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## **Lack of Accountability and Bullying**

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*If exercise physiology and its practitioners are to prevail as credible healthcare professionals, academic exercise physiologists must assume greater responsibility and accountability for ensuring that the doctorate prepared exercise physiologists are fortified with sufficient resolve to resist succumbing to the failed rhetoric of sports medicine and exercise science.*

**A**T THE CENTER of the change process are the historical artifacts of failed thinkers. They represent much of what we know about life and making decisions, whether it is starting an exercise program or how people relate to others. The administrators and faculty of academic institution are part of this process. Those who support yesterday's rhetoric that was built on power and control are concerned that thinking different from status quo will disrupt their way of doing things. But of course life is about change and dealing with conflict, especially when yesterday's quest for power and/or ego message drives personal and organizational conflicts.

*Since 1985, the overall consumer price index has risen 115% while the college education inflation rate has risen nearly 500%.*

*-- Steve Odland*

## **The ASEP Perspective**

I believe in the ASEP perspective. I believe that exercise physiologists should be fully in control of their everyday practice and expectations as healthcare professionals. It is an important part of my life, and it has been for nearly two decades. It is my reality and thus, it has shaped my purpose in life. What is important is that the students of exercise physiology are provided the opportunity to a credible future in healthcare, not that I exist

to do research and build my resume. Understanding this point may help others get the ASEP perspective. The traditional view of trying to keep exercise physiology as a research discipline conflicts with the expectation of students to make it financially in the real world after graduation.

This thinking isn't new. It has been expressed in hundreds of articles published in the PEPonline, JPEP, and the ASEPNewsletter (1). Yet, despite the efforts of ASEP members to give shape to the transitional thinking of exercise physiology as a profession, I have come to understand two very strong factors that work against the change process. First, there is the idea that change is wrong if not impossible – so why try? Second, there is the notion that nothing needs fixing. No matter how the necessity for change is presented, the act of disagreeing finds its expression in poor communication, rudeness, and even hostile behavior that has resulted in dragging out the inevitable. Imagine the unfortunate outcome of where society would be if inventors and individuals of new and creative thinking actually embraced the attitude of the impossible. Nothing would get ever done, and that is exactly where exercise physiology has been for 40+ years.

Remember the old country song, *“If you don't stand for something, then you'll fall for anything.”* It is truly unfortunate that so many people have fallen for the notion that it makes sense to spend thousands of tuition dollars to earn a degree that is meaningless.

### **The Invisible Force of Resistance**

There is an unspoken invisible force of resistance by key individuals of certain organizations to persuade those on the “fence of change” to think of it as too tragic and painful to try. Some of the individuals who have supported ASEP have lost their jobs for continuing in their belief that free people have the right to free speech, regardless of the forum. Others, mostly the doctorate prepared exercise physiologists, who could promote positive changes do not think of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. They are simply products of a failed education and poor communication about what college graduates need. As a result, exercise

*I hope I shall always possess  
firmness and virtue enough to  
maintain what I consider the  
most enviable of all titles, the  
character of an honest man.*  
-- George Washington

physiologists and their administrators are not telling students the truth and, if that is the case, answer the following questions:

1. Where is the dignity in academia when there is deception?
2. Where is the honor when administrators fail as mediators in faculty incivility?
3. Why aren't faculty members speaking up when they know that faculty members are perpetuating rumors?
4. Why can't the administrators recognize when a faculty member's behavior is disguised as concern for the department or university while actually promoting his or her personal agenda?

Failed academic majors that cost students and their parents thousands of dollars in tuition are senseless. Also, the unnecessary anxiety that results in decades of stress and the increased likelihood of an early onset of a chronic disease (e.g., atherosclerosis or hypertension) is not without collateral damage. These degree programs are linked to unsuccessful change agents who are dismissed and/or fired along with their followers. The students are left behind blind to the mess they find themselves in. More often than not

they are not prepared for the life after college. In particular, after all the formalities and handshakes at graduation, it finally occurs to them that they are on their own without a job and broke.

