

# Professionalization of Exercise Physiology<sup>online</sup>

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**American Society of Exercise Physiologists**  
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## The New Order of Things

Tommy Boone, PhD, MPH, MAM, MBA  
Board Certified Exercise Physiologist

*There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.*

*Niccolo Machiavelli*

**H**OW MANY EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGISTS realize the American Society of Exercise Physiologists is the professional organization of exercise physiologists? This is an important question for many reasons. Similarly, how many exercise science majors know that exercise science is not exercise physiology? Equally relevant, how many academic exercise physiologists are more interested in publishing their research papers than educating their students to what is exercise physiology and who is an exercise physiologist? Is it likely that the variety of so-called fitness professionals and weekend warrior certifications are the result of exercise physiologists at all levels failing to unite as a collective body of healthcare professionals?

Thinking outside the box is about survival. It is especially necessary when a group of specialize individuals (such as exercise physiologists) decide to think of themselves as a profession versus being a discipline. Survival as a healthcare profession within the context of a complex and ambiguous list of academic majors requires a vision that is sustainable. Yet, even with such a vision, there will always be resistance to change. Resistance, groupthink, and the fear of turning from what is comfortable have kept exercise physiology on the level of personal trainers and fitness instructors.

*Great souls have  
always met with  
violent opposition  
from mediocre  
minds.*

*-- Albert Einstein*

The exercise science and sports medicine mentality of more certifications for trainers and instructors is the same as it was in the 1960s. Such thinking then was a failure, and it is still failing our college students today. Most, if not, all of the 40 or more offshoots of the original health and physical education degree (e.g., exercise

*Students of the physical education offshoot degree programs are facing a terrifying failure. The degree itself is meaningless. The degrees are not career oriented with a truthful understanding of credible jobs. Allowing it to continue is a tragedy.*

science, human performance, kinesiology, sports science, and so forth) teach the same list of courses as a physical education major takes. Frankly, there is a crisis throughout the colleges and universities that appears unlikely to change for decades to come. The inertia of these offshoot majors is slowing the innovations in exercise physiology.

Until the exercise physiologists and college faculty recognize the need to change, nothing is likely to overcome the desire to stay the same. Part of the reason is that the academic setting is protected by its overall size and prestige. There isn't any competition per se. The truth is that hardly anything has changed except for the continued increases in tuition costs. The bottom line is that the department chairs, regardless of whether they are exercise physiologists or not, must commit to change or their failing to do so will be recognized as a slow departmental suicide.

*The idea that accrediting the undergraduate exercise science degree will place the exercise science and/or the human performance college graduates on the same career level as the physical therapist, nurse, or athletic trainer is simply untrue. Moreover, it purposeful misinformation to simply keep graduate academic departments flooded with applications. Perhaps, worst yet, it is a questionable ethical misrepresentation in that both the students and their parents believe that graduating from college will ensure the college prepared students of getting a financially good job. The problem with this thinking is that accrediting meaningless degree programs simply results in more students getting generic certifications and meaningless jobs. There is no industry credibility when organizational leaders promote philosophic issues and financial agenda over the welfare of the members. The leadership simply does not understand professionalism, credibility, and credentials. In fact, it appears that the leadership doesn't care either. That is, they come across as not caring that professional organizations exist to benefit the members' professional development and credibility, and it appears that they don't understand that professional organizations exist to help the members become successful as credible healthcare professionals.*

-- Dr. Tommy Boone, *PEPonline*, May 2014

Unemployment rate is at a record high for college graduates in many degree programs. In particular, it is my experience as a college professor that exercise science students and students of related programs fail significantly to improve their analytical application of the scientific thinking that undergirds exercise medicine. While it is true that college departments are hardly to blame for the administrations decisions to increase tuition year after year, they should be held accountable for their inability to think differently, to always give in to the power and threats of the competitors to control the direction of a various degree programs, and the students' lack of preparedness for the modern work force.

Where is the enlightened academic exercise physiologist to find the courage to explore the ASEP initiatives? Not from the generic organizations, who are enthusiastic cheerleaders of the status quo, and not from the recent doctorate graduates of exercise science, who are guardians of their professors' commitment to obsolete models of education. It is unfortunate but true that the scholarly work by college teachers result in leaving little serious concern for the well-being of students, either in school or out of school.

*Many doctorate level exercise physiologists have seldom taken the time to read the ASEP Code of Ethics, and yet it speaks to the exercise physiologist. They have little knowledge of its value or why exercise physiologists need their own professional organization and Standards of Practice.*

After everything has been said, is change just a matter of time? I would like to think so. The ASEP organization represents a particularly profound change that will enable or force significant changes in exercise physiology and the professional development of its members. The ASEP leaders' capability to empower exercise physiologists at all

levels, not just those who publish research articles. They will also help to flatten organizational hierarchies and the unwanted influence of the generic leadership. The changes will have such far-reaching implications that the profession of exercise physiology should start preparing now rather than later.

While the leadership of generic organizations may be reluctant to accept that ASEP is the new order of things for the 21st century exercise physiologists or because ASEP is a poor fit with their existing strategic market plans, internal barriers must be changed. At the very least, generic organizations need to be aware that the profession-specific organizations are not only appropriate but more efficient and effective for specific professions. Generic organization should also be aware of the special problems produced by actions that are viewed as problematic, especially when they duplicate an existing organization's efforts to help the profession grow and effectively serve society. It is highly likely that the continued support of ASEP and related professional initiatives will ease some of the challenges that have plagued college students when they transition into the public sector. It is also highly likely that some challenges will persist, regardless of ASEP desire and effort to work with other organizations.