

Professionalization of Exercise Physiology^{online}

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American Society of Exercise Physiologists
The Professional Organization of Exercise Physiologists

ASEP's "Exercise Physiologist Certified" – The EPC!

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Many of the beliefs of our pioneering ancestors have become old hat, sacrificed on the altar of fakery and sham. These include: (1) Courage to work for what you want; (2) Candor – to call a spade a spade; and (3) Courage to label fakery and phoniness for what it is.

*-- Joe D. Batten and Leonard C. Hudson
Dare To Live*

AS A STUDENT IN COLLEGE, do you want to graduate and earn a certification. If so, how do you know if the certification is valid or even necessary? There are 100s of different certifications for personal trainers who work in a gym. Often, many of the certifications are little more than the so-called “weekend warrior” certification. This means that one’s athletic built is considered more important than a list of accredited academic courses.

Or, you would rather graduate and work as a healthcare professional? Think about it. Is there a difference between a healthcare professional and a personal trainer? What about the term “exercise professional” – is such a person equally qualified to be called a healthcare professional? Personally and professionally I don’t think so. In fact, answer this question: “Is the exercise science degree a healthcare professional degree?” Here again, the short and most obvious answer is “no.”

Although our academic experience differs and varies, exercise physiologists are accountable to one another.

Most college teachers don’t think so either. That is why they spend most of their time advising juniors and seniors to do what is necessary to complete an application to graduate school. They know that the exercise science degree is essentially the same course work as the physical education degree except for the academic courses that allows the physical education major to teach in the public schools. Degree title is important, particularly with reference to job opportunities. This thinking has been explained in hundreds of articles published in the **PEP**online journal.

It is through the articles and books that I have written as well as my work as my 46 years as a college teacher that keeps me dedicated to sharing the truth with students, especially those are interested in getting a college degree that will result in a credible job. Hence, whenever possible, I do what I can to help students in exercise physiology related degree programs sit for the ASEP “Board Certified Exercise Physiologist” credential. Why? With the EPC (i.e., Exercise Physiologist Certified, same as the Board Certified Exercise Physiologist) the college graduate is recognized for the first time in the history of exercise physiology as a healthcare professional. The certificate increases the chances of career success for every person who didn’t get an actual exercise physiology degree, but who otherwise passed the EPC exam. Although seldom talked about among academic types, the link between title and career is important. In fact, it is everything when it comes to professionalism and credibility.

Also important, just because a large generic organization has relatively recently provided the means to accrediting primarily undergraduate degree programs for the exercise science(s) degree doesn’t mean that it is right thing to do. For certain, it has

Given that exercise is medicine, then, exercise medicine should be prescribed by board certified exercise physiologists.

not helped the students of exercise science, kinesiology, sports sciences, human performance, etc. Clearly, the accreditation process is little more than a move by the organization to keep departments from upgrading their programs and thinking differently about their degree programs. It is not a professional attempt to help the students. Rather, it is a business move designed to put money in the organization’s bank. The truth is the organization’s business agenda is driving its agenda and the appearance of being helpful.

That is why there isn’t just one, but instead dozens upon dozens of similar degree programs that have transitioned from physical education during the past 60 or so years. Unfortunately for the students, the existing academic programs are little more than degree programs that provide a large pool of potential candidates for physical therapy, athletic training, or a similarly established degree. Of course this thinking is great for the other academic departments. Their existence is improved by the large number of college graduates who must make application for graduate school since the so-called exercise professional certification isn’t linked to a credible career in healthcare.

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.

So, if you are a student in college today and you are enrolled in an exercise science degree, ask yourself this question: "Do I really want to major in an academic degree that the department faculty spend all their time telling me just how prepared I will be to complete an application to physical therapy when I graduate?" The truth is this: As long as the prerequisites for PT are taken, it doesn't matter what the undergraduate degree program is in. In most cases, there are no benefits from majoring in exercise science over biology. The majority of the exercise science majors aren't even required to know the origins, insertions, and functions of the muscles. Yet, the musculoskeletal system is extremely important to all physical therapists.

Perhaps, it would be altogether different if students understood from the beginning that they wanted to be a physical therapist and, then, pursue any degree program that would help them get accepted into PT. Again, from my experience, that is not the case with the majority of the students who major in exercise science and related degree programs. Also, strange as it might sound, many students think from the beginning that there are real jobs waiting for them when they graduate. As I have come to realize, many of these students are thinking about sports and the work it takes to make the team (football, in particular). They are not thinking about what they are going to do after college.

All academic exercise physiologists should carry out their professional duties, including teaching and research for the good of their students.

