



Introduction to Kinesiology

After completing this chapter you should be able to:

- explain the meaning, significance, and scope of the focus of kinesiology;
- explain the choice of kinesiology as the preferred name for our field;
- describe the spheres of scholarly study that constitute kinesiology;
- experience the meaning of kinesiology in your own life.

Studies in kinesiology, or the science of human movement, not only accommodate a range of educational purposes but also have a very personal impact. From the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment our heads hit the pillow at night, we perform hundreds of different movements and engage in a wide array of physical activities. Human movement affects our personal health, wellness, and physical achievements in distinct ways, providing a unique opportunity to explore and interact with the world around us.

In fact, issues related to health and human movement have become primary concerns of all societies today. From health promotion to human performance, the highly interdisciplinary field of kinesiology provides a natural springboard for students interested in discovering and unraveling the complexities of human movement.

The popularity of kinesiology reflects its wide scope and significance as an emerging field of study. But to understand where we are going, we have to understand where we came from. This chapter will help you understand how the discipline of kinesiology has evolved and will discuss why it has taken its current form and focus.

Definitions and Dimensions

Kinesiology Defined

Kinesiology is the new and exciting field of study of human movement. The meaning of kinesiology was best defined in 1990 by the American Academy of Physical Education when it resolved to identify a common name and focus in order to describe the academic discipline and to unite the field. Through this action, the Academy hoped to settle the following problems facing the emerging academic field of study:

- More than 100 different names were being used for academic programs and administrative units related to the study of human movement.
- The basic conceptual framework of this body of knowledge varied greatly from university campus to campus.
- The multitude of degree titles, program names, and administrative rubrics produced confusion regarding the nature of the study of movement, even among academicians who work in the field.





The American Academy of Physical Education believed that a nationally accepted name and definition of the body of knowledge would provide a stronger sense of purpose, higher visibility in the academic community, and a greater understanding of the discipline by the public, so it crafted the following resolution:

Be it resolved that the American Academy of Physical Education recommends that the subject matter core content for undergraduate baccalaureate degrees related to the study of movement be called Kinesiology, and that baccalaureate degrees in the academic discipline be titled Kinesiology. The American Academy of Physical Education encourages administrative units, such as departments or divisions, in which the academic study of Kinesiology is predominant, to adopt the name Kinesiology. Finally, in any situation in which an administrative unit feels comfortable in describing the totality of its components by the title of the body of knowledge, the Academy recommends that this descriptor be Kinesiology.

This statement by the Academy was a long time coming; the leaders of the field had been discussing definitions and dimensions throughout the preceding century. As long ago as 1893, Thomas Wood suggested, in his address to the International Congress of Education, that “the term physical education is so misleading, and even misrepresented, that we look for a name which shall represent fairly the real idea of the science.” In 1964, Franklin Henry, one of the founding fathers of our academic study, recognized that a schism was developing between disciplines claiming to study human movement: “There is an increasing need for the organization and study of the academic disciplines herein called physical education. As each of the traditional fields of knowledge concerning man becomes more specialized, complex, and detailed, it becomes more differentiated from physical education.”

The Scope of Kinesiology

One of the underlying reasons that the confusion about definitions and dimensions went on for so long is the extraordinary breadth and scope of academic approaches and professional purposes that



Figure 1.1 A main reason for the popularity of kinesiology is the increasing recognition of the importance of health-related and skill-related human movement.

have both defined and divided programs through the years. The ways that changes in the structure and purpose of higher education have led to the modern approach to social, cultural, behavioral, and biophysical perspectives of kinesiology are discussed later in this chapter (see the section on spheres of scholarly study) and throughout the book. Despite (and because of) years of intense – and sometimes tense – discussions among the leaders of the evolving field about the form it should take and the name it should be given, the field has continued to flourish.

A main reason for the popularity of kinesiology is the increasing recognition of the importance of health-related and skill-related human movement. Because health and human movement are so closely linked, the study of human movement naturally links with a concern for health. The correlation between being physically active and being healthy is proven. Physical activity of various types is valued not only for its preventive capacities but also as a form of treatment for many conditions. Of course, it has always been the basis of physical therapy, but physical activity is also recommended as part of the remedial protocol for many lifestyle diseases in the Western medical establishment and as a form of health promotion through such activities as tai chi and yoga in the Eastern tradition (Figure 1.1).

