Strength and Conditioning Education for the 21st Century

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As the Chairperson of the newly formed NSCA Education Committee, I have received many telephone calls, many of which were forwarded to me by the NSCA National Office from prospective students who were interested to learn which institutions of higher learning they could attend in order to pursue a degree in strength and conditioning.

Strength and conditioning, per se, is not often found as a major, a minor, or even an area of study at most colleges and universities. However, many institutions offer an excellent course of study in exercise physiology. Additionally, many of those programs do emphasize anaerobic training and adaptations. Many also offer technique (activity) classes in resistance training, and some even have a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) on their faculty or staff. These programs already prepare students for certification as a CSCS and should be recognized as such.

Because of the aforementioned requests for information on schools that provide a course of study in strength and conditioning, the NSCA Education Committee was asked to develop a list of schools that have programs in strength and conditioning. However, the education committee felt that it would be inappropriate and perhaps exclusionary to develop such a list at this time. The committee felt that if NSCA distributed a list of schools, it might somehow imply that these schools were endorsed or recognized by the NSCA and that such recognition implied a level of quality. Conversely, if a school did not appear on the list, it might be construed that the NSCA did not recognize them.

Therefore, the NSCA Education Committee decided that if the NSCA were to recognize schools that have an emphasis in strength and conditioning, they should be approved by the NSCA Education Committee for having met established criteria of offering specific content in strength and conditioning. This recognition then, would be similar to accreditation of these programs, although recognition is not as stringent as accreditation. Accreditation is usually much more in-depth and includes things such as a self-study and an on-campus visit to ensure quality.

It is a long-term goal of many individuals in the NSCA, as well as of the NSCA Education Committee, to improve the level of formal education offered in strength and conditioning and to recognize those programs that are assisting our efforts. Having a “recognized curriculum” in strength and conditioning would NOT require having a major in strength and conditioning. What it will require is having an emphasis in strength and conditioning and having a dedication to advance the NSCA and the field of strength and conditioning. Many of today’s outstanding exercise physiology programs already do that (2).

The NSCA Education Committee believes that accreditation of educational programs is in the future of the NSCA and is in the long-term best interest of the association and the profession. The initial step, however, will be to recognize curricula that emphasize strength and conditioning and to have that list available in the national office and on the associa-
tion’s web site as a resource for prospective students.

This should also be considered as an important recruiting tool for many colleges and universities. Having this recognition will be the comparative advantage for many colleges and universities. Being recognized will help distinguish an exemplary program that includes anaerobic conditioning from an otherwise ordinary exercise science curriculum. In fact, those programs that are not recognized by the NSCA may be at a disadvantage when marketing their program to students.

The NSCA will begin an aggressive marketing campaign to attract institutions of higher learning to submit themselves to the NSCA Education Committee for approval for recognition as having a curriculum with an emphasis in strength and conditioning.

It should be noted that recognizing curricula in strength and conditioning is only the first step in a series of steps (in a long-range plan established by the NSCA leadership) to strengthen the profession of strength and conditioning. Other steps to look forward to may include revising the CSCS certification examination, granting accreditation to educational curricula in strength and conditioning, and strengthening the eligibility requirements for sitting for the CSCS certification examination (1).

This is an exciting time for our profession. However, change is sometimes difficult. It has been said that “while change simply for the sake of change is seldom wise, change based on careful thought and input is essential to the continued success of any worthwhile endeavor.” President Wathen, Past-President Chu, the NSCA Board of Directors, and the NSCA Certification Commission all deserve a great deal of credit and praise for having the foresight and intellect to ensure the credibility of the CSCS credential and to promote the profession of strength and conditioning into the 21st century. I urge all members of the NSCA to provide feedback on these issues to the NSCA Education Committee and to the NSCA leadership. This is, indeed, an exciting time for our profession, and together we can affect our future. ▲

■ References


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