

Re-Examining the Undergraduate Core in Kinesiology in a Time of Change

Submitted by

Robert W. Christina

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

This report focuses on the proposed undergraduate core of kinesiology that emanated from the meeting of the American Kinesiology Association (AKA) which was held in Orlando, Florida on February 5 – 7, 2009. It is based on the author’s interpretation of the presentations and discussions that took place at the meeting. The author also took the liberty of elaborating on selected issues and points of discussion and proposing future steps that could possibly be taken.

The purpose of the Orlando meeting was to re-examine and if possible, identify the undergraduate core of the field of kinesiology. The program was attended by 42 participants (deans, department chairs, undergraduate coordinators) representing 33 institutions of higher education from 13 states. In attempting to re-define the undergraduate core of kinesiology the meeting was unique and the first of its kind since the 1960s.

The Proposed Undergraduate Core of Kinesiology

The speakers (Phil Martin, 2009; Jim Morrow, 2009; Gil Reeve, 2009; & Roberta Rikli, 2009) presented on the major issues involved in developing a common core for the field of kinesiology and the participants engaged in a spirited discussion following each presentation. Speakers delivered their presentations and participants engaged in discussion of the core based on the AKA definitions of *kinesiology*, *physical activity*, and the *knowledge base of kinesiology*. *Kinesiology* was defined as the academic field which involves the study of physical activity and its impact on health, society, and quality of life. And, *physical activity* was defined as activities of daily living, work, sport, dance and play as well as exercise for improvement of health and physical fitness, rehabilitation from injury, disability and disease, and conditioning and training for athletics and other high performance activities. The *knowledge base of kinesiology* integrates information gained through

experiencing physical activity, through professional application, and through multidimensional scholarly approaches to the study of physical activity---biological, medical and health-related aspects, psychological and social-humanistic.

In his presentation, Martin (2009) pointed out that the ultimate goal was to reach agreement concerning the essential elements of the undergraduate core in kinesiology. He defined the *core as fundamental, essential, categories of knowledge that define the field* and also referred to Lawson's (2007) definition of the *core as a common denominator of knowledge, values, sensitivities, and skills*. Alternatively, and stated in question form, Lawson asked, "*What should every undergraduate kinesiology major know or be able to do?*"

Some other questions that surfaced for discussion were as follows. Is the academic discipline the whole field or only part of it? Does the academic discipline include professional programs (e.g., physical education-teacher education, sport management, athletic training) or does it stand separate from professional programs serving only to provide them with subject matter. Is it possible to develop a field of kinesiology without the constraints of discipline and profession such as nursing, medicine, and law have done? Is the core a valid, miniaturized version of the field at large? Basic questions such as these clearly revealed to those attending the Orlando meeting some of the complexities involved in developing a core that is universally accepted.

In her presentation, Rikli (2009) encouraged participants to ask, *what is the core content of kinesiology*, and not what is the core content of kinesiology given various constraints such as a small number or the limited expertise of faculty members in a program or pressing multiple agendas (Newell, 2007)? As discussion proceeded among the participants, consensus was reached that the goal was to try to develop the core content for the entire field of kinesiology as defined by AKA independent of the limitations, constraints, and agendas that various programs face. Further, the focus was on core content of kinesiology rather than on core courses found in kinesiology programs. Core content is not the same as core courses, which are how the content is packaged and delivered to students in a curriculum. How the core content is packaged for delivery and the extent to which the core content is covered

differs among kinesiology programs across the nation based on local constraints such as the number and expertise of the faculty members in the program, institutional and college or school priorities that impact the kinesiology program, and the diversity, needs and accreditation demands of professional programs involved.

After considerable discussion among the AKA members at the Orlando meeting, agreement was reached on a proposed common undergraduate core content of the field of kinesiology. The following proposed common core statements were drafted at the Orlando meeting.

Proposed Undergraduate Core of Kinesiology

The American Kinesiology Association believes that undergraduate majors in kinesiology should share a common core of knowledge. The common core establishes broad knowledge categories that can be used as a guide by faculty in kinesiology to examine and refine current educational expectations, policies and practices.