The truth of the manipulation tactics that takes place when college advisors speak to potential students interested in going to college is not complicated. The advisors understand exactly what they are doing. That is why many of the students who are entering college for the first time are without question victims of this gaming process. The majority of the academic exercise physiologists realize that there are only a few financially good jobs for the thousands of exercise science majors. So, they live with this fact (and themselves) by presenting the degree as a stepping stone to some other established profession. They do this while keeping a smile on their face, regardless of how unethical it is once the behavior is understood. Remember, the college professors have a good job making a good salary while teaching an average of two academic courses a semester with a course release to do research! That is 6 hrs in the classroom

a week. That is it and, increasingly, if there are classes with a lab, graduate students oversee the lab time.

It is sad to say, but true that not all college advisors are professional at what they do. This is as I see it after more than 4 decades of college teaching. For certain, it is true that certified personal trainers are not healthcare professionals. Why, because personal trainers do not constitute a healthcare profession. This is also true for the title exercise specialist and fitness instructor. Trainers, specialists, and instructors do not constitute a healthcare profession. They are titles from the 60s through the 80s and so forth that simply benefit certain organizations' financial agenda and, unfortunately, the organizations do it on the backs of students who are fed misinformation.

It is true that physical therapy is a healthcare profession. Nurses are also members of their professional organizations. Yes, athletic trainers are healthcare professionals. Each one of these professionals is a member of his or her own profession-specific organization. Hence, if they decide to become a member of a generic organization, it is a membership that is in addition to their professional responsibility to their profession-specific organizations. This cannot be hard to understand unless of course a person simply turns a deaf ear to the obvious truth.

Since 1997, the professional advancement of exercise physiology is made possible because of the existence of the profession-specific American Society of Exercise Physiologists. The ASEP leaders, like the leaders of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), understand the differences between a generic organization and a profession-specific organization. That is why they created long-term strategic priorities

that benefit the membership and not the organization. The leadership of ASEP is responsible for ensuring the welfare of the membership before it works to ensure its longevity and financial base, even if it means doing so while using uncommon thinking and behavior.

Exercise physiology has emerged as a scientific education that first and foremost is responsible for the teaching and implementation of exercise medicine.

But, such knowledge in itself is relatively useless without the backbone of those who are helped to stand up and support the implementation of a new education with exercise physiology profession values. More specifically, the growth of the profession of exercise physiology requires that exercise physiologists belong to the profession of exercise physiology so that they can willingly support it by way of a proactive and visible role in advocating its strategies for success and effectiveness. Hence, what cannot be overlooked is that if exercise physiologists (defined by the ASEP leadership as actually earning a degree in exercise physiology) fail to support the profession of exercise physiology by supporting the ASEP organization and/or the ASEP Board Certification, then, they do not understand their responsibility in developing and sustaining their own healthcare profession.

Those who do understand the founding of ASEP on behalf of the students' success and the leaderships' development of exercise physiology-specific credentials to help foster professionalism in exercise physiology must voice their concerns and support. When they do so, they become the backbone of the change process. The price is high in breaking off from the past way of thinking. Not everyone is willing to do their part because the ideals and responsibilities articulated by the ASEP leaders demonstrate a profound willingness to surrender one's individuality to carry out the exercise physiologist's professional duties. It is a way of living and treating clients, patients, and colleagues in a professional way that improves everyone involved.

While the beliefs in this new way of thinking and life may trigger paralysis in some, it is the role of every board certified exercise physiologist to share the ASEP ideas. Ultimately, the change process comes down to "It all depends on me." The only correct way forward is to embrace the details of professionalism, the importance of an accreditation and a shared implementation of educational courses, Board Certification for all exercise physiologists, and both a deliberate and informed sharing of the science that underpins the innate sense of exercise medicine. Of course doing these things is never easy, especially given the failed rhetoric of the past and its continued influence today. It is a struggle, but exercise physiologists do their best regardless of the beliefs of their colleagues. They must always hope for, work for, and expect that eventually the right emphasis on knowledge and skills will be fully understood by the academic exercise physiologists.

The ASEP Code of Ethics speaks to the truths of the exercise physiologist's Standards of Practice, which are not up for discussion.

Finally, ask yourself these questions, "Do you have the courage to support the ASEP organization?" "Do you have the conviction to just let yourself go and become part of the evolution of the Board Certified Exercise Physiologist?" "Are you ready to believe in yourself and believe in exercise physiology as a healthcare profession?" If you are close, then, simply consider the old Latin proverb: "Believe that you have, and you have it." Remember, it's in your mind. So, why not believe that you can become what you say you believe you are? After all, if you believe you can or can't, you are right!