*Nothing strengthens authority  
as much as silence.*

-- Leonardo da Vinci

Of course, the parents are not aware of the dilemma yet. If the recent college graduate doesn't have to move back home, parents can count their blessings. Otherwise, more than once you can hear the father ask, "You did think about what you were majoring in, and your professors did talk about salaries and career opportunities, right?" What do you suppose ever happened to the idea that a college degree meant a better salary and a better job than without it? It is a well-known fact that certain academic degrees correlate with higher salaries than other degrees. By majoring in the right academic degree, students can anticipate less difficulty after college. After all, young people aren't going to college just to play around and have fun? So why not put a lot of thinking into it?

## **Academic Bullying**

Ask yourself, “Where does the problem of meaningless academic degrees arise from?” The answer might disturb you, but it is the truth. More often than not they are passed on from generations of failed thinking by department chairs, deans, and vice-presidents. You may think it is unjust criticism of the administration, but 40 years of college teaching tells me otherwise. The administration is keen on getting its point across even if it means bullying. And yet, the faculty must be able to trust the administration, that their work is honored however different from status quo, and that rewards will be based solely on productive work. The administrators must be responsible for seeking the truth and dealing appropriately with students and doing everything possible to help them be successful after college.

Similarly, the administration must be responsible for faculty gossip, knowing the truth, and carrying out their responsibilities in an unbiased, helpful, and constructive manner. If not, then, the institution’s culture of silence explains why the administrators and faculty show little desire to get involved in getting rid of poor degree programs and promoting civility. This is especially the case when administrators are not concerned with the academic bullying. After all, it would require the administrators (and the faculty) to seek answers to why “ganging up” on a target member of the faculty is taking place. No one wants to hear about mobbing and psychological terror in the academic institutions of higher learning? However, it is important to recognize that researchers (3) have identified many bullying behaviors that exist in all fields of work. Here is a list of just a few:

1. Treat in a rude/disrespectful manner.
2. Interfering with work activities.
3. Giving the “silent treatment.”
4. Giving little or no feedback on performance.
5. Not giving praise to which an individual is entitled.
6. Failing to give information needed to do his or her job.
7. Lying to others about the individual.
8. Preventing an individual from expressing him- or herself.

Despite the strong evidence for abusive behaviors driven by personal inadequacies or personal gain target a victim, bullying is very much alive in academia (4). Research indicates that bullies do everything they can to trivialize accomplishments, spread rumors, and encourage the victim to seek alternative employment (5). The isolation, physical, and psychological health issues that the victims experience are seldom considered by the administration, the bullies, or by the other faculty members who do not have the courage to talk about what is going on in their department or across campus. This is the case every day in academic settings throughout the United States.

***Key Point:*** *If the academic institution allows for bullying and deception, both the administrators and the faculty must be held accountable.*

### **Academic Accountability**

Sustaining the trust in the educational process is the key to the academic accountability. In part, the existence of the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP, the professional organization of exercise physiologists) is the commitment to strengthen the exercise physiology degree. As a member of ASEP, academic exercise physiologists

*The tuition bubble will eventually pop when college graduates realize there are no credible career opportunities for many borrowers to repay their loans.*

pledge their support to adhere to certain professional responsibilities, chief among them, the primacy of student welfare. The profession of exercise physiology promises the students that all aspects of the academic major, the required course work, and the laboratory experiences will be free of compromising self-interest.

Yet, it is abundantly clear that one major threat to professionalism and the credibility of the academic major deserves mention. It is the unwillingness of exercise physiologists to take responsibility for the profession of exercise physiology.

Increasingly, educational institutions are operating as a business. There can be no doubt that society understands this point, especially given the rapid rise in tuition costs per academic year. Yet, there is no justification for the ‘substitution of market-place ethics for the tenets of professionalism’ (6). Having said that, it is evident that the most obvious

similarity between higher education and the business market-place is the price for a college education is increasing every year. Yes, of course, there is the financial challenge, if not, burden of cost to run academic institutions. No one disputes the need for money, but the sustained and widespread increases in college tuition indicate that a college degree might not be a good investment (7).

