

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

ISSN 1099-5862

December 2011 Vol 14 No 12

## The Leftovers Dilemma

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*Fate chooses your relations, you choose your friends.*

-- Christopher Wren  
(1632-1723)

**T**HE CONTENT OF THIS ARTICLE is not about the academic issue of exercise physiologists turning a blind eye to professionalism in exercise physiology. Rather, it is about the “leftovers” of the failed physical education dilemma of the past decades. My comments are consistent with what most Americans believe when they speak of a college education. As an example, it is believed that every student who attends a college or a university should have the same opportunities at graduation to locate a financially sound job with good healthcare benefits. After all, from the society’s perspective, this is why they go college [1].

*The fear of God makes a hero; the fear of man makes a coward.*

-- Alvin York  
(1887-1964)

To accomplish the objective that parents hope, expect, and pray for their children while in college, the academic degree must be career driven. Moreover, it is important that the teachers understand this point [2].

If both points are agreed upon, then, the academic degree is worth the thousands of tuition dollars that students and their parents pay. However, if both points are not understood, if they are violated by a mixed message within the department and/or the faculty, then, the

hopes and expectations of the students and their parents are little more than wishful thinking. Such an outcome would seem to be quackery.

No doubt there are numerous definitions of a quack [3]. However, for the purpose of this article, a college teacher who acts singly or collectively as in a department to promote an idea and/or result that is untrue is quackery. Understandably, while the salient characteristics of “academic fraud” are not all that common, it has been around for decades. It is in reality a type of pseudo-academics; a term known only to those who understand the ineffectiveness of a meaningless academic degree. Think about it. Would the faculty of an academic department take deliberate steps to intentionally deceive students and others for personal gain (i.e., continued employment)? The publishing of false statements on department websites has been a problem with various academic degree programs.

In determining whether a college teacher or a department is committing quackery, it is important to address what is acceptable evidence of the failure of the academic majors to provide solid career opportunities. Because there is some level of uncertainty, that is, whether the students are actually working hard to locate a career, it is common practice

*Wisdom is found only in truth.*

*-- Johann Goethe  
(1749-1832)*

for many academic exercise physiologists to explicitly state the future expectations of earning the degree. Often, this kind of thinking leads to a situation that benefits the faculty, while the college graduates suffer from a financial loss that is hard to correct without going back to school.

Getting at the root problem of deceit isn't easy. Is it the department chair, the faculty, or the administration driving the practice? However, if it isn't clear, it should be clear that to knowingly promote a meaningless academic degree while realizing that the students do not have a chance of locating a good paying job is deceitful advertising. It is quackery (i.e., doing whatever benefits the faculty but does little to help the students), and it is fraud. As to the latter, it is simply a matter of the department chair and/or the exercise physiologists knowing that they have misrepresented career opportunities of the academic major.

Do college teachers know that exercise science is a meaningless degree? If they do and yet, they misrepresent the degree, then, they are committing fraud [4]. To be specific, fraud is an intentional deception made for personal gain or to damage another individual. While most college teachers are likely not to be interested in damaging their students, they certainly appear to be intentionally deceiving them for personal gain. Very specifically, if they can keep the students as academic majors, the department isn't likely to be closed. Faculty members keep their jobs plus they have the opportunity to do research to move up in rank and salary.

Defrauding students of their tuition dollars is a not-so-common recognized purpose of fraud, yet it exists. Academic fraud is closely tied to false advertising. As mentioned earlier, when faculty members deliberately misrepresent the importance of an academic major and students suffer financial damages, it is fraud. Deliberate misrepresentation of the facts that undergird an academic major is fraud. Why? Because the department chair and/or faculty knew beforehand that the product (academic degree) was defective or the investment was worthless! On the other hand, yes, it is likely that some department chairs and their faculty promote an academic major without knowledge of a deception. If that is the case, then, they need to find a different career or take a serious look at the problems their students face following graduation.

