

**CHARACTERISTIC OF PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION CONTENT OF THE USA MOST COMMON MAJORS OF PARKS, RECREATION, LEISURE, AND FITNESS STUDIES DIVISION**

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**Annotation.** *Purpose:* The given article deals with the phenomena of relative similarity of content components of the USA physical education field academic plans. *Material:* Undergraduate curriculum as the learning experiences of students in pursuit of a college degree is analyzed for the Parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies division. Data of the comparative analysis of curriculum content of the general education component, division field disciplines and the disciplines of major specialization are presented. *Results:* It is shown that the structure of curriculum at the USA universities has common and quite unified character and consists of three key components: general education, field disciplines and major courses. It was found that for the Parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies division these components are quite similar and display slight divergences not as much in the content of curricula as in the titles of the disciplines studied. *Conclusions:* It is recommended to examine in more detail the content of syllabi of the disciplines.

**Keywords:** bachelor, curriculum, major discipline, parks, recreation, leisure, fitness, USA.

**Introduction**

The acknowledged leadership of the United States of America in the world's economy, its indisputable achievements in sport and social life, as well as highly developed sphere of higher education present the need of investigation of these phenomena by scientists. The general structure of the higher and business education of the USA was studied by Romanvskiy O.O., multicultural aspect of the USA education was investigated by Balytska I.V., civil education of students in the USA was explored by Toporkova Yu.O., modern concepts of social work in the USA were examined by Lifintsev D.V., the tendencies of content development and organizational forms of the USA adult education were studied by Bidiuk N.M. [15, 17, 16, 2, 20, 8, 3].

In the circumstances of space and time limitations we elaborated a comparative algorithm, capable of the fastest and most complete analysis of the issues under examination.

In the course of a close scrutiny of the USA physical education field the division "Parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies" was discovered. The conclusion was made due to the data of the USA educational information sites "Campus Explorer", "The College Board", "College Majors 101". This whole area may be roughly subdivided into eleven relatively separate majors: "Athletic Training", "Fitness Specialist", "Pre-Physical Therapy", "Foods and Nutrition", "K-12 Physical Education Teacher Education", "Adapted Physical Education Teacher Education", "Exercise Science", "Sport Psychology and Leadership", "Sport Administration", "Health Promotion and Recreation Administration" [10, 11].

Having investigated all of them we came to the conclusion that the particular importance have "Athletic Training", "Exercise Science", "Fitness Specialist" and "Physical Education Teacher Education". The latter shall not be an object of study in the present article as it is concerned mostly with the education component which exceeds the goals of the article. It should be noted that the issue of physical education teacher education at the USA universities was investigated by Osadcha T.Yu. [12].

Thus, we shall concentrate on the first three majors. The academic specialization (major) is considered the key element of the bachelor's degree in the USA. Students view it as a principle factor in the choice of educational establishment.

Some of the above listed specializations are further subdivided into smaller and more specialized divisions but on the whole the concept of eleven-component field causes little argument and looks quite logical and reasonable. Not all of them, however, maintain the equal level of popularity and student enrollment. [7, 4]. Some majors may be considered as quite self-sufficient and profitable event at the level of Bachelor's Degree (e.g. Athletic Training, Exercise Science, etc.) while the others may require further study and Master's Degree (e.g. Pre-Physical Therapy).

The statutory title of "athletic trainer" is a misnomer. Athletic trainers provide medical services to all types of people - not just athletes participating in sports - and do not train people as personal or fitness trainers do. However, the profession continues to embrace its proud culture and history by retaining the title. In other countries, athletic therapist and physiotherapist are similar titles. The AT profession was founded on providing medical services to athletes [13]. Commencing with Athletic Training it should be noted that Athletic Trainers (ATs) are health care professionals who collaborate with physicians to provide preventative services, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions.

Athletic training is often confused with personal training. There is, however, a large difference in the education, skill set, job duties and patients of an athletic trainer and a personal trainer. Athletic trainers provide physical medicine, rehabilitative and preventative services. Athletic trainers treat a breadth of patients, including but not limited to: professional, college, secondary school and youth athletes, dancers, musicians and military personnel. Athletic trainers work can work in a variety of locations including schools, physician clinics, hospitals and manufacturing plants.

