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Exercise Science: Where is the Accountability?

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It's time for these people to have accountability for what is being done.

-- Sonny Landham

I believe that the 21st century is a good century for college students to demand greater accountability from academic departments. The likelihood of this reality is linked to the students' cost of 4 or more years of college attendance. The cost of a college education is in the thousands of dollars. Young adults and/or their parents are responsible for paying the tuition dollars either from their own money or loans. The amount of money spend on a "college education" should requires the institution to acknowledge its accountability and honesty to the students.

Please appreciate that after 47 years of college teaching in six academic institutions, I can hear the exercise science faculty laughing at the idea of accountability. After all, they are doctorate prepared and maybe even tenured. They were hired to teach, engage in research, and service. Frankly, the majority of the teachers do not concern themselves with how well they are teaching. This is true even though many are first-time teachers just out of doctorate school with little to no teaching experience. But, perhaps, worse than that, teaching is not what is important, especially when the faculty believe anyone can teach. The only real concern is doing research and publishing articles. Of course, if the research is linked to grant money, then, so much the better.

Problems don't usually happen at the college level beyond an obvious faculty member who presents him- or herself completely outside the interests of the department and/or college. Hence, when the feelings of the majority get challenged, they come together to get rid of the person. They will do so in ways the typical reader would not believe. Forget about ethics and religion. Life within the halls of academia isn't as straight forward as society is led to believe. It is vicious with all kinds of bad behaviors among the majority.

But, on the other hand, one could also say that life isn't much different in dozens of other jobs in the public sector. Being different is not an easy road. It requires major changes in how colleagues, administrators, and friends think.

Interestingly, students do not yet have the voice of change agents either. They do not have the power of influence that, for example, Ralph Nader had when he brought attention to traffic safety or Rachel Carson and her work to protect the environment. But, I believe it is just a matter of time that students will have the power to influence change. It will come from their parents who are paying the huge tuition dollars to academic institutions across the U.S. The academic response will be a major change in exercise science. It will become part of the exercise physiology movement, degree, and the support of the profession of exercise physiology. The faculty will assume responsibility for teaching professionalism, upholding accreditation, and supporting ASEP Board Certification for all college graduates who plan to work as exercise physiologists.

The ASEP expectation is for all 20th century Departments of Exercise Science will become the 21st century Departments of Exercise Physiologists. There are many reasons why this is going to happen. No doubt the most compelling reason is that it is both logical and necessary. Students are not getting their money's worth. There is no transparency in academia. Students are simply victims of a system that empowers itself at the expense of the consumers. This is wrong, and it has been so for decades.

In terms of the need for transparency, one critical piece of today's exercise science so-called education is hidden from the public. That "critical piece" is there are no credible career opportunities for exercise science college graduates. Secondly, the listing of jobs on department websites is nothing more than words without value. Freshmen students and their parents are not sufficiently informed so that they can understand what isn't said by the department chair and/or faculty. In short, if they had known 4 years earlier what they now know, then, they would have departed the campus.

It will not be too long from now that a reasonable standard of care in higher education will be acknowledged. For example, to validate the credibility of an academic degree, the implementation of universal standards will be consistent with the ASEP Professional Standards of Accreditation and Services. Any deviation from the standards will be evidence of negligence at the individual level as well as the academic level. This means either the broad diversity of so-called exercise physiology related degree programs (sports science, exercise science, kinesiology, human performance, etc) will join forces with ASEP or they will be diminished over time.

The scrutiny of the academic programs is long overdue, especially given the lack of serious communication between the faculty and students. Also, failure of the institutions to properly evaluate academic degree programs and the failure of the administration to identify questionable department practices cannot be ignored any longer. The students' failure to learn and their failure to materialize with jobs at graduation cannot be overlooked

any longer. Where is the accountability? Where is the professional competence that would encourage and help students understand the importance of professionalism?

Stated somewhat differently, are college teachers responsible just for the delivery of classroom information or for the professional development of their students and the role of the academic major in healthcare? Personally, I think they are responsible for both the delivery of classroom content and the professional development of their students. Why is that so hard to understand?