### **The Failed Investment**

The academic degree in exercise science and dozens of other related degree programs is a questionable investment. Why? Any academic degree that automatically requires the college graduate to go back to college and spend more tuition dollars to access a credible career is misleading if not unethical. Administrators love it because they want the money! The majority of the full-time employees in higher education are in administrative positions, not in faculty positions (8). The administrators are not interested in cutting tuition. This would send a negative signal to the Board of Directors that the administrators cannot spend money on programs, buildings, and locations to attract applicants and boost their prestige. It would also mean that the average salary of administrators would not increase, which would supposedly distract from hiring above-average leaders.

Exercise physiology and related faculty in exercise science departments have not taken the time to consider what a college degree should provide. That is, they have not determined the value of the students' education in terms of a credible career. Indeed, the only consideration seems to be that the degree exists to position the college graduates for graduate school. Two important factors contributing to this problem are the easy entrance requirements to the BS programs and the association with sports and athletics.

*The current structure and traditional thinking that drives the exercise science and related degree programs make these degree programs too widely available. The young people are the biggest losers. In fact, many college graduates are just getting by on bartending, waitressing, and odd jobs. It is truly a leaky boat in which ~6 million Americans ages 25 to 34 during 2010 lived with their parents. Isn't it a shame that academic exercise physiologists don't understand the problem?*

Both factors are present when it comes to students blindly contributing to the failed realization of the college degree. The magnitude of the problem is huge, especially since the students end up competing with personal trainers who may or may not have a college degree. This is the key concern at this point, one for which the exercise physiology faculty is not likely to correct for quite some time.

**Key Point:** *It would hardly be necessary to mention that why generic organizations are promoting personal training as though it is a profession if it were not essential to refute such popular misconceptions and stupidity. There is no such thing as the personal trainer profession. It is an oxymoron.*

The lack of discussion regarding these points, and the difficult task of disassociating from traditional thinking makes forecasting the future challenging. But, however difficult it is to change, it is increasingly likely that the academic structure will eventually have to change. The heavy reliance on student loans to major in degrees programs that are not career driven simply is not a wise way to enter the real world. Either the recent college graduates will borrow more money to enter graduate school or those with a debt that exceeds half of their salary will be forced to move back in with their parents. As a result, increasingly, they will have to postpone marriage and/or buying their first home (7).

Not only is it apparent that many exercise physiologists are slow to recognize the need to change, they come across unaware of the overriding importance of the 'hidden' agenda in their association with generic organizations. The leaders of these organizations have used widely recognized business practices to build their financial base. While doing so, it can be easily demonstrated that the outcome is nonproductive for exercise physiology. This is particularly the case when they promote personal training certifications or encourage students to apply to physical therapy or nursing. In fact, every time a student witnesses an academic exercise physiologist promoting anything other than exercise physiology as a healthcare profession, it distracts from the growth and recognition of exercise physiology.

*As stewards of the future of exercise physiology, the ASEP leadership has a special obligation to ensure that the settings in which students acquire their professional education truly reflect the profession's highest standards.*

## Questionable Practices

Another major problem for exercise physiology is the marketing activities of the sports supplement industry. It has encouraged exercise physiologists to engage in questionable financial relationships. There are concerns about the conflicts of interest compromising the objectivity of exercise physiologists' decision making in sports nutrition courses and the integrity of scientific research (9, 10). One has to ask the question, "What do students

*All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men [or good women] do nothing.*

*-- English philosopher  
Edmund Burke*

take away from sports nutrition lectures that come across as advertisements for the sports supplement industry?" Although the professors are not likely to think that their commitment to the industry is questionable, one wonders why this point is seldom discussed.

As a college teacher for 40 years, I can testify that many professors and administrators are spectacular at teaching and caring for their students and faculty. There are also institutions that hire and reprogram faculty to finish their lectures without the slightest hint of considering ethical issues in athletics. "Winning at all costs" ends up hurting students by failing to act on behalf of exercise physiology as a healthcare profession. If the questionable practices were better understood, it is reasonable that exercise physiologists would learn to represent sports nutrition in a way that empowers rather than limits the students' education.