The undergraduate degree in kinesiology includes principles and experiences focused on physical activity across the lifespan. These include:

- *Physical activity in health, wellness, and quality of life*
- *Scientific foundations of physical activity*
- *Cultural, historical and philosophical dimensions of physical activity*
- *The practice of physical activity.*

The next step will be to distribute the description of the undergraduate core of kinesiology to all AKA members. Members will be asked to carefully review the proposed statements that describe the core content of the field of kinesiology and provide feedback. AKA members will have the opportunity to respond (feedback) in one of the following ways: (a) accept all of the proposed core content statements as they were proposed and agreed upon at the Orlando meeting, or (b) accept one or more of them as they were proposed and the other(s) contingent upon recommended changes, or (c) reject all of them in favor of a completely new set of proposed

statements. Once all the responses have been received and revisions made, the revised draft will be distributed to all AKA members for approval.

Future Tasks

Three other future tasks directly related to the proposed core of kinesiology were the targets of lively discussion at the Orlando meeting. These tasks involve (a) explaining the four proposed core categories, (b) identifying of the core competencies, and (c) developing strategies for packaging the core content.

Explaining the Four Core Categories

After final approval of the core knowledge content statements is achieved, one future task is for each of the four broad core categories to be explained in written form so that everyone in the field of kinesiology knows exactly what they mean. Explanations should define the scope and the nature of the content of each of the four core categories especially with regard to what each one includes and excludes. Without such explanations, the four core categories could be easily misinterpreted from one department to another to mean something very different than what was intended by AKA. For instance, Steve Wallace of the department of kinesiology at San Francisco State University pointed out that it is important that the *scientific foundations of physical activity* category be broad and comprehensive so that it is not interpreted too narrowly by one or more the programs and departments. He argued that not doing so, would allow any department to interpret what it meant by *scientific foundations of physical activity* to their own liking. Steve claimed that this is what happened at UCLA and the University of Colorado at Boulder. He indicated that, “These departments started to emphasize physiology and even micro-biology to become more *scientific*. In short, their interpretation was too narrow, and they started to resemble a biology department, and we know the consequences. It is important that the *scientific foundations of physical activity* be broad and comprehensive, and I think the AKA needs to make it clearer as to what these are. I don’t think we need to talk about courses such as biomechanics, motor learning and socio-cultural, but we need to use terms that provide a clear message

that kinesiology studies physical activity in a comprehensive manner.” (S. Wallace, personal communication, February 19, 2009).

Although Steve’s argument and recommendation was focused solely on the *scientific foundations of physical activity* core category, it seems reasonable that it should be extended to the other three core categories so that there is no room for misinterpretation among programs in departments at different colleges or universities. Thus, it is recommended that thorough explanations defining the scope and nature of the content be developed for each of the four core categories. However, the explanations must not be so definitive or constraining that they prevent faculty members in various programs from selecting the specific core content, packaging it and delivering it in ways that are best suited for their respective programs given their faculty resources and expertise, and the constraints, culture and political context of their department, school or college and university.

Once written explanations of the four broad core categories are drafted, the AKA members should have the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the proposed statements. Once all the responses have been received and revisions made, the revised written draft of the four explanations will be distributed to all AKA members for approval.

Identifying the Core Competencies

Once the AKA membership has approved the (a) written statements describing the undergraduate core of kinesiology, and (b) written explanations of each of the four core categories, the next step is to *identify the core competencies*. Based on Gil Reeve’s (2009) presentation and discussion by the AKA members present at the Orlando meeting, the next order of business for the AKA Executive Committee should be to arrange for the *identification of the competencies* for each of the four core categories and suggest possible *levels of attainment* for the competencies identified. Doing this would give each individual program the opportunity to select the core competencies that are most appropriate for their programs given their faculty resources and expertise, and the constraints, culture, and political context of their department, school/college and university. Once core competencies are selected, individual programs would be responsible for the development of the *five*

to seven expected student learning outcomes that would emanate from each of the four core content categories.

Based on Reeve's (2009) presentation at the Orlando meeting, a student-learning outcome is a specific statement that describes the (a) knowledge, (b) skills, and/or (c) attitudes that students are expected to learn upon completion of a course or program (or more generally, upon completion of a set of learning experiences). The outcomes should be stated using student-centered, observable and measurable terms. Several examples of student learning outcomes for a core competency in kinesiology that focuses on the role of physical activity in promoting health and wellness across the lifespan are as follows:

- Student will be able *to describe* the role of physical activity in promoting health and wellness across the lifespan.
- Student will be able *to explain* the role of physical activity in promoting health and wellness across the lifespan.
- Student will be able *to develop* physical activity programs that promote health and wellness across the lifespan.
- Student will be able *to assess* physical activity programs that promote health and wellness across the lifespan.

