

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

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## **The Power to Choose**

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“Reasoning is simply a matter of getting your facts straight.”  
-- B.F. Anderson

There is a problem for many students in exercise science. For the past several decades, students have majored in dozens of different academic programs with titles like exercise science, sports science, kinesiology, human performance, and other related titles [1]. They graduate thinking they are exercise physiologists!

Why students think they are exercise physiologists is a mystery, except that some teachers encouraged the students' behavior and expectation. Part of the problem is that jobs in the public sector are driven by academic titles. For example, the student in physical therapy graduates to land a job in physical therapy. It is the same with nursing, occupational therapy, accounting, social work, law, medicine, and other academic degrees.

Another part of the problem is that kinesiology or human performance is not a recognized job career. Where are kinesiologists with a BS degree hired? What does a student with an exercise science major do? What kinds of jobs do students apply for? The answer to these questions is not something students want to hear. College teachers do not talk about it either. They say as little as possible to their undergraduate students. And, when possible, the doctorate prepared academic requires the kinesiology doctorate student with a TA position to teach the undergraduate students.

If this does not get your attention, remember that many doctorate academic physiologists do whatever it takes to get out of teaching. This may sound harsh, but it is the truth. Even some PhDs just out of college are complaining that the load is too heavy. There is no time to do research. There is a sense that the academic exercise physiologist believes the university exists for him/her to do research, to publish, and to attend national meetings.

Strange as it might sound, teaching is something that is done only if it has to be done. This might be a good time to point out that this article is not about talking bad about college teachers. Rather, it is about “simple truths”. It is about an emerging reality of professional responsibility to do the right thing for the right reasons. What is not the right thing is the continuation of undergraduate degrees that are a complete waste of time. Students and parents need to know this basic truth. Attention needs to be brought to this problem, especially since students are paying for a product that is defective. The object of an education is to access a job. Students and parents have a growing appreciation for this fact and what it means at graduation. That is exactly why they choose physical therapy or nursing. They expect an academic major to yield a career.

Department chairs and faculty who argue their existence on the backs of students, who are told to attend graduate school or go into another field at graduation are problematic. The challenge for exercise physiologists who teach in non-exercise physiology departments is to help improve upon the students’ career options. Indifference to professionalism is no longer an option [2]. Because the circumstances under which students find career opportunities are not likely to change without significant faculty influence and involvement in the paradigm shift [3], exercise physiologists must proclaim a crisis in the academic offerings. It has therefore become increasingly obvious that to continue as things are is to fail to act honorably in serving students’ career interests.

“One of the great sufferings in life is to no longer have the possibility of doing what before one could and should have done.” – Source Unknown

This crisis of failing to do what should be done in a timely fashion has many symptoms. The most obvious is that students feel that they were not told the truth about career opportunities. There is a certain predictable emotional and financial dis-satisfaction that drives them to other academic majors. For those of us who teach and are concerned about professionalism, it is absolutely imperative that the big clean up gets underway. This has been discussed in other papers published in *Professionalization of Exercise Physiology* [online](#) [4-8]. Other academic programs have made the leap from discipline to profession. Exercise physiologists can do it the same. Running away or staying the same will not help. It is time for a new attitude towards academic responsibility. Why this hasn’t happened before now is truly amazing.

Think of what is possible when academic exercise physiologists get the full understanding of the ASEP perspective. Students would no longer be victims. Instead, they would be equally competitive for healthcare jobs in the public sector. The entire thrust of ASEP is to ensure that the vision becomes reality.

1. 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. The Society 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. 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.

In some ways it is a story that parallels many other evolving professions. If you were to go their websites and study their documents, you would see that they are fighting the same fight or that they have transported themselves significantly forwards by agreeing to work together. This is exactly the realization that exercise physiologists must come to understand. The power exercise physiologists need the most is their integrated strength. It's not about slick organizations, big meetings, and theater-like presentations, but how in the world will exercise physiologists make the right choice.

The power to choose is an awesome responsibility. The idea that issues and visions can be correct and/or fulfilled by others doing it for exercise physiologists just does not cut it. Exercise physiologists must get out from under their time-warped sports medicine way of thinking if they are to ascend to join the so-called upper-room group of professionals. They are, after all, in an almost unimaginable powerful position to teach, mentor, and share in the philosophy of a healthier life.

Many people today, even some from outside of traditional, evidence-based medicine, have figured it out. But, there's nothing about accredited academic programs that seems to grip them. Too often they are totally about accessing the power of the dollar. How much money can be made? By contrast, exercise physiology is something altogether different. At least this is the story as told by a member of the ASEP Board of Directors. They believe that, even with all of the obvious sports medicine shortcomings and failures, exercise physiology is special. They understand that it is intellectual and amazingly creative.

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