial opportunities in the public sector that promote credible jobs with financial stability. These variables and more, as stated in the ASEP Accreditation Guidelines, must be identified and noted. After all, the students’ presence in college classes is more than a classroom of students for the teacher to do his or her job and generate a good salary. College is about the students and doing what is right to help them to be successful.

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