

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

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**American Society of Exercise Physiologists**  
The Professional Organization of Exercise Physiologists

## **Establishing Change in Exercise Physiology: It's All Good**

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*While the time period in which a goal is expected to be achieved should be known, a sense of urgency is not the problem as long as the effort is satisfying and the attainment is expected.*

**T**HE PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION of exercise physiologists is **ASEP**. It did not exist prior to 1997. As co-founders, Dr. Robert A. Robergs and I have always been very much interested in the success of the organization. Hence, during the original planning process, we and others within ASEP created in the organizational plan the vision, goals, and mission statements. Once each statement was agreed upon, we set out to define the profession of exercise physiology by addressing who is and who is not an exercise physiologist. The change process has been going on for 16 years now. Trying to predict the future is not without problems and opportunities.

With that said, what do you think is the purpose of exercise physiology? The traditional answer is that exercise physiology is a research discipline with the purpose of studying the acute and chronic effects of regular exercise? Frankly, this definition is common throughout the exercise physiology texts and department websites. It is inherently problematic for many reasons. The question is this: "Is it correct?" The short answer is "No." The long answer is complex, but if exercise physiology is a research discipline, then 95% or more of the exercise physiologists in United States have a doctorate degree. Why? Because research and publishing are not commonly

carried out by non-doctorate individuals (i.e., except for students who complete a master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation).

Strictly speaking, the traditional perspective means that thousands of college graduates with an undergraduate degree or a master's degree cannot use the title exercise physiologist (even if they should have an actual academic degree in exercise physiology). Clearly, such thinking makes no sense at all. When it comes to denying a college graduate the right refer to him- or herself as an exercise physiologist if he or she has a degree in exercise physiology is flat out failed rhetoric. Conversely, imagine that the majority of the doctorate prepared exercise physiologists do not have an actual academic degree (i.e., by title) in exercise physiology. This means there are college professors with a doctorate degree in kinesiology or human performance or one of a dozen other degree titles who call themselves an exercise physiologist when the title is actually an acquired one. Perhaps, even worse, many of these academic types refer to themselves as a "physiologist" when, in fact, they do not have a degree in physiology.

While these ideas have been presented many times in the ASEP professionalism journals, the majority of the college professors who teach exercise physiology types of courses are preoccupied with their research. The scenario of the future is predictable, especially if they continue to fail in altering conditions. As a result, the established healthcare professions will continue to benefit from the collective deaf ear syndrome of the academic exercise physiologists. Frankly, it is their responsibility to define the business of exercise physiology, that is, the professionalism of exercise physiologists. They must come to the understanding that it is necessary to open their closed minds of status quo and ask the following questions:

1. What is exercise physiology?
2. Who is an exercise physiologist?
3. How can exercise physiologists meet the needs of a non-exercise physiologist who wants to be an exercise physiologist?
4. How is the exercise physiologist's code of ethics, accreditation, board certification, and professional practice satisfying the profession of exercise physiology and exercise physiologists?
5. Who are the customers of exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals?

6. How can exercise physiologists best meet the health and well-being needs of their customers?
7. How well are they satisfying customer needs as experts in the prescription of exercise medicine?
8. How are exercise physiologists satisfying the needs of athletes and the athletic community?
9. How are exercise physiologists promoting professionalism in academic settings and satisfying the needs of the students?
10. How can members of ASEP best deal with the opportunities and threats to forecasting and predicting the future?

The ASEP leadership asked these questions to identify the needs of the professional organization, the profession of exercise physiology, the students of exercise physiology as healthcare professionals, and the customers of exercise medicine. Answering these questions helped to identify not only what direction the organization had to go but what needs had to be met. That is why the ASEP website was developed. It presents a new 21st century approach to defining the professionalism and business of exercise physiology. Finally, since 1997, the concept of exercise physiology is no longer based on the notion of just research or just the understanding of acute and chronic responses to exercise, but rather the needs of exercise physiologists, their students, and how to best prescribe exercise medicine via exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. The following content is from the ASEP website. It is helpful in answering several of the questions.