*A prudent question is one-half of wisdom*

-- Francis Bacon  
(1561-1626)

What is also interesting is that students are obligated to investigate whether the academic degree is worth the tuition dollars. Failure to take the appropriate time to read articles such as this one and others in the *Professionalization of Exercise Physiology* online [5] and *Journal of Professional Exercise Physiology* [6] can seriously weaken a fraud case in court later. The chair, faculty, and administration can claim that the alleged victims (students) had every opportunity to discover the potential for deliberate misrepresentation (fraud) and failed to investigate the matter thoroughly. Once the students entered into a legally binding pursuit of a college education (i.e., a contract that has a dollar amount for an expected result), remorse over the terms of the deal is not the same as fraud.

The administration of every academic institution has been delegated authority for financial and academic resources. It is therefore accountable to the public for the proper use of these resources. The administration (Vice-Presidents, Deans, and Chairs) should also be held accountable for the quality of jobs available to their students, particularly given the context of specific department websites as advertisements. After all, it is clear that certain academic degrees are substantially less career oriented. That's why the deans, chairs, and faculty should be held accountable to the actual value (if any) of continuing to offer the same academic degree without updating it or getting rid of it for something better?

This problem is real and it needs serious attention, especially by academic exercise physiologists. According to Michael Snyder [7], "...there are over 18 million students enrolled at the nearly 5,000 colleges and universities currently in operation across the

*If you have a job without aggravations, you don't have a job.*

*-- Malcolm Forbes  
(1919-1990)*

United States. Many of these institutions of higher learning are now charging \$20,000, \$30,000 or even \$40,000 a year for tuition and fees. That does not even count living expenses. Today it is 400% more expensive to go to college in the United States than it was just 30 years ago." To personalize the issue for a moment, how would you feel if the tuition and fees

are in the \$140,000 or more range for your son or daughter? Oh, you say "He or she will be able to locate a good job. I believe that it will happen." Good, but what if it doesn't happen? What then?

College students have been told by their parents, society, and especially educators that a college education is the key to a successful future. Forget about the tuition and additional living fees. If necessary (and it always is), there are plenty of loans available. Once again, Snyder [7] says, "...our economy is facing the biggest student loan debt bubble in the history of the world, and when our new college graduates enter the "real world" they are finding out that the good jobs they were promised are very few and far between."

Think about it for a moment. Is this the present day situation with exercise science, kinesiology, human performance, and similar undergraduate degrees? Is this why college

graduates are waiting tables or stocking the shelves at retail stores? Is this why they end up disappointed and barely able to financially survive, especially given their student loan debt? If the answer is “yes” – then, why aren’t the students being warned about these meaningless degree programs? Why isn’t something being done to produce updated and meaningful academic majors? The “leftovers dilemma” of physical education degree titles is an academic mess.

The problem that is being analyzed in this article isn’t about the for profit colleges telling students that they will be able to make a ton of money if they simply pay for an academic degree [8]. It isn’t about the college and/or university becoming a consumer-oriented market. In fact, there shouldn’t be any problem with academic institutions’ responsibility to produce a sound product that is purchased by tuition dollars and a lot of hard work, commitment, and time. The sad part is that apparently the university teachers fail to get that their responsibility is to their students and then to the university system. The issue here is not the quest of moving college graduates up the ladder of prosperity. Rather, it is about the college graduates failing to find jobs so they can repay their tuition loans and meet other financial obligations.

*Chivalry is knowing what to do in a given situation and then having the courage to act without regard to the outcome.*

*-- Rex Page*

Everyone seems to believe that what they think and what they are doing should not be questioned. And yet, hardly anyone within the academic side of the exercise science, kinesiology, or sports sciences major has thought about or executed a strategic update of their degree programs. Do they realize that there are 40 or more similar undergraduate degrees; all resulting from the conflicted transition from physical education? Here in this context, leadership is about students. It is about finding a vision [9], putting it into action, and doing what one can with what he or she has at that moment in time. It is about the desire to recognize limitations and to move forwards even with one’s imperfections and mistakes [10].

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