The biophysical bases of movement to which you will be introduced in this book are essential prerequisites for professions in human movement and health enhancement. It is no accident that graduates of kinesiology programs are in great demand in health-related and medical professions as well as in performance-enhancement and teaching settings. Health in kinesiology is more **proactive** and preventive than the **reactive** forms of medicine that focus exclusively on the treatment of disease. Health encompasses the dynamic, constantly changing process of trying to reach one's potential; **wellness** goes one step further to combine health and happiness in a balanced state of well-being.

Skill-related performance is an important star in the constellation of kinesiology practice. It includes athletic movement that may involve varying degrees of vigor and may invoke both fine and gross motor skills. It fluctuates along a continuum of organization, from the creative freedom of play to the more structured modes of organized competitive sport played at every level by people of all ages with varying degrees of seriousness. Competition is a variable concept that may range from team sports, where groups of people compete against each other in such popular pastimes as football and basketball, to a range of individual challenges (Figure 1.2), including

- one versus self – contests motivated by a desire for personal challenge;
- one versus another – individual sport contests, such as tennis;
- one versus many – activities such as marathon running and triathlons;
- one versus standards – of distance (jumps, throws) or time (time trials); and
- one versus nature – conquering the elements (e.g., rock climbing).

When combined into one program of study, health-related movement and skill-related physical activity provide considerable scope for study and a broad array of potential professions in and through kinesiology.