Athletic trainers work in a variety of different professional settings, including: Professional & Collegiate sports; secondary & intermediate schools; sports medicine clinics; hospital ER & rehab clinics; occupational settings; performing Arts; law Enforcement and Military; physicians' offices.

To become certified athletic trainer, a student must graduate with bachelors or masters degree from an accredited professional athletic training education program and pass a comprehensive test administered by the Board of Certification (the organization that provides a certification program for entry-level Athletic Trainers, establishes and regularly reviews both the standards for the practice of athletic training and the continuing education requirements for BOC Certified ATs) [19]. Once certified, they must meet ongoing continuing education requirements in order to remain certified. Athletic trainers must also work under the direction of a physician and within their state practice act.

Athletic Training as an academic major or graduate equivalent major program is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). The minimum entry point into the profession of Athletic Training is a the baccalaureate level; by 2014-2015, all accredited education programs in Athletic Training will lead to a degree in Athletic Training. Upon completion of a CAATE-accredited Athletic Training education program, students become eligible for national certification by successfully completing the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Board of Certification examination.

NATA represents more than 34,000 members in the U.S. and internationally, and there are about 40,000 ATs practicing nationally. NATA represents students in 325 accredited collegiate academic programs. The athletic training profession began early in the 20th century, and was established in 1950.

A program that prepares individuals to work in consultation with, and under the supervision of physicians to prevent and treat sports injuries and associated conditions. Includes instruction in the identification, evaluation, and treatment of athletic injuries and illnesses; first aid and emergency care; therapeutic exercise; anatomy and physiology; exercise physiology; kinesiology and biomechanics; nutrition; sports psychology; personal and community health; knowledge of various sports and their biomechanical and physiological demands; and applicable professional standards and regulations. An integral part of AT curricula is the clinical component. Students are required to participate in a minimum of two years of academic clinical education. Through these experiences, students must gain clinical experiences with a variety of patient populations who vary by age and types of activities, and who are at risk for both musculoskeletal and general medical conditions. Clinical experiences provide students with opportunities for real patient care while under the direct supervision of qualified preceptors (i.e., Athletic Trainer or other credentialed health care professionals).

As part of a complete healthcare team, the certified athletic trainer works under the direction of a physician and in cooperation with other healthcare professionals, athletics administrators, coaches and parents. The certified athletic trainer gets to know each patient/client individually and can treat injuries more effectively.

A bachelor of science in Exercise Science provides an excellent academic foundation for students choosing to pursue graduate and professional degrees in a wide array of health careers, such as exercise physiology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, medicine and athletic training [6]. Because these fields require post-baccalaureate degrees, students will need to take additional pre-requisites as appropriate for their field of interest. Students who choose to not pursue a post-baccalaureate degree can pursue a career as a personal trainer, wellness coordinator, strength and conditioning coach, or in corporate wellness.

The exercise science program provides students with a solid academic foundation in anatomy, physiology and chemistry in support of cutting-edge courses in applied exercise science and rehabilitation. Students are required to take major courses including functional anatomy, biomechanics, exercise assessment and prescription, and exercise physiology. The program is structured to provide students with the opportunity to develop the skills and abilities that are critical in the growing fields of health, fitness, medicine and rehabilitation.

Upon graduation, students are equipped to work in a variety of professional settings including community recreational agencies, health-related clinics and hospitals, and corporate and sport industries. The major also provides an excellent foundation for those choosing to pursue advanced education in occupational therapy, physical therapy, and other fields related to exercise and health science [5].

Graduates of the Exercise Science stream can pursue careers with both the public and private sectors in a variety of roles. A research career is also an option if the graduate completes an honors degree and then a higher degree. From the point of view of the field application of knowledge, career opportunities with major in exercise science may be such as following.

In fitness industry they can work as: fitness center manager (fitness leader, fitness programmer, personal trainer); recreation/ activity officer (a wide variety of companies in the health and tourism sectors employ graduates to provide sport and recreation services for their clients).