*Students, athletes, and coaches must learn from Theodore Roosevelt who said, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." Instead of feeling that the only thing important in sports is winning, why not value the power of participation? This does not mean that winning isn't important, but reframing the experience helps to modify the athletes attitude and behavior towards athletics. It also helps to resolve the conflict that winning is the only thing important.*

It is hard to imagine how many students are harmed by the lack of accountability in the teaching of sports nutrition. Just because a college teacher has a doctorate degree and is teaching at the college level does not mean that he or she is qualified to do so. This is not a new concept by any means. While most college teachers are aware of this point, few act



on it. This is primarily due to the politics in academia, especially the vote “yes” or “no” on promotion and/or tenure documents.

*The great end of life is not knowledge but action.*

-- Thomas Henry Huxley

### **Misguided Colleagues**

Unbeknownst to the public, the academy is not policed when it comes to egregious or offensive behavior that demeans and disrespects the work and lives of the faculty. Although it is obviously wrong, the majority usually prevails even when it is injurious. Why otherwise good men and women go over the edge to steal and lie from a colleague is a problem in academia. No doubt it is driven by ulterior motives, personal issues, and the willingness to do anything to ensure their position and pay check. Classical thinking suggests that a certain percent of the individuals are highly egotistical and need the attention of others.

*Incivility is not just a personal issue. It disrupts work patterns and diminishes the effectiveness of its targets and others.*

-- Chuck Waggoner

While it is true that few if any college teachers or administrators are interested in talking about the mistreatment of colleagues or the hidden facts of bullying, both exist. No doubt you have entered into a conversation with a colleague who quickly said, “You have to keep this between us. No one else can know or I will get into trouble.” If you take a moment to think about it, circumstances at work are unreal when a person has to sign a confidentiality clause to never speak of his or her mistreatment at work or the death of an aging parent due to medical mistakes. However, such is the unethical reality of business, whether it is in an educational institution or a medical facility. Yet, it is embarrassing not to ask the question: Why is okay to marginalize human beings so that the for-profit businesses can chase the bottom line at the expense of hurting others?

*If there’s a single belief that seems almost inseparable from success, it’s that there’s no great success without great commitment.*

-- Anthony Robbins

Academic institutions are pretty much a mirror image of the administration. If they are not interested in holding the faculty accountable for bullying, inappropriate remarks, illegal behaviors, and disturbing statements, so be it. Nothing will change. To anyone who has taught at the college level, this point is obvious. For everyone else, the academic setting looks to be in good hands. However, if you think that is true, take a moment and look up academic bullying on the Internet. You are likely to get an entirely different picture. It is scary place where too many unnecessary wrongs take place. That is why there is an increasing concern as to whether integrity actually exists in most academic institutions. Yet, without integrity, conversations and agreements are meaningless.

*According to a recent study by Dr. Leah P. Hollis (2012), 62% of professionals employed in higher education reported experiencing workplace bullying. This is 58% higher than the rate of bullying reported by Namie and Namie in their 2007 study of the general workforce.*

-- <http://anniejenningspr.com/jenningswire/career/bullying-wilts-ivy-on-ivory-tower/>

Aside from the bullies adversely affecting a person's work, avoiding irreparable harm to the students by those who are still in charge isn't easy. Bullies seldom waste a heart beat or an emotion pondering the feelings of the targeted individual who may have to sell his or her home. Bullies are either too dumb to understand the pain they cause or they simply don't care. Either is sufficient to result in bad health and difficulties for the target and his or her family who find themselves living day-to-day with the deception, brutality, and lies. Predictably, the target experiences increased healthcare costs with higher medical bills and, in the long run, higher insurance premiums with less financial stability.

The unethical and scandalous methods used by bullies should be recognized for what they are – Wrong! Bullies destroy people and institutions. The institution suffers, but not as quickly as the target and his or her family. For the administrators who are not part of the bullying, they must understand that if it is not stopped the institution will suffer the consequences of faculty members' loss of performance due to loss of integrity. The fallout is huge and sustaining, although seldom properly addressed.

