



## **In This Chapter:**

**What's in a Name? Diversity of University Physical Education Programs 524**

**Career Opportunities for University Physical and Health Education Graduates 526**

Teaching Careers 526

Health Sciences Careers 526

Fitness Careers 528

Sport and Recreation Administration Careers 528

Coaching Careers 528

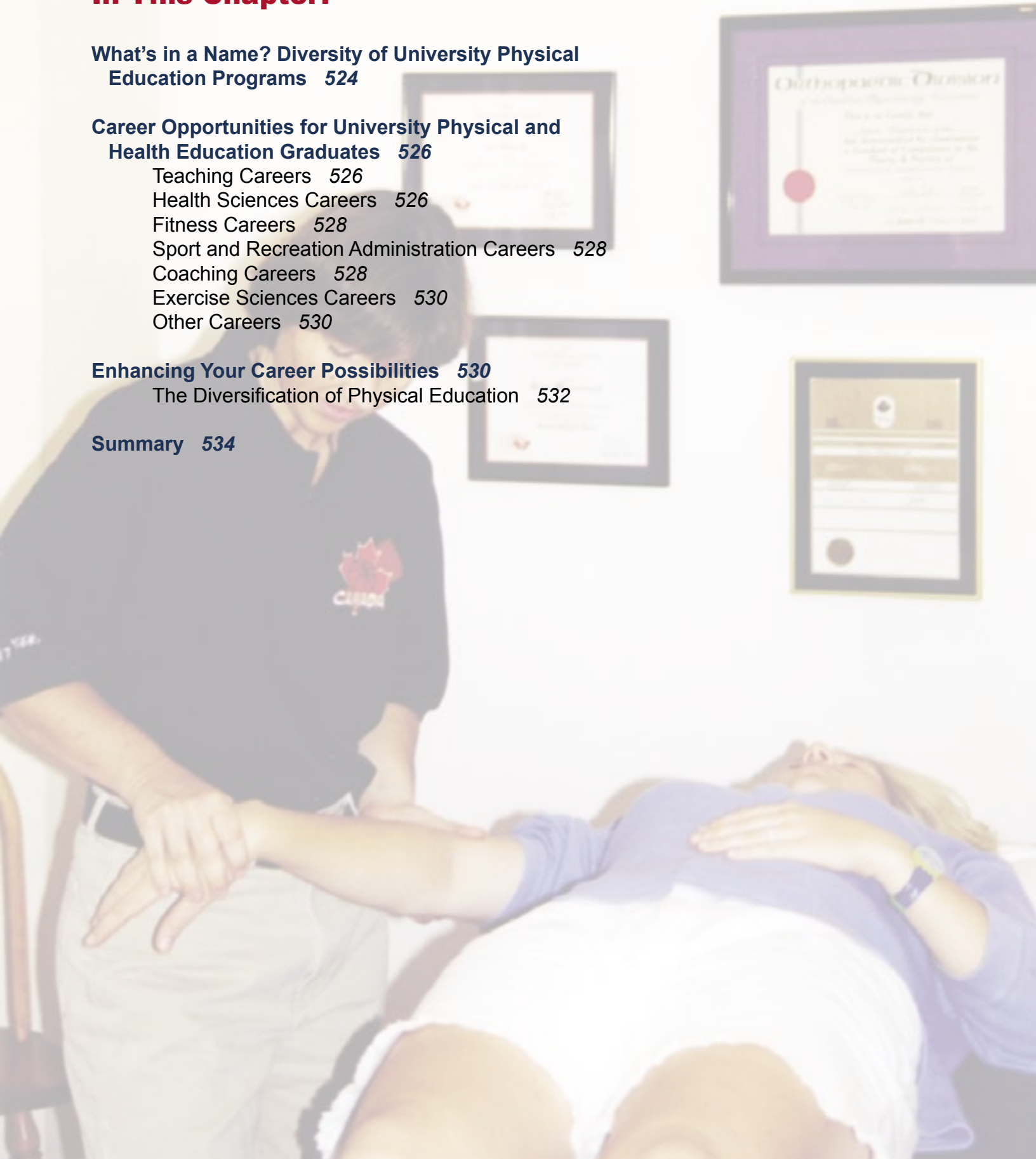
Exercise Sciences Careers 530

Other Careers 530

**Enhancing Your Career Possibilities 530**

The Diversification of Physical Education 532

**Summary 534**





Let's explore careers in PHE...

# CHAPTER 21



## Career Opportunities in Physical and Health Education

**A**fter completing this chapter you should be able to:

- describe the diversity of university programs in physical education;
- identify career opportunities available to physical and health education graduates;
- describe the role of physical and health education in today's society.