In the sphere of pure Exercise Science there may the positions as: Sport Scientist, Exercise physiologist, and Biomechanist. These jobs are concerned with the testing and training of elite athletes. Sport scientists work in laboratories and wherever athletes train and compete. The role of the sport scientist is to assist the athlete and coach to improve performance. Sport scientists conduct research in an attempt to improve sport equipment and training techniques. The majority of employers are institutes and academies of sport. The Defence Forces also employ exercise scientists to train soldiers and conduct research. Some sporting equipment manufacturers employ sports scientists to help design racquets, bats, balls, shoes, etc. Graduates with a specific interest in a sport should consider a career as a coach with an institute of sport or sporting association. Some elite coaches are able to work for themselves.

The career of Strength and Conditioning Specialist focuses on the physical preparation of athletes. Strength and conditioning specialists work in Institutes and Academies of Sport and are also employed by many professional and semi-professional sporting teams.

As for the medical/clinical environment, the careers may be:

- Cardiac/Respiratory technician. This position may involve cardiac stress testing and/or lung function testing under the supervision of a cardiologist for the purpose of diagnosis of cardiovascular and pulmonary disease. Employers are almost exclusively hospitals.
- Cardiac Rehabilitation/Exercise physiologist. This job involves the prescription of exercise for those who have had heart surgery or those with heart disease, obesity, insulin resistance, Type II diabetes, elevated cholesterol, osteoporosis. Employers are almost exclusively hospitals
- Exercise Rehabilitation. This is a growth industry that provides a rehabilitation service for those injured in the work place. Most of the opportunities exist with small businesses. Work in this area usually requires a post graduate qualification.
- Corporate Health. Fitness/health/exercise consultant: implementation of a health package tailored for the specific needs of an organization. This organization may have needs for both "white" & "blue" collar working populations. Physiological testing can help employees identify their capacity to perform the required tasks with minimal risk to themselves. Most employers are small businesses or you may be self employed.

Dwelling upon Fitness Specialist major, it should be mentioned that fitness specialists lead and teach exercise routines, in addition to offering training advice and motivation. Prospective fitness specialists earn professional credentials, educational certificates or associate's and bachelor's degrees in physical fitness or exercise science.

Fitness specialists typically work for organizations, such as universities, health clubs, professional gymnasiums, resorts, country clubs and hospitals. They work with small or large groups to help improve clients' fitness levels or to rehabilitate injuries. Some fitness specialists may hold personal training sessions at a gym or in clients' homes, in which they help clients reach personal fitness goals.

Before performing an exercise regiment with a class or client, fitness specialists assess the physical condition of the participants. They lead warm-up activities, like stretching, and run through an entire exercise program. A fitness specialist may assist or offer suggestions to individuals who are having difficulty. In addition to exercise duties, a fitness specialist also performs administrative work, which may include leading tours of fitness facilities, registering new members, monitoring the front desk, writing articles or supervising exercise rooms [1].

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the training necessary for a fitness specialist career varies greatly by employer. Most fitness specialists must acquire a high school diploma and pursue education at the college level. Technical schools and community colleges frequently offer certificate or associate's degree programs in physical fitness. Some employers prefer a fitness specialist with a bachelor's degree in exercise physiology, kinesiology, or health and fitness.

Other requirements for this position include maintaining a positive mental outlook and remaining physically fit. Fitness specialists lead exercise classes and demonstrate workouts, so being able to perform these activities is important. Additionally, because interacting with clients is a major component of the job, fitness specialists must have effective, friendly communication skills.

Employers usually look for fitness specialists with professional certifications from organizations that are officially accredited. Certification may verify expertise in a specific type of exercise, like pilates or yoga, as well as a type of training, such as group fitness or personal training.

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) offers several certifications, including the Advanced Health and Fitness Specialist credential, which requires the highest level of training. This designation requires fitness specialists to hold certification, along with ACE Personal Trainer or equivalent certification, though a bachelor's degree in Exercise Science fulfills this requirement. Additionally, candidates must complete at least 300 hours of professional work experience and an exam.