It is inevitable that the public sector will become more involved in the mechanics of academic function, especially since the American taxpayers are large supporters of the

institutions and the high salaries and bonuses of the administrators. The taxpayers concern is simple. Do they really want their tax dollars and financial gifts supporting extravagant pay for questionable administrators and faculty? Taxpayers do not think it is right to take the public's money while manipulating annual increases in college tuition that is in excess of inflation? Incentives to be an administrator should be understood in the context of doing what is right for society at large.

### **Transparency and Academic Freedom**

Every college administrator should be committed to transparency, open participation with the faculty, and support of faculty dreams, hopes, and possibilities. Transparency is critical to strengthening the institution and promoting an unprecedented effectiveness in carrying out goals and objectives. The truth is that transparency doesn't exist. It is a top down organization in which the faculty actually has little power or influence. The research bloat and its consequences have produced a decline in the students' education while tuition cost to support the increase in the growth of administrators continues to climb.

*The disintegration of civility in higher education is a growing concern for university faculty who say the disrespect has reached epic levels not only between professors and students but also among colleagues.*

*-- Arelis Hernandez*

Unfettered power, especially at the administrative level, manifests itself in the irresponsibility of supporting faculty who encourages the institution's agenda or branding without considering consequences on the faculty. It is such a problem in academia throughout the United States that the presidents, vice-presidents, and deans with an inflated sense of power have actually squandered the dreams of faculty who have dedicated their lives to creating new and credible opportunities for their students. Experience shows that administrators of this kind will eventually be held accountable for their lack of competence and personal self-interest.

Straight thinking and character are central to sustaining the public's trust. The continued progressive intrusion of decades of failed rhetoric from exercise physiologists and non-exercise physiologists committed to sports medicine and exercise science is threatening to keep exercise physiology as a discipline with obvious negative effects on all students who graduate with an undergraduate degree. Academic exercise physiology must assume greater responsibility and accountability for facing up to the powerful threats to teaching, nurturing, and sustaining professionalism in exercise physiology as an evolving healthcare profession.

What is needed is an academic civility policy that identifies inappropriate behavior and the consequences of failing to adhere to the policy. Of course, such a policy is meaningless if the administration itself is guilty of uncivil behavior. That is, while bullying is often viewed as an unnoticed problem among the faculty, there is reason to

***Intellectual Civility:*** *It is distinguished from intellectual rudeness: verbally attacking others, dismissing them, stereotyping their views.*

believe it is also being allowed if not encouraged by the administrators. Indeed, it is increasingly becoming the primary way to get rid of unwanted tenured faculty (especially those with high salaries). Tenure is not a lifetime job guarantee as society tends to think it is. Also, the truth is

that tenure is no longer understood as the right to due process. Evidence isn't needed to find a tenured professor incompetent, unprofessional, or fired for cause, although it is unfair and unethical.

***Key Point:*** *Research indicates in 2008 that 16 to 21% of employees experience bullying that endangers their health and that it is four times greater than sexual harassment reports.*

-- D. Yamada

Academic freedom does not exist. It is a clever fraud perpetrated by administrators who can take away tenure and/or employment. Tenured professors think they can put their ideas to the test and teach their students to think and defend controversial ideas are foolish thinkers. The truth is they need to realize that speaking out is dangerous. The definition of "unprofessional" and "whether an idea has value or not" is what the administrators want it

to be, not what the professor thinks it is. In other words, the problem is not the target or what he or she thinks. The problem is what the bully is thinking and what he or she wants. Being targeted is not the fault of the target (i.e., the victim). The fault lies with the bullies and their supporters. As Historiann (11) said in her June 27, 2008 blog, “Bullies are the ones who need to change, and their enabling co-workers are the ones who need to force those changes on the bullies and in themselves.”