**N**otions based on outdated stereotypes sometimes make physical education out to be a field for “dumb jocks.” In addition, when people think about careers in physical and health education, visions of their high school P.E. teachers often come to mind. However, secondary school teaching represents but one of many opportunities available to university graduates in physical and health education. Completion of a university degree in physical and health education (or related field) can provide you with the foundation for numerous further career options such as sports medicine/medical doctor, physiotherapy, business and sport administration, community health, fitness consulting, and many other areas not directly related to physical and health education.

The increased emphasis on physical activity in today’s society as a means to better health as well as improved business productivity has meant a corresponding expansion of career possibilities in a variety of fields.

The diverse positions filled by university physical and health education graduates are a continuing reminder that the old stereotypes and caricatures are fast disappearing. This chapter will survey the diverse learning and career opportunities available in physical education and health-related fields.

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## What’s in a Name? Diversity of University Physical Education Programs

In order to pursue a productive career in fields related to physical and health education it is usually necessary to complete at least an undergraduate university degree. At one time, all Canadian university physical education programs were known by that name. This is because most such university departments were initially formed (between about 1940-1970) primarily to train those planning on teaching physical education in elementary and secondary schools.

Since then a huge evolution has occurred in the diversity of knowledge and its application in the field. This includes major developments in areas such as exercise physiology and biochemistry; sports medicine and exercise rehabilitation; fitness, nutrition, and health; sport psychology; biomechanics and applied ergonomics; sport and recreation administration; and fitness for elderly, disabled, or very young populations as well as advanced training and coaching techniques for elite athletes. This vast expansion of the scope of the discipline has also resulted in the growth of new and exciting areas for employment for graduates.

With the evolution of this expansion has come diversification and partial fragmentation of Canadian university physical and health education programs. None of these university programs is geared entirely to train physical education teachers, although many programs still do this as part of their mandate. And to avoid a narrow association of physical education with training for the school system, many university programs have over the past 20 years changed their name. Of the 36 Canadian universities listed in Table 21.1 that offer “physical and health education” related programs, 25 (or 69 percent) no longer include “physical education” as part of their name. Some of the names that physical and health education has evolved into include “**kinesiology**,” “**human kinetics**,” “**kinanthropology**,” “**exercise sciences**,” and “**human biology**” (Table 21.1).

In the 1960s most university physical education programs were also somehow associated (to a greater or lesser extent) with the university athletics departments. By the late 1990s this had also changed significantly. While some university physical education programs are still administratively linked to athletics, most others are administratively separate, part of faculties of science, or have been combined in some way with other university health science oriented programs, such as physiotherapy and nursing. These developments reflect the continuing evolution of the discipline and its widening contribution to and impact on Canadian society.



**Table 21.1** University physical education programs across the country.

| Name of Program  | University                                 |
|--|--|
| School of Human Kinetics and Recreation                                | Memorial University of Newfoundland (NFLD) |
| Department of Human Kinetics   | St. Francis Xavier University (NS)         |
| School of Health and Human Performance                                 | Dalhousie University (NS)                  |
| School of Recreation Management & Kinesiology                          | Acadia University (NS)                     |
| École de kinésiologie et de récréologie                                | Université de Moncton (NB)                 |
| Faculty of Kinesiology   | University of New Brunswick (NB)           |
| Département d'éducation physique                                       | Université Laval (PQ)                      |
| Département de kinésiologie  | Université de Montréal (PQ)                |
| Département des sciences de l'activité physique                        | Université de Québec à Trois-Rivières (PQ) |
| Department of Exercise Science   | Concordia University (PQ)                  |
| Department of Kinanthropology  | University of Quebec at Montreal (PQ)      |
| Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education                       | McGill University (PQ)                     |
| Faculté d'éducation physique et sportive                               | Université de Sherbrooke (PQ)              |
| Department of Kinesiology  | McMaster University (ON)                   |
| Department of Kinesiology  | University of Waterloo (ON)                |
| Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education                         | Wilfrid Laurier University (ON)            |
| Department of Physical Education<br>Faculty of Applied Health Sciences | Brock University (ON)                      |
| Faculty of Human Kinetics  | University of Windsor (ON)                 |
| Faculty of Physical Education and Health                               | University of Toronto (ON)                 |
| School of Human Kinetics   | Laurentian University (ON)                 |
| School of Human Kinetics   | University of Ottawa (ON)                  |
| School of Kinesiology  | Lakehead University (ON)                   |
| School of Kinesiology  | University of Western Ontario (ON)         |
| School of Kinesiology and Health Science                               | York University (ON)                       |
| School of Physical and Health Education                                | Queen's University (ON)                    |
| Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation Studies                   | University of Manitoba (MB)                |
| Physical Activity and Sport Studies                                    | University of Winnipeg (MB)                |
| College of Kinesiology   | University of Saskatchewan (SK)            |
| Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies                              | University of Regina (SK)                  |
| Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education                       | University of Lethbridge (AB)              |
| Faculty of Kinesiology   | University of Calgary (AB)                 |
| Faculty of Physical Education & Recreation                             | University of Alberta (AB)                 |
| Department of Human Kinetics   | Trinity Western University (BC)            |
| School of Human Kinetics   | University of British Columbia (BC)        |
| School of Kinesiology  | Simon Fraser University (BC)               |
| School of Physical Education   | University of Victoria (BC)                |

