What Are They Saying About Exercise Physiology?
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Problems cannot be solved by thinking within the framework in which they were created.  
Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

After slightly more than a decade of intensive activity by professional exercise physiologists, the quest for a renewed view of exercise physiology continues. The state of exercise physiology today is marked by incompleteness, tentativeness, and diversity. The most controversial area is the lack of desire or willingness to separate from sports medicine and exercise science. This article will give a brief report on some of the issues, principally from the ASEP leaders’ perspective.

In order to bring some focus to the direction of how professionalism is to guide the development of exercise physiologists, there must be discussion regarding the exercise physiologist’s code of ethics, accreditation, board certification, and professional standards of practice. This calls for a significant change in the thinking of “what is exercise physiology.” Like all new and evolving professional organizations, the result of broad consultation and analysis of different points of view is both time consuming and frustrating.

You’re either part of the solution or part of the problem.  
American political activist Eldridge Cleaver (1935-1998)
Although a significant task for the obvious reasons, new thinking
doesn’t happen overnight.

Two dangers lurk in the academic hallways. One is that research is
so important that it becomes the only thing talked about. Exercise
physiologists can too easily forget that a professional infrastructure
is important to managing what they do. A second danger is that
the non-academic types fail to identify with the whole of “what is
professionalism” and its importance in exercise physiology. The
core of this thinking is the ASEP organization and the efforts of the
leadership to provide guidance in developing exercise physiology as
a healthcare profession. After all, as exercise physiologists, they feel compelled
to be the source of change.

Thus, to understand what they are saying about exercise physiology – one must
reveal his or her source. Is it someone from ASEP or is it a non-ASEP person?

Interestingly, the commandment “You shall love your neighbor as
yourself” has been violated many times since the founding of ASEP
in 1997. The organization that has created much of the debates in
the effort to renew exercise physiology is the American College of
Sports Medicine (ACSM). The organization has been around since
1954, and it is very powerful. Many men and women dedicated to
exercise physiology are ACSM members. They have not reached
out to ASEP to share the new reality of exercise physiology.

But of course this is not as it should be. Timely decision-making on
behalf of exercise physiologists is imperative. In short, the ASEP
leaders are interested in the college students and their financial
investment on one hand and the implications of exercise physiology
as a healthcare profession on the other. Both concerns need to be
considered and done so in a complete, honest, and ethical way. This
is what other healthcare professions have done, and they continue
doing so regardless of how long they have been around. This means
that “professionalization” is always an ongoing process. It also
raises questions that take away from yesterday’s thinking to what

The mind is like an umbrella - it only works when it is open.
Scientist Sir James Jeans (1877-1946)
should be today’s thinking. How do exercise physiologists teach professionalism? What are the steps and/or procedures?

The point here is that the differences in exercise physiology from exercise science or kinesiology are huge. They are like day and night. Sure, they share some relationships but the reality of exercise physiology is far different from exercise science or some similar physical education-oriented degree program. Perhaps this thinking is the beginning of sensing a new reality and way to think about the physiology of exercise and its gift to society as medicine. But as anyone knows, exercise is common. Anyone can do it or teach it. However, that is the third problem in this article. It is clear that too many people think exercise is just exercise. They fail to get the message that it is medicine and, like all medicines, it must be properly prescribed to be safe and effective.

Far too many personal trainers and fitness instructors have been lured into thinking they understand the scientific aspects of cardiopulmonary exercise testing. Experience tells me that this is a problem of major importance. It also raises numerous questions: For example, who is behind the push for personal trainers? Well, it isn’t complicated. The ACSM organization is big into trainers. Why? Probably because the leadership understands that the only job thousands of exercise science majors are going to get when they graduate from college is a trainers’ job. Then, after reality sets in, meaning, after several months of a very small pay check or, perhaps, a year failing to pay their bills on time, they apply to graduate school (e.g., physical therapy or nursing). It is an occurrence and reflection of the fail sports medicine rhetoric.