### **Administrators, Morality, and Bullies**

Contrary to the everyday dogma of college promotion and tenure documents, as stated earlier, tenure does not protect a professor’s employment. Administrators interested in getting rid of a faculty member will do so. Forget about holding the administrators accountable. As long as they state a reason, regardless of whether it makes sense, followed by the so-called “due process” the tenured professor will be fired. Gaines West (12) said it best:

Unfortunately, the way this has played out in the cases in which I have been involved, is that administrations (administrators) who decide to fire a tenured professor will generate some pretextual reason for the termination and then put the hapless professor through the nightmare of defending against false or embellished accusations when (unknown to the professor) the outcome has been predetermined. Of course, the administration puts on the show of due process, usually in the form of one or more hearings before faculty hearing committees, which the professor must suffer through, all the while metaphorically screaming his or her innocence. The key factor which renders tenure useless is that the administration has no obligation to follow any finding or recommendation of the faculty hearing committees. The final say is still up to the administration and none of the so-called protective process can stop the termination....The end is that the professor is fired despite his or her tenure, despite exoneration by the so-called protective process, and despite his or her innocence of the pretextual allegations which, of course, are not the real reason the administration is firing the professor anyway.”

Rather than administrators committing themselves to a system of moral values and civility, many come across as immoral individuals who knowingly engage in wrong doing. If there are no rules, except the decisions made by the administrators, everything else is a moot point. To believe there is a strong foundation of ethical conduct that guides the decisions

of the administrators is to assume a false position. Administrators can harass, manipulate, and fire faculty without a reason.

Yet, if fraudulent behavior is being dishonest, the administrators (who misrepresent the so-called fairness of the professor's intent to save his or her job) are simply bad people. This is the case when they say to the professor who is being fired for cause that if you go through this process of clearing up "what is what" – you can continue teaching. Then, once the hearing process is completed, the professor is fired anyway.

This is deceit and breach of confidence that is perpetrated to gain an unfair and dishonest advantage over the faculty. When this behavior exists in an academic institution, the only conclusion is that the administrators lack accountability and integrity.

*When people oversimplify what they are told by whomever, such that they fail to see the obvious and, therefore, engage in yes-or-no thinking – they are failing to think straight.*

***Intellectual Civility:** It is not a matter of mere courtesy but, instead arises from a sense that communication itself requires honoring others' views and their capacity to reason.*

It is pastime to recognize that the mistreatment by administrators and faculty cannot be condoned. If they engage in bullying, then, they are terrible and dishonest people. In many ways, they are like the person who fails to find love in the right and acceptable way, so they rape the person next door. They get what they want and blame the victim. It is thinking gone wrong, just as bullying is. What are the consequences for raping someone? Nothing, as long as you can get enough people to join in and blame the victim (target). The bully's strategy is to abuse the target emotionally by spreading rumors. They also engage in a lot of gossip about the target, and where they can find support they ridicule the target. They want to inflict pain and disappointment on the target.

The German word Todschweigen, death by silence, describes this initial, informal stage of workplace mobbing (13). The targets are challenged to live with the silence, the injustice, and the mindless behavior of the bullies. Many do what they can to move on to a different job to survive emotionally and financially. Often, depending on the target's age, he or she is forced into early retirement. It is wrong and greater attention should be paid to

the crime of hurting people. But, unfortunately, the answer to bullying (or mobbing) is not an easy one.

A beginning point is to acknowledge that it exists and that it is morally wrong. Then, it is important to act to correct the problem. What is needed is leadership to help achieve a safe work environment. Faculty members who have a narrow understanding of what bullying is about must step aside and allow those who “get it” to do something about it. Change is never easy, but it is possible with persistence and determination. No longer can administrators simply ignore the health and well-being of their faculty. No longer can the bullies issue orders and expect them to be mindlessly obeyed, especially when they are scandalously used to hurt others. The leaders of tomorrow must establish a real sense of caring and civility in accordance with rules and regulations that are honored by people who profess to believe in values of respect, compassion, and love of learning.

***When People Get It Wrong:*** Critical thinking has its roots in education and philosophy. Wade and Tavris (14) said “...it is the ability and willingness to assess claims and make objective judgments on the basis of well-supported reasons and evidence rather than emotion or anecdote. Critical thinkers are able to look for flaws in arguments and to resist claims that have no support.” No doubt it is reasonable to conclude that critical thinking is relevant to administrative and faculty accountability since it is about ways of making decisions and drawing conclusions not for personal gain or satisfaction, but for the full benefit of everyone involved (including students). To do less is an excellent indication of dishonest and unethical behavior.

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