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Guest Editorial

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Become Part of the Solution

The challenge exercise physiologists face is the development of strategies to deal with the problems exercise science students face in and after college. One problem is that exercise science is a generic degree. Another problem is that the exercise science teachers (who are taught by exercise physiologists) are not doing what they should be doing to upgrade the degree to exercise physiology. In short, the exercise science degree is a physical education degree without the academic courses to earn a teaching certificate. Students graduate without the opportunity to teach in the public school system. Without designated career opportunities, students are told that the degree exists so they can apply to physical therapy or graduate school. Of

course the reason why the college teachers talk about graduate school is because they already know there are no credible career jobs for exercise science graduates. This means the students graduate with a meaningless college degree that requires them to go deeper into debt if they are lucky enough to be accepted into PT or nursing.

Why do these problems exist? It begins and ends with the department faculty who are still doing what they can to prove their worth. After all, they understand their physical education and coaching heritage all too well. Most are bent on doing research and publishing because it elevates their image and helps to secure their jobs. However, the constant emphasis on more research is very much like another fix without the motivation to change. The daily concern at work is all about the faculty, not the problems faced by the students.

In dealing with the lack of support from the department faculty, ASEP members have to get used to being surrounded by paradox. Very often PhD exercise physiologists with the power to influence if they were to get involved turn a blind eye to change. Also, strangely enough is the fact that being educated does not necessarily lead to understanding the significance of professionalism and professional development. Education does not equate with being intuitive, especially when it is obvious that privilege and oppression exist.

Also, whether it is obvious or not exercise science and sports medicine organizations are doing what they can to keep the BS degree programs from changing. Generic organizations are interested in membership and developing a strong power base. The in-house problems of size, privilege, and oppression are deep and wide. That is why it is easy for colleagues to lose sight of the reality of their failure to support ASEP. Yet, it is important that they come to an understanding of their responsibilities as exercise physiologists for the professionalization of exercise physiology. Hopefully, in time, they will:

- Attend ASEP national meetings;
- Read and reflect on the ASEP professionalism documents and articles published in the ASEP website and PEPonline and JPPEonline;

- *Call attention to the inherent problems of the present academic dilemma;*
- *Assume the responsibility of committee work within ASEP; and*
- *Demonstrate an increased awareness of the need to support the ASEP initiatives.*

The profession of exercise physiology cannot grow without the help of exercise physiologists at all levels to challenge the dogma of the past several decades. This means exercise physiologists must be mentally and physically strong when faced with uncertainty, ridicule, and ostracism. If you think this does not happen, you are not aware of how people respond to new ideas and plans (much less a new organization) that are different from status quo and how much planning and effort go into ignoring and/or challenging individuals who think outside the box.

Understandably, there are no easy steps to changing attitudes that are fixed by tradition. But, change is inevitable, and it is always an ongoing experience. The fact that ASEP continues to exist since 1997 with the first-ever exercise physiology code of ethics, accreditation guidelines, board certification, and standards of professional practice argues for its success. No one should stubbornly discount the work of the organization and its members. Most important, ASEP has a very important place in exercise physiology's brief history.

In sum, it is likely that many exercise physiologists agree with the ASEP perspective but they are not interested in membership. They may even believe that the dogma of other organizations is not right for exercise physiology. And, on occasion, they may say the same to a close friend and then go about business as usual. It may help the exercise physiologists live with themselves, but it doesn't stop the hurt and disappointment that comes with a meaningless degree.

So, what is the answer? It is simple. Join the ASEP organization and dedicate your time, energy, and influence to changing "what is" to "what can be." Take responsibility one step at a time within the larger context of the ASEP organization and the members' drive to make a difference by becoming part of the solution.