Whether university programs are called physical and health education, kinesiology, or by some other related term, most deal primarily with various aspects of the study of human movement. Some programs specialize in the more scientific or quantitative aspects of this study, others more in health and fitness areas, and still others in recreation and leisure, etc. Some offer sports, fitness, and coaching practicals, others more laboratory experiences, and still others things such as co-op sport administration placements. However, most Canadian university programs are diverse and comprehensive enough to allow for study in many of these areas along with the development of various student interests. The name of a program alone will not always distinguish its specialization since many “physical education” programs also deal heavily with the health science or biomechanics of physical activity and many “kinesiology” programs may offer practical courses such as basketball or sport administration. Only by more closely investigating and comparing the full array of a university program’s offerings can potential students decide which program is right for their interests.

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## **Career Opportunities for University Physical and Health Education Graduates**

### **Teaching Careers**

Traditionally, the majority of university physical and health education graduates has gone on to become elementary or high school teachers. In Ontario one becomes a certified teacher after completing an undergraduate degree followed by a Bachelor of Education degree from a university college of education. A survey at the University of Toronto revealed that over 50 percent of the graduates from the School of Physical and Health Education in the early 1980s had entered teaching careers. By the late 1990s the prospects

for teaching careers for graduates of physical and health education and related programs had greatly diminished. Not only was the competition for places in colleges of education more intense, most Canadian school boards were greatly reducing their hiring. A cursory look at employment of kinesiology and physical education graduates of Wilfrid Laurier University in the mid-1990s shows that no more than about 10-20 percent of them had careers in teaching after graduation. Recently this trend has again reversed itself with many more opportunities currently available in teachers colleges and in teaching careers as many older teachers retire and the number of school-age children again begins to climb. It is difficult to predict whether this current trend will continue when present high school students are ready to enter the work force.

While teaching will remain a rewarding career option for some, many other graduates are availing themselves of the various other job opportunities that have become available to physical and health education graduates over the past 20-30 years.

### **Health Sciences Careers**

Many physical and health education graduates are now opting for careers in the health sciences. These include professions such as medical doctor, chiropractor, physiotherapist, podiatrist, clinical kinesiologist, athletic therapist, clinical exercise therapist, massage therapist, and many others.

Many of these careers require further study after completion of an undergraduate physical and health education or related degree. However, the undergraduate physical education curriculum now provides the necessary preparation for entry (at times with advanced standing) into the other areas through courses in human anatomy and physiology, sports medicine, athletic injuries, community health, and biomechanics.

In addition, undergraduates in physical education often learn practical interpersonal and client/patient relationship skills, thus further aiding their career prospects in these expanding areas.



## A Career in Physiotherapy

**NAME:** Joan Mlynarczyk  
**OCCUPATION:** Sports Physiotherapy Specialist  
**EDUCATION:** MA, BPHE, BSc PT, CATC

### **What careers have you pursued since graduating?**

Following my undergraduate education, and through my experiences as a varsity athlete, I became interested in sports medicine. I specialized in athletic training during my master's in physical and health education, became a certified athletic therapist, and then pursued a degree in physiotherapy. As a physiotherapist and certified athletic therapist, I worked with university varsity athletes during the academic season, and traveled with our Olympic and National women's basketball team during the summer months. As an athletic therapist I have been appointed to over eight major Games medical teams, including the 1992 Summer Olympics. Currently, I own a private physiotherapy clinic called Osteopathy and Physiotherapy Specialists. I also hold a faculty appointment at McMaster University, and teach undergraduate physiotherapy students. I am also working towards a PhD in exercise science and biomechanics.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job(s)?**

I definitely enjoy the variety and diversity. I enjoy treating and caring for athletes. I also enjoy the team approach to injury management, having other key practitioners with similar interests collaborating. Most of all, I enjoy the opportunity to continuously evolve, learn, and develop clinical and professional skills, to share this information with others as an educator, and to take good care of my patients using evidence-based and well-thought-out methods and treatment approaches.