#### **Purpose, tasks of the work, material and methods**

*The purpose of the research* is to study and provide comparative analysis of curriculum content for the most importance majors: Athletic Training, Exercise Science, Fitness Specialist.

*The tasks of the research:* on the base of comparative analysis of curriculum content to study up-to-date situation of structure of the general education component, field disciplines and specialization/major disciplines.

*The methods of the research:* analytical analysis of scientific-methodic literature, pedagogic observations.

*Organization of the research:* the received results were processed with the help of pedagogic analytical analysis, comparative analysis of curriculum content.

#### **Results of the research**

The given scientific studies, in terms of curricula structure, indicate their hierarchical order and complex structure. It was discovered, however, that their general frame is based on three key components: the general education component, science field disciplines and disciplines of majoring [14, 21, 18].

Thus, the majors' peculiarities being displayed, we are shifting to the essence of the article, comparative analysis of curriculum content. As far as the analysis of the programmers on the whole proved to be ineffective, we shall execute it in three stages. At the first stage the general education component will be compared, at the second stage – field disciplines and at the third stage – specialization/major disciplines [9].

Speaking of the general education component it should be noted that despite slight differences between the majors the former component is practically the same for every specialization even taking into consideration majors beyond kinesiology realm. The Table 1 epitomizes the given disciplines and points out at the divergences.

Table 1

*List and credits of General Education component*

Discipline	College	Athletic Training (Pennsylvania State University)	Exercise Science (Indiana University of Pennsylvania)	Fitness Specialist (Pennsylvania State University)
Composition		6	7	6
College Algebra		3	-	3
Chemical Principles		4	3	3-4
General Psychology		3	3	3
Elementary Statistics		4	3	4
Humanities		6	9	6
Arts		6	3	6
Effective Speech		3	-	3
Total credits		35	28	34-35

The disciplines presented in the table are taken from the correspondent major's curricula and bear integral information. For the purposes of our research the slight differences in the discipline titles are omitted. It also should be born in mind that different establishments have different systems of discipline subdivision i.e. at one university where general chemistry is considered as a course of general education, in another it may be a subject of field disciplines. However within the number of general education and even field courses the level of matching is very high.

The information given in the Table 1 is taken from the most explicit programs of study in each area. Athletic Training's curriculum is represented by Pennsylvania State University, Exercise Science by Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Fitness Specialist by Pennsylvania State University.

The course of College Algebra which is studied at Pennsylvania State University is omitted at Indiana University of Pennsylvania but this fact doesn't note that the discipline is not studied there. As it turned out it is integrated in the course of elementary statistics, as well as the course of Effective Speech at the latter university is an integral part of Arts and Humanities and is not represented as a separate discipline. Basically, the conclusion to be drawn is that of 120 credits of BS degree from 30 to 35 are assigned to general education disciplines. The set of these disciplines is practically the same for all establishments under study.

Table 2 reflects the tentative picture of field disciplines which despite specialization differences bear common core. This is quite natural and understandable because all three specializations belong to the area of Kinesiology. Particularly noticeable is the similarity between educational programs of San Diego State University. Unfortunately this establishment doesn't have Exercise Science major so that we could compare all three specializations within the framework of a single university.

Table 2

*List and credits of Division disciplines' (Parks, recreation, leisure, and fitness studies)*

Athletic Training (San Diego State University)	Exercise Science (Bowling Green State University)	Fitness Specialist (San Diego State University)
Human Anatomy	Introduction to Kinesiology	Human Anatomy
Prin of Cell & Molecular Biology	Lifetime Fitness	General Biology
General Chemistry	Structural and Functional Bases of Human Movement	Intro to General Chemistry
Fundamentals of Nutrition	Motor Development Across Lifespan	Fundamentals of Nutrition
Introductory Psychology	Motor Learning	Introductory Psychology
Introduction to Physiological Psychology	Exercise Physiology	Introductory Sociology: The Study of Society
Introductory Sociology: The Study of Society	Applied Exercise Physiology	ENS Activity (2) Weight Training (1)
Intro to ENS	Biomechanics of Human Movement	Intro to ENS
Care & Prevention of Athletic &Recreational Injuries	Exercise Science Practicum	Care & Prevention of Athletic &Recreational Injuries
Care & Prevention Lab	Human Anatomy	Biostatistics
Biostatistics	Nutrition	
	Introduction to Research in HMSLS	
	Foundations of Sport Psychology	