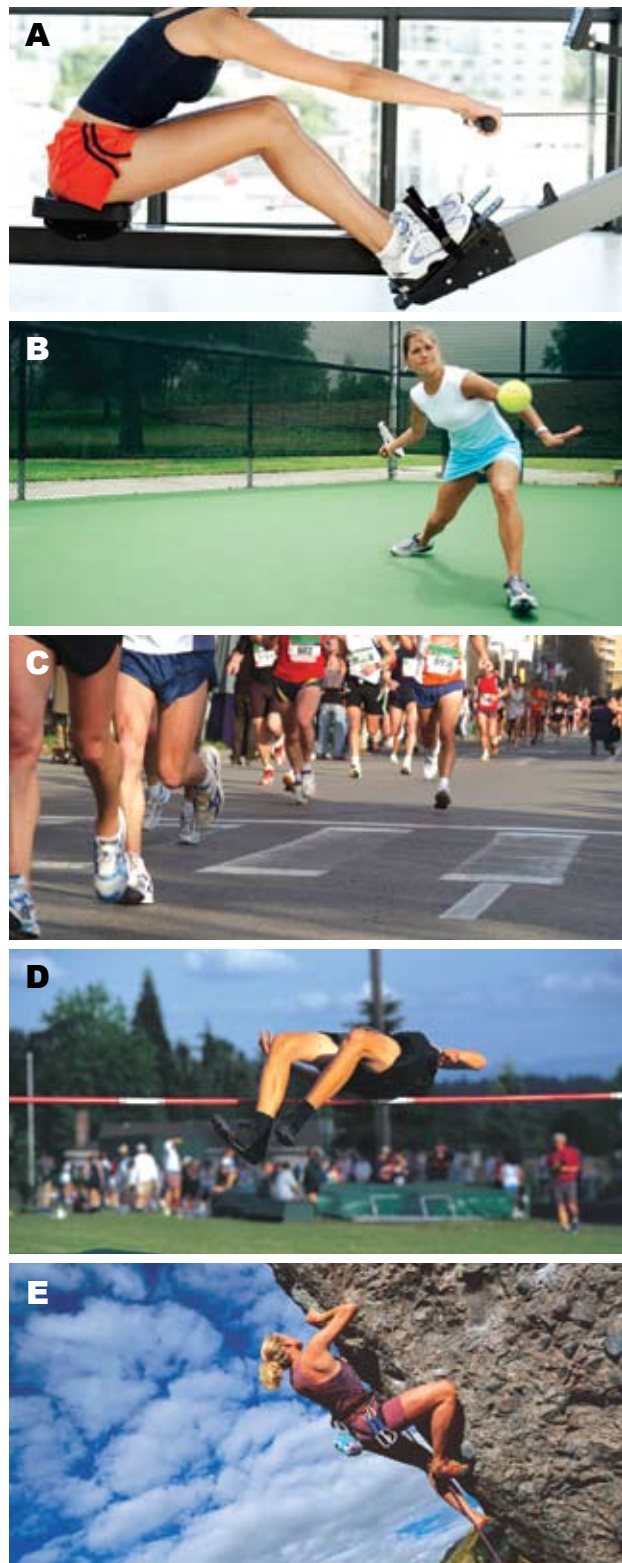


Figure 1.2 Competition is a variable concept that includes a range of individual challenges including **A.** one versus self, **B.** one versus another, **C.** one versus many, **D.** one versus standards, **E.** one versus nature.



The Significance of Kinesiology

Human movement has potential as the focus of our studies because it is eminently researchable and because performance and health enhancement are topics of great interest to us individually and to the larger global community today. The field lends itself readily to both descriptive and prescriptive research methodologies. Building from the description of the current state of affairs (*what is*), we can proceed to study, research, and prescribe *what might be* (e.g., how could performance be enhanced). Human movement is also highly accessible to research from a wide range of social, cultural, behavioral, and biophysical disciplines, so it is an attractive focus from a variety of perspectives.

Kinesiology has the potential to help answer many of the major questions facing the global community. It is hard to name other academic fields that address topics of such significance as personal, public, and environmental health; teaching and learning based on motor development and skill acquisition; and performance at every level up to elite sport. Issues abound in high-level athletic performance, and the research conclusions can have great significance in a cultural phenomenon of intense public interest. Professional sports culminating in such popular events as the Olympic Games and World Cup soccer grip the attention of nations.



Kinesiology also has a focus of considerable scholarly significance in sport because of organized sport's cultural impact. Influenced by media coverage of sport and by concern for their own health, people

of all ages, of every skill level, and in the full range of physical conditions are active in sports. Similarly, the focus on health and wellness, prevention of lifestyle diseases, and promotion of lifespan well-being has never been as pronounced or as widespread as today. The biophysical bases of our field, such as exercise physiology, biomechanics, and nutrition, attract many to kinesiology, as does the scope for sociocultural, behavioral, and philosophical analysis afforded by the full range of human movement action in society today. Consequently, kinesiology is becoming the choice of an ever-increasing cadre of students, who ultimately swell the ranks of such movement-related professions and health-related careers as teachers and coaches, researchers and professors, physicians and physical therapists (Figure 1.3; also see Chapter 23).



Figure 1.3 An ever-increasing number of students are choosing to pursue movement-related professions and health-related careers as the focus on health and wellness has grown.

The Name Game

The Importance of Finding the Right Name

We use words to communicate our understanding of reality. Unlike numbers, which might have the same meaning to all, words are loaded with alternative interpretations, hence the frequency of misunderstandings in daily dialogue. The choice of words is a political act; the outcome of an interaction depends on the appropriateness of their selection. Similarly, the choice of labels to introduce and define ourselves, and most importantly to describe our field of study, has drastic consequences. It immediately implants images of what we do and who we are. We can wear the right label proudly, as a badge of respectability, or we can expend time and effort dispelling negative connotations from the minds of our audience if we pick an inappropriate term. Acceptability, credibility, and viability ride on our choice. Centrality in an organization (such as a university), funding for research, and our upward professional mobility are affected by how we project ourselves and how others view the reputation of our field.

The Contenders in the Name Game

Many names have been tried through the ages, some of which are preferred over kinesiology in particular institutional settings.