Everyone who is contributing to this problem must climb together toward a more complete grasp of the truth. That truth is simply that the Age of Exercise Science as the better worldview of physical

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Keep away from small people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."

American novelist, journalist and humorist
Mark Twain (1835-1910)
education is over and finished! Yes, it is true that individuals with PhDs can make a living as college teachers/researchers. But, the thousands of students who do not earn the PhD degree are strongly reflected in the failure of the academic system. One only needs the courage to look upon the world of the unemployed to understand the gravity of the crisis. Change and revision are what exercise physiology needs. It is time to stop wandering aimlessly with nothing to give back to society.

All of this leads to the all important revision of exercise physiology from the exercise science view or even that of the sports science perspective to ensure that it isn't continually contaminated or influenced by classical untruths, failed logic or bias. Because revision isn't easy, let me spell it out for you. The significance of the ASEP perspective, what the leaders know, and the way they have come to know it drives the change process. The function of ASEP is to help exercise physiologists express themselves as healthcare professionals. This thinking has helped arouse the professional consciousness of a good number of exercise physiologists and those who desire to be known as ASEP exercise physiologists (via the EPC).

Change is a messy and troubling process. And yet, it is exactly what is needed. Surely the world of exercise physiology will be a lot better once the madness has passed away. As unnatural as it seems to use the word "madness," it is nonetheless correct to do so. The single truth is exercise physiologists must stand up and do what is obviously required of them. If they do so, they will begin to think as healthcare professionals. It is not a new truth among those who have already begun the work. Only this is new about it, that it will require discipline and work beyond the researcher’s best scientific paper. It is the restorer of the exercise physiologist’s lost dignity, and it makes the future not merely likely but inevitable.

It is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top.

English novelist Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)
Through this understanding, all exercise physiologists will become a family of healthcare practitioners. It is a truth as new as is the morning’s paper and as old as the Bible. Now before all others exercise physiologists must speak to those who don’t get ASEP or refuse to do so to affirm the essential truths embedded in the change process. These are truths that are capable of changing exercise physiology from being misunderstood (as just a research discipline) to the irresistible logic woven into exercise as medicine.

One pauses for just a moment to compare this tremendous truth with the ugly reality of sports medicine. With little reason to be on the side of the exercise physiologist, ACSM willingly does what it can to satisfy its own thirst. But, frankly, we have only to look into our students eyes to see their sadness. The devastation is terrible if not beyond that. Parents sit in their living rooms and ask themselves the question: What happened to the $40,000 we saved for John’s college tuition? Why is John now living in his old bedroom! Or, there is the look on Tara’s face when she realizes that $14 an hour without health benefits isn’t going to make it. A terrifying parallel with John, and she too is a victim of the same failed sports medicine rhetoric.

There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure.
The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho (1988)

It is terribly difficult for students to give life to themselves. Life, or a credible career in the public sector, comes to students by way of their teachers. If it isn’t a crime what many academic programs are doing, it should be. A credible college degree is the means by which our children enter the adult world and accept responsibility for their debts. Without a credible degree students are worse off than when they entered as freshmen. Now, they have tuition loans and other expenses that must be paid back. Professors have broken their bonds of commitment and friendship with their students. All for the glory of doing research, publishing papers, and attending national meetings.
Without good teachers students are severely handicapped. As it becomes painfully obvious that a real opportunity to make it away from home isn’t going to happen, they get this blank stare on their face. Perhaps, for the first time since they stepped on campus years earlier, it occurs to them: Why didn’t I major in something that would have helped me to find a credible job? Why? This is where the teachers could have helped. They have the incredible power for good or bad in students’ lives. They can either help students or hurt them. A good teacher takes students where they never go on their own. A bad teacher keeps students in the darkness of ignorance where they are less likely to ask questions or disturb the teacher’s role-playing.