### **What other career options are open to students who are interested in sports injury management?**

Combining your physical education training with virtually any health care profession will make you more specialized to assess and treat athletes. Currently, the Sports Medicine Council of Canada sends physiotherapists, athletic therapists, and medical doctors to major Games as a part of the Canadian Medical Team. National teams also work closely with massage therapists, osteopaths, psychotherapists, strength and fitness trainers, as well as nutritionists.

### **Why did you choose a career in sports physiotherapy?**

As a varsity basketball player, I sustained a significant injury to my hamstring muscle, which took several months to rehabilitate. I became fascinated by the whole process. While respecting the stages of healing, I had to keep myself as physically fit and as mentally ready as possible. This required a progressive program and good communication among coach, doctor, and athletic therapist.

### **What are the future job prospects in this area?**

Excellent. There is an endless number of positions available for those who do good work. The characteristics I look for in employees in my clinic are good interpersonal skills, a passion and enthusiasm for their work, and a keen desire to continually improve their knowledge and skills through continuing courses and interests. I believe these characteristics will make people successful in anything they do.

### **What advice do you have for students who may be interested in sports physiotherapy?**

A degree in physical and health education is beneficial. Expose yourself to volunteer work or work placements in one of the various health care professions, and try to gain as much information as possible about your area of interest. Most physiotherapists, athletic therapists, and physicians would be willing to spend some time answering your specific questions.

### **What salary range can be expected in this field?**

Well, that would depend on the setting. Generally, physiotherapists will have a higher salary range than athletic therapists, and physicians higher salaries than physiotherapists. The highest salary opportunities for physiotherapists and athletic therapists are in private practice. Other environments such as hospitals, universities, and/or professional sports are more secure, but sometimes less financially rewarding. These other settings will be far more rewarding in other ways.



Graduates with strong backgrounds in health have also recently been finding employment with community health promotion and research organizations. Often these jobs require applicants to have a master's degree in health or exercise science and some research or health promotion experience.

The marketing of exercise and sports-related protective and corrective equipment such as braces, orthotics, nutritional supplements, and acute sports injury management equipment also continues to expand. Numerous stores specializing in this niche market, and employing physical education graduates, have recently opened up across Canada and growth in this area is expected to continue.

## **Fitness Careers**

Since the late 1990s fitness is fast becoming a career choice for an increasing number of physical and health education graduates. The Canadian fitness industry continues to expand and opportunities related to fitness assessment, instruction, programming, administration, and sales are currently growing. Many graduates are finding full- and part-time employment as fitness instructors/programmers with fitness clubs, community centres, and YM- and YWCAs. Still others have become instructors and programmers for special populations such as the elderly in chronic care, and personal trainers for busy executives or master athletes. And in response to studies which have demonstrated increased productivity and decreased sick time for physically active individuals, many large corporations have also set up and staffed in-house fitness facilities for employee use.

Many physical educators are now also in sport administration. Physical and health education graduates have found careers in sports equipment sales, as well as in the business side of sports/fitness equipment manufacturing and distribution. These often overlooked career possibilities may best suit students with some marketing or sport administration emphasis in their undergraduate

physical education programs as well as practical work experience.

## **Sport and Recreation Administration Careers**

Amateur sport remains another strong area of employment for physical education graduates. While much of Canadian amateur sport is still volunteer based, most Canadian sports governing organizations are administered professionally both at the provincial and national levels. Although it is often helpful for potential employees to have a background in the sport itself, organizations continue to employ physical education graduates with work experience and education in administration.

There are also growing opportunities in administration and marketing with professional, semi-professional, and junior sports teams and organizations. Other related employment opportunities include facilities management (i.e., stadiums, recreation complexes), sports camp administration, and intramural administration in universities and colleges.

Careers in the recreation and leisure field continue to expand, especially in non-traditional areas. One of these areas, and in which some university programs specialize, is outdoor adventure and tourism such as white water rafting, canoe touring, skiing, and mountaineering. University programs that emphasize recreation and leisure administration also prepare graduates for careers in the recreation hotel/tourist industry and local tourism, camping, and recreation promotion. These are all potential growth areas for employment opportunities for physical education students.

## **Coaching Careers**

Graduates of physical and health education programs have traditionally been employed in coaching young and elite athletes. Many coaching positions in Canada involve volunteer or part-time work. However, some sports, particularly