### **What is Exercise Physiology?**

**Exercise Physiology** is the identification of physiological mechanisms underlying physical activity, the comprehensive delivery of treatment services concerned with the analysis, improvement, and maintenance of health and fitness, rehabilitation of heart disease and other diseases and/or disabilities, and the professional guidance and counsel of athletes and others interested in athletics, sports training, and human adaptability to acute and chronic exercise.

The **Introduction to Exercise Physiology** text is endorsed by the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP). For more information about exercise physiology as a healthcare profession, go straight to Jones and Bartlett Publishing or click on any number of Internet sites such as **Introduction to Exercise Physiology**.

### **Who is an Exercise Physiologist?**

An **Exercise Physiologist** is a healthcare professional who either has an academic degree in exercise physiology or who is certified by ASEP to practice exercise physiology [via the Exercise Physiologist Certified exam (EPC)] or who has a doctorate degree in exercise physiology from an accredited college or university.

### **The Exercise Physiologist's Practice**

Establishing and implementing standards of practice are major functions of a professional organization. The purpose of the standards is to describe the responsibilities for which exercise physiologists are accountable. The **Exercise Physiology Practice** promotes health and wellness, prevents illness and disability, restores health and well-being, and helps athletes reach their potential in sports training and performance.

### **Board Certification**

A Board Certified Exercise Physiologist is a person who has passed the ASEP **Exercise Physiologist Certified exam**. EPCs are held accountable to the **ASEP Code of Ethics** and the **Exercise Physiologist's Standards of Practice**. ASEP is important for many reasons, but one in particular is to promote the professional development of exercise physiology. Hence, implicit within the ASEP web pages is the notion that exercise physiology is a healthcare profession. The bulk of the epidemiologic evidence and the scientific papers by exercise physiologists support the health benefits of regular exercise. Moreover, it is clear that an active lifestyle protects from many diseases. Now, with the ASEP Board Certification as the gold standard for exercise

physiologists, the supervision, safety, and care of clients are increasingly evident throughout the public sector.

### **ASEP Vision Statement**

The **ASEP Vision** is the greatest gift that can be given to exercise physiologists. Vision generates hope, provides endurance, and motivates the discouraged. No matter how difficult, the essence of the ASEP vision is to see the future.

#### **1. What the organization wants to be?**

To be recognized as the leading professional organization of American scholars and practitioners in the study and application of exercise physiology to fitness, health promotion, rehabilitation, and sports training.

#### **2. What it wants to accomplish?**

The Society of Exercise Physiologists is dedicated to unifying all exercise physiologists in the United States and worldwide to promote and support the study, practice, teaching, research, and development of the exercise physiology profession.

#### **3. Whom it wants to serve?**

Through proactive and creative leadership, the Society empowers its members to serve the public good by making an academically sound difference in the application of exercise physiology concepts and insights.

### **What is ASEP?**

As a national non-profit professional organization, the American Society of Exercise Physiologists (ASEP) is committed to the advancement of exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. Founded in 1997 in the state of Minnesota, the Society provides a forum for leadership and exchange of information to stimulate discussion

and collaboration among exercise physiologists active in all aspects of the profession. The Society works to set standards for exercise physiologists through ASEP-approved curricula in universities and colleges in the United States.

### **Who Belongs To ASEP?**

Any exercise physiologist can belong to the Society. ASEP members are educated professionals who have the minimum of a bachelor's degree in exercise physiology. Members with a related degree program can earn the professional title, Exercise Physiologist, by passing the ASEP Board of Certification (i.e., the EPC). They are recognized as leading scholars and practitioners in the study and application of exercise physiology to fitness, health promotion, rehabilitation, and sports training. Exercise physiologists belong to ASEP because they sense a need for a unified voice that speaks to the academic, medical, and lay communities about problems confronting them in their professional development.

### **The ASEP Goals**

The ASEP goals describe actions that are taken by the National Office, Board of Directors, and Committees. There are a number of goals, each describing a desired future condition toward which efforts are directed to increase membership, accreditation, board certification, and advertisements. Accomplishing the goals help to define ASEP as a successful organization. Goals challenge those responsible for achieving them focused on the success of ASEP and away from distractive activities that often result in draining resources and accomplish little. A few examples that support the ASEP mission statement are:

1. Implement an advertisement component to the ASEP web pages that customers will want to post their exercise physiology-related advertisements.
2. Create a well-designed book for those interested in studying for the ASEP Board Certification.