Individual programs also would be responsible for identifying and explaining the methods of direct and indirect assessment that they plan to use to determine when and the extent to which each expected learning outcome was achieved.

Developing Strategies for Packaging the Core Content

Identifying and defining the core content of kinesiology is one thing, but how to package it for successful delivery is another. The extent to which those in the field are successful in delivering the core content will depend on how it is packaged for delivery to the undergraduate students who they serve. Simply packaging the core content into the typical course structures (e.g., sport psychology, history and philosophy of sport, biomechanics of sport) as we have traditionally done the past forty five years will not produce the desired results for at least two reasons. First, the focus is not only on just on addressing the problems and issues central to the narrower topic of *sport*, but on addressing the problems and issues central to the

much the broader topic of *physical activity*. Thus, the course content will have to be structured or arranged in such a way so that students are able to learn about the major problems that are central to *physical activity* as well as how to address them. For instance, instead of a course typically titled History and Philosophy of Sport, it might be titled History and Philosophy of Physical Activity. And second, many of the solutions to problems that are central to physical activity will demand learning of the cross-disciplinary as well as sub-disciplinary knowledge that exists. Many in our field already know how to structure its knowledge content in a sub-disciplinary way, but now must also arrange and develop the core content in a cross-disciplinary manner such that students learn about the myriad of physical activity or inactivity problems that exist and possible ways to address them.

Some of the discussion at the AKA Orlando conference focused on the importance of packaging of the core content properly. Several individuals suggested possible strategies for packaging the core content, two of which were as follows:

- Case studies of physical activity or inactivity problems (e.g., obesity, falls in the elderly) and possible solutions and have students study them from various cross-disciplinary perspectives; and
- Core themes (e.g., obesity, falls in the elderly) and have students study such problems as (a) obesity, (b) how we move, (c) why we move, and (d) what happens if we don't move from various cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Case studies and themes are a couple of possible ways in which students could learn about real physical activity or inactivity problems and how they might be addressed. Rather than the faculty member always selecting the case studies of themes, it was also suggested that students could be given the opportunity to select them based on their interest and major field of study. Indeed, ways of restructuring the core content of kinesiology to effectively focus on *physical activity or inactivity* problems and possible solutions from a cross-disciplinary perspective as well as a sub-disciplinary perspective is a challenge that needs to be addressed in the near future.

Summary

One of the factors that divided the field of *kinesiology* was the absence of an undergraduate core for the field. The AKA meeting in Orlando attempted to resolve this problem by re-examining and if possible, identifying the undergraduate core in kinesiology. In attempting to redefine the undergraduate core, it was unique and the first meeting of its kind since the 1960s. Based on the AKA's definition of (a) *kinesiology*, (b) physical activity, and (c) the knowledge base of *kinesiology*, and spirited discussion, agreement was reached on a proposed undergraduate core of *kinesiology* by AKA members attending the 2009 Orlando meeting.

Following review and approval of the proposed core by the AKA membership, future tasks could include (a) explaining the four broad core categories so that everyone in the field knows what they mean; (b) the identifying of the core competencies for each of the four core categories and suggesting possible levels of attainment for the competencies so that individual programs can use that information to select the core competencies and the expected learning outcomes that they want their students to achieve; and (c) suggesting possible strategies for packaging the core content of kinesiology not only in ways that take advantage of sub-disciplinary knowledge, but also cross-disciplinary knowledge that focuses on problems and possible solutions that are central to *physical activity*.

References

- Lawson, H. A. (2007). **Renewing the core curriculum.** *Quest, 59*, 219-243.
- Martin, P. (2009). *Kinesiology Curricula: What's Our Core?* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Kinesiology Association, Orlando, FL.
- Morrow, Jr., J. R. (2009). *The Politics of the Core: Accommodating the Professions.* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Kinesiology Association, Orlando, FL.
- Newell, K. (2007). **Kinesiology: Challenges of multiple agendas.** *Quest, 59*, 5-24.
- Reeve, T. G. (2009). *Core Knowledge Competencies, Learning Outcomes and Assessment.* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Kinesiology Association, Orlando FL.
- Rikli, R. E. (2009). *Re-examining the Kinesiology Core: Are Changes in Order?* Paper presented at the meeting of the American Kinesiology Association, Orlando, FL.