	Psychological Aspects of Exercise and Fitness	
Total credits 34	Total credits 40	Total credits 32

Comparing the field component of Athletic Training and Fitness specialist it becomes obvious that they are practically the same mostly due to their belonging to one university. But even in analysis of Exercise Science major it is evident that the courses are pretty much alike. The disciplines which have different titles are still the same if reviewed by their content. This concerns, in particular, the so called ENS discipline at San Diego State University which stands for Exercise and Nutritional Sciences and has its correspondent at Bowling Green State University at the title of Kinesiology, etc.

Thus, the field discipline component takes from 35 to 40 credits out of 120 credits of the whole BS degree program. Via method of mere calculations it is not difficult to assume that the specialization component will include approximately 50 educational credits.

As the Table 3 shows we were right concerning the amount of credits and, as expected, the differences among the specialization disciplines are the greatest. The first staggering fact for a reader is of course the visual quantity of Exercise Science courses. Looking at the number of credits assigned, however, the thing becomes more or less clear. The first thing is that separate disciplines at the Exercise Science section are more volumetric. Exercise Science Internship, for example, solely has 15 credits, while the amount of so called electives may extend to 14 credits.

Table 3

*List and credits of the specialization disciplines*

Athletic Training (San Diego State University)	Exercise Science (Bowling Green State University)	Fitness Specialist (San Diego State University)
Principles of Human Physiology	Exercise Testing and Prescription	Principles of Human Physiology
Nutrition Throughout the Life Span	Exercise Testing and Prescription for Special Cases	Nutrition Throughout the Life Span
Physical Growth and Development	Sport Conditioning	Nutrition for Athletes
History and Philosophy of Sport & PE	Designing and Directing Exercise Programs	Physical Growth and Development
Applied Kinesiology	Exercise Science Internship	History and Philosophy of Sport & PE
Physiology of Exercise	Sport and Public Assembly Facilities	Applied Kinesiology
Exercise Physiology lab	Legal Aspects of Sport and Recreation	Physiology of Exercise
Measurement & Evaluation in Kinesiology	Electives	Exercise Physiology lab
Biomechanics of Human Movement		Measurement & Evaluation in Kinesiology
Motor Learning & Performance		Biomechanics of Human Movement
Scientific Basis of Sports Injuries		Motor Learning & Performance
Clinical Evaluation of Sport Injuries I		Corrective Physical Education
Clinical Evaluation of Sport Injuries II		Adapted Phys Ed Lab
Practicum in Athletic Training		Musculo-Skeletal Fitness
Practicum in Athletic Training		Musculo-Skeletal Fitness Activity
Practicum in Athletic Training		Admin of Exercise & Fitness Program
Practicum in Athletic Training		Exercise, Fitness & Health
Promoting Physical Activity and Health Behavior		Exercise, Fitness & Health Lab
Musculoskeletal Fitness		Exercise, Sport & Aging
Principles & Techniques in Therapeutic Exercise		Promoting Physical Activity and Health Behavior
Organization & Administration in Athletic Training		Fitness Practitioner Internship
Clinical Pathology for Athletic Trainers		
Total credits 53	Total credits 42-47	Total credits 51

On the whole the majoring field may be roughly subdivided into such components as: Kinesiology disciplines, nutritional disciplines and internship i.e. purely majoring courses.

### Conclusions:

Thus, not regarding the exact specialization and establishment under study it may be clearly stated that despite the absence of strict governmental control the educational programmers of the USA universities have common and quite unified character and consist of three key components: general education, field disciplines and major courses. Within the field of physical education, sport and fitness these components are pretty much alike and display slight divergences not as much in the content of curricula as in the titles of the disciplines studied.

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