3. Set up a system across the United States that offers flexibility, reliability, and credibility for candidates who want to be Board Certified Exercise Physiologists.
4. Establish a partnership program with other organizations that generates increased potential for new membership exposure and income for ASEP.
5. Put in place a management structure that is able to accomplish the business of ASEP conferences and workshops efficiently and profitably.

### **ASEP Objectives**

If you are an exercise physiologist, you might be surprised to read the following list. For the ASEP members, this is part of the 21st century thinking that underpins the infrastructure of professional development. After all, professionalism is critical to society's acceptance of exercise physiologists as healthcare professionals. And, in much the same sense that Bob Dylan was thinking when he said, "You don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows." -- ASEP leaders believe that exercise physiologists don't need a doctorate degree to know that Albert Einstein was right: "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

1. To provide a powerful, unified forum and opportunity for exercise physiologists to present and discuss current research in exercise physiology.
2. To promote and encourage the exchange of ideas and information regarding all phases of exercise physiology.
3. To promote advancement of teaching and research in exercise physiology within the academic environment.
4. To encourage the implementation of undergraduate and graduate education programs to meet the diverse interests and healthcare career opportunities in exercise physiology, regardless of age, gender, race or disability.
5. To promote the growth and application of the highest quality teaching, research, and professional application of exercise physiology in health promotion, disease prevention, rehabilitation, and sport fitness and training.

6. To promote development and exchange of scientific information between ASEP and other professional organizations with an interest in exercise physiology.
7. To set the agenda, determine the direction, and make the decisions about the future of the profession of exercise physiology.
8. To be a dynamic and action-oriented clearinghouse for questions regarding the professional development of exercise physiologists, healthcare, athletics performance, and research opportunities.
9. To increase visibility and enhance the image of the exercise physiology profession throughout the United States.
10. To represent exercise physiologists whose professional work is mainly clinical, and to help ensure that federal agencies and legislators understand their work and needs of the clinical professional.
11. To participate in the development and implementation of public policies and procedures concerned with exercise physiology.
12. To make a commitment to quality and integrity in exercise physiology through adherence to the ASEP Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Practice.
13. To facilitate and promote positive public policy and professional, ethical behavior by providing ongoing peer review and quality assurance programs via the accreditation of the exercise physiology academic programs.
14. To expand federal and private funding of exercise physiology research, education, and professional development.

### **ASEP Accreditation Philosophy**

The purpose of ASEP Academic Accreditation is to establish academic standards for the exercise physiology profession, verify the credibility, integrity, and quality of academic programs that prepare students for professional work in exercise physiology, and identify institutions that have attained the ASEP standard.

### **Why Accreditation?**

Accreditation benefits all facets of the profession. Academic programs are critically evaluated and improved. Employers are more confident that they are hiring competent



professionals. In time, students will gravitate to the ASEP-accredited programs, as there will be little incentive to enroll in a program not recognized by ASEP.

### **Accreditation Requirements**

The curriculum requirements identified by ASEP are minimal so that the faculty of the academic programs has the freedom to address the required content areas and learning objectives in ways that best suit their needs and constraints. Adhering to the course examples presented in this section would meet the curriculum requirements and address most of the content areas and learning objectives.

### **Accreditation Benefits**

The academic programs accredited by ASEP will receive several benefits. Most significantly, attaining ASEP accreditation enhances the reputation of the academic program and advances the entire profession of exercise physiology. Having met the standards and external review of peers gives the institution and program, as well as the entire profession of exercise physiology, more credibility and clout when challenged politically and legally.

### **In Closing**

Although the work of an organization is always ongoing, it is appropriate to conclude that ASEP is a positive step in the right direction. Challenging goals and dealing with obstacles will always be part of the process of improving the ASEP organization. Thus, for those who compare ASEP to organizations that are 60 to 150 or more years old, all anyone should say is “Get a life!” They simply don’t understand the role that time plays in making improvements. Also, they come across with little knowledge of the stubbornness of bureaucracy and its history in resisting innovation. As my daughter says, “It’s All Good. Thank you ASEP members!”