

The American Kinesiology Association

POSITION STATEMENT #1

Kinesiology on the Move: One of the Fastest Growing (But Often Misunderstood) Majors in Academia

In universities across the country, kinesiology programs continue to expand and evolve as they address some of society's greatest concerns, with larger departments often enrolling well over 1,000 majors. Kinesiology, the academic discipline that studies physical activity and its impact on health, society, and quality of life, has emerged in recent years as the undergraduate degree of choice for many students seeking careers in a variety of allied health/medical fields, as well as in more traditional areas such as fitness, health promotion, physical education, recreation, and sport.

Enrollment patterns in a number of institutions confirm the heightened interest in a kinesiology as an undergraduate major. The more than 11,300 kinesiology majors in the California State University system, for example, reflects a 50.5% increase over a 5-year period compared to a 6.5% increase in overall enrollments, with similar increases observed in other states. A positive outcome of the growing interest in kinesiology in recent years, and of the field's significantly expanded science base, has been its official recognition in 2006 by the National Research Council as an academic discipline in the Life Sciences and its inclusion in the Taxonomy of Research Doctoral Programs.

The Multi-Faceted Scientific Nature of Kinesiology

A key factor in kinesiology's unprecedented growth and increased popularity as an undergraduate degree choice has been its expanded scientific basis and its increased professional application opportunities. Kinesiology departments are generally comprised of several specialized areas of study such as biomechanics, sociocultural foundations of sport, sport and exercise psychology, exercise physiology, motor behavior, physical education teacher education, athletic training, sport medicine, and sport management, all of which are viewed by the American Kinesiology Association as either fundamental building blocks of the field or professional applications.

These specializations have a synergistic relationship with each other, in that all derive from a common study of physical activity. This is especially true at the undergraduate level where students often are required to take courses in each of these curricular areas as part of their degree programs, either as complementary or prerequisite knowledge. As such, a kinesiology department is not unlike an anthropology department which may be segmented into cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, linguistics, and archeology, or a psychology department with specializations in social, industrial, clinical, experimental, and physiological psychology.

Kinesiology Draws its Strength from Integration

The integrated and multi-faceted nature of kinesiology programs has contributed to its success and has served students well. The disciplinary synergy of kinesiology programs

is weakened when one or more of the specializations are transferred to other units in the college or university. Prior experience has shown that in the cases where a kinesiology department or units thereof have been transferred, the result can work to the disadvantage of both the transferred faculty and to the departments to which they have been moved. Kinesiology faculty may discover that they have little in common with other faculty in the unit to which they are transferred, and the receiving unit may find it awkward to integrate kinesiology into its existing specializations. Several years after disassembling various specialized areas of study and sending them off to other organizational units, both the University of Tennessee and the University of Georgia found it necessary to recombine them into one department. At the University of Texas the physical education-teacher education unit was moved to another department in the School of Education. After several years it was moved back into a comprehensive department of kinesiology.

Although the American Kinesiology Association recognizes that local issues always affect institutional planning, and that sometimes this requires a shuffling of departmental units across disciplinary lines, we strongly believe that students, society, and an institution's best interests are served by retaining the sub-units of this multi-faceted field in one department, named kinesiology.