College classes, lectures, and discussions with students represent the work of the college teacher. It is not how many papers or books teachers have published, although important. It is the students! An academic audit can bring to the surface conflicts buried deep in academia. If students complain that they are working too hard, more often than not, the teacher is viewed as the problem. The basic assumptions of the administration should be first to support the faculty. Unfortunately, usually much more emphasis is placed on keeping things running smoothly. Often, therefore, it is difficult for the “caring professor” to promote a higher level of performance in the classroom. Needless to say, to avoid conflict, the values and beliefs that a strong teacher may want to share with exercise physiology students are pushed to the side.

A good teacher is one who understands what the students need. Such a person can see the obstacles and the benefits of venturing into unexplored territory. A good teacher is a caring person; one who sees the consequences of failing to think about the academic major, career opportunities, and leadership as well as participation in the professionalization of exercise physiology. Such a person knows that change is constant and, if students are going to make it on their own after college, they (and their teachers) must be willing to change, grown, and learn. That’s why ASEP is so important and

A goal without a plan is just a wish.
French writer
Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900-1944)
relevant. It speaks to the need to change and adapt, and to do so appropriately. Sports medicine and exercise science as an integral link to exercise physiology is a dinosaur concept.

So what are they saying about exercise physiology? The answer is “not enough.” More needs to be said. More exercise physiologists need to move out of their comfort zone if they are to achieve their dreams. They need to stop concerning themselves with the naysayers who said ASEP could never make it. On the heels of those negative attitudes came the professionalism era of exercise physiology, so let them laugh. The ASEP leaders and ASEP members understand that they must move into the future despite the naysayers and opposition. Leadership is about planning for the future, however frustrating it is. That’s why goals and strategies are important. They help to make things happen. Leaders get this point. That’s why they get that they are in the midst of a paradigm revolution. Exercise physiology is now thought of as a “profession” and not a “research discipline.” The ASEP perspective has changed how people think about exercise physiology.

Futurist Alvin Toffler said it best, “The illiterate of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” The great opportunities of a college education depend on “learning, unlearning, and relearn.” It is as simple as that. The old sports medicine way is “old.” Exercise physiologists have learned how to do research. Now, they must unlearn their lessons and relearn the power of building and supporting their own professional organization – ASEP. Choosing to ignore this thinking means missing the paradigm shift, thus allowing the established healthcare professions to move faster in incorporating “exercise as medicine” into their licensure bills and practice standards. This is a problem since it literally steals the future from the students of exercise physiology.

Never be afraid to tread the path alone. Know which is your path and follow it wherever it may lead you. Do not feel you have to follow someone else's footsteps.

Eileen Caddy in "Footprints On The Path"
How can the students of exercise physiology expect to be successful in the public sector if physical therapy and even medical doctors become the experts in prescribing exercise? Are parents going to be happy sending Steve or Amanda to college at a tuition price of $60,000 or more so they can get a job as a personal trainer? I don’t think so. Every college education must be more than simply getting a meaningless degree. That’s why the ASEP vision is important. It is the greatest gift that can be given to exercise physiologists. Vision generates hope, provides endurance, and motivates the discouraged. No matter how difficult, the essence of the ASEP vision is to see the future.

1. **What the organization wants to be?**
   To be recognized as the leading professional organization of American scholars and practitioners in the study and application of exercise physiology to fitness, health promotion, rehabilitation, and sports training.

2. **What it wants to accomplish?**
   The Society of Exercise Physiologists is dedicated to unifying all exercise physiologists in the United States and worldwide to promote and support the study, practice, teaching, research, and development of the exercise physiology profession.

3. **Whom it wants to serve?**
   Through proactive and creative leadership, the Society empowers its members to serve the public good by making an academically sound difference in the application of exercise physiology concepts and insights.

Richard Beckhard and Wendy Pritchard said in “Changing the Essence” that “A vision is a picture of a future state for the organization, a description of what it would like to be a number of years from now. It is a dynamic picture of the organization in the future, as seen by its leadership. It is more than a dream or set of hopes, because top management is demonstrably committed to its realization: it is a commitment.”