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## How to Become an Exercise Physiologist

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*The American Society of Exercise Physiologists gives us the passion for a new healthcare profession that benefits exercise physiologists and society. The ASEP organization shows us how to be credible healthcare professionals in prescribing exercise medicine.*

**H**OW TO BECOME an exercise physiologists isn't complicated. But, first, let me ask the question: "Why do you want to be an exercise physiologist?" Is it because you enjoy sports? Or, is it related to your passion for being physically fit? Of course anyone with an interest in sports and/or fitness doesn't need an academic degree in exercise physiology to excel in either. Maybe, you are interested in exercise physiology because you have come to the understanding that what you will learn will help you work in the healthcare field? If this is the case, you are on the right track. It is true that exercise physiologists help clients and patients develop a more active lifestyle through a tailored exercise plan that will help to prevent or alleviate the symptoms of disease and/or disability.

Exercise physiologists prescribe exercise medicine that is consistent with the prescriptive use of medications prescribed by medical doctors. Trainers and fitness instructors are not educated to treat heart disease, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, and emphysema with exercise. An exercise physiology degree and certification by the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP) identifies the exercise physiologist as a credible healthcare profession who is academically prepared to access a career in different hospital settings, fitness facilities, physical therapy centers, cardiac rehabilitation clinics, and wellness centers. Also,

*The seed of credibility grows as we learn to believe in ourselves.*

more now than ever before, there are more exercise physiologists who have developed their own healthcare facilities (1).

So, the logical question is what kind of education do you need? For decades students have been told that they need a master's degree in exercise physiology to work as an exercise physiologist. This point of view is no longer true. The ASEP leadership founded and built the “American Society of Exercise Physiologists” on the foundation of a credible undergraduate degree in exercise physiology. That is why they created the ASEP undergraduate accreditation guidelines. They believe the undergraduate degree should mean something. No student should have to go back to school and spend more

*Work began on the development of the accreditation program in early 1998. Through the collaborative efforts of exercise physiologists from around the country, the accreditation "Guidelines Manual" was submitted for final approval of the Board of Directors at the 1999 national meeting.*

money on yet another degree to be an exercise physiologist. However, while this thinking is consistent with the inherent value of a college degree, it is imperative that the degree is in exercise physiology.

Many of the undergraduate degrees that look like exercise physiology (including but not limited to exercise science, kinesiology, and human performance) are often believed to be the equivalent of an exercise physiology degree. This is a mistake that will take some time to correct. For now, it is simply best to

say that many of the undergraduate degrees by different titles offer similar academic course work with that of an exercise physiology degree. So, if a student with a major in exercise science has taken a significant number of the academic courses listed in the “Exercise Physiologist Certified” (EPC) exam (2), then the student may qualify to sit for the EPC exam and earn the profession title, Exercise Physiologist. The ASEP leadership believes this approach to helping students is the right thing to do until more academic institutions adopt the ASEP accreditation that ultimately requires the changing of the degree program to exercise physiology.

Regarding where to begin an exercise physiology education, it is recommended that high school graduates locate an ASEP accredited program that prepares students to sit for the ASEP certification exam. Graduating from an accredited program also indicates to potential employers that the college graduate is a competent professional who has received an approved education. While the ASEP organization has accredited 9 academic departments and the respective colleges and universities, presently there are 5 institutions accredited by ASEP. They are: (1) Midwestern State University; (2) Marquette University; (3) Bloomsburg University; (4) Long Island University – Brooklyn; and (5) West Liberty University.

In an accredited exercise physiology program, it is suggested that students will take such courses as sports nutrition, exercise physiology, exercise biochemistry, sports

biomechanics, statistical research design, applied human anatomy, graded exercise testing, and electrocardiography (3). Clinical training gives students the hands-on experience in the science, technology, interpersonal, and motivational components of the profession. Basic life support, CPR, and cardiac care certifications may also be required for work in hospitals settings.

It is important to instill into the minds of academic exercise physiologists as soon as possible rather than later the fundamental proposition that professionalism and professional development are 100% imperative for the survival of exercise physiology. Otherwise, if left to the objectives of others, exercise physiology will only exist at the doctorate level and all others who are interested in exercise physiology will in effect major in exercise science. The PT profession likes the latter very much in that it helps to ensure their population of potential students to enter physical therapy. It does little to no good for the profession of exercise physiology. It appears that the academic exercise physiologists must get this point thoroughly within their mind before it becomes important to the rest of those who desire change.

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When everything else fails, send an email to the **ASEP National Office** using this email: [tbooneasep@gmail.com](mailto:tbooneasep@gmail.com) or if you feel the need to do so, call at 218-340-3496.

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### **References**

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