Physical Education

The most widely used name for our field throughout history has been **physical education**, sometimes joined by health, recreation, and dance to form HPERD departments. In some universities and in some societies other than North America, physical education might still be the best choice, particularly when the sole mission of that program is to prepare teachers of physical education for the public school system. However, a consensus

seems to be forming in North American higher education that physical education is no longer the most appropriate descriptor for most programs, primarily because the field of study has undergone a curriculum metamorphosis in the latter part of the 20th century. The title *physical education* fails to adequately describe either the focus of study or the change in approach (Figure 1.4). Since the initiatives of Franklin Henry, the field has gradually been shifting toward a more scholarly, research-oriented, disciplinary approach. Forty years later the reality of kinesiology is far removed from stereotypes of physical education. Changing these stereotypes is problematic, because they are deeply rooted in traditional associations with the following:

- Activity programs encountered in K-12 that are devoid of academic content and rarely linked to the intellectual mission of the school.
- High school and college athletics programs that may, or may not, be based on the development of student-athletes. On the one hand, you would expect an individual who excels in athletic performance to gravitate toward the department that studies human movement. Many of these student-athletes excel in all spheres of learning and are so well rounded that they become leaders of the field, but some are



Figure 1.4 Although physical education has been the most widely used name for the field throughout history, this name may still be appropriate only for programs focusing on preparing teachers of physical education for the public school system.



marginal students with high athletic talent but low scholarly expectations. All too frequently in the past, teacher-coaches who taught physical education would “take care of” such athletes in the classroom, providing passing grades to ensure athletic eligibility regardless of academic performance. The damaging “easy major” stereotype that runs counter to the modern-day reality of academic excellence, terminal degrees, and cutting-edge research lingers on despite the best efforts of physical education reformers to eradicate them.

- One exclusive mission: the preparation of school teachers. Recently, the focus of professional preparation has broadened to encompass an array of alternative opportunities. The label *physical education* suggests one future career and one only, which complicates the lives of students who have chosen to study human movement in order to embark on professional pathways in fields far removed from teaching, such as health care or research.
- Labels that are limited and limiting. The word *physical* is too narrow to be used in the title. In a world of dichotomies, physical tends to suggest that the study of human movement is not intellectual, mental, or spiritual. Similarly, *education* is unnecessary and redundant in a university setting: Other departments do not add education to their titles (history education or mathematics education). And, once again, the word *education* is misleading in that it narrowly points toward a teaching degree in a setting where students are preparing for many other careers.

Other Names

Other names exist to describe the study of human movement. Many of them incorporate the words *exercise*, *sport*, *fitness*, and *human movement*, usually in combination with *science*, *studies*, or, less frequently, *arts*. The problem with such titles is their constricting capacity; such labels as exercise science by definition limit the focus of the program (to exercise) and eliminate alternative methodological approaches (except science). Because the label

physical education is laden with stereotypes and entrenched in public misperception, and to avoid overly elaborate and complex titles such as human movement and sport studies, many academic units have opted to adopt the name change resolution proposed by the leaders in the field and reinforced when the American Academy of Physical Education changed its own name to the American Academy of Kinesiology and Physical Education.

Why Is Kinesiology the Name Game Winner?

Because it FITS best, where **FITS** stands for **F**ocus of study, **I**ntuitively appropriate, **T**reats all approaches equally, and **S**ounds right (Figure 1.5).

Focus of Study Above all, the name of the department should evoke the *focus of study* of that unit. The word *kinesiology* does just that; its roots can be traced back to ancient Greek terminology to literally mean the study of (*logy*) human action (*kin*). Consequently, this title clearly presents the central topic of human movement and represents all of the facets of this focus through a nonspecific umbrella term that covers exercise, fitness, sport, health, leisure, recreation, and play in a way that



Figure 1.5 Of all the contenders in the name game, kinesiology has been thrust into the spotlight because it FITS.

is broad and neutral, allowing its practitioners to study all aspects of human movement from the perspectives of the arts and sciences.

Intuitively Appropriate The title kinesiology is *intuitively appropriate* and meaningful to academia and society. Unlike many of the improvised proposals, kinesiology seems valid and familiar to the college community and the general population as it has been associated with the study of physical activity in higher education for at least a century, initially as a title for biomechanics and more recently as an umbrella term for the study of human movement.

Treats All Approaches Equally Kinesiology *treats all approaches equally*. The neutrality of *logy*, meaning the study of, provides leeway for a range of methodological approaches to human movement. Beneath this term, natural science, social science, and humanities approaches are all permissible, as opposed to the restrictive titles that legitimate only one focus and one approach, such as sport science.

Sounds Right It *sounds right* in that it draws on the historic roots of the word, it evokes the mission of the field, and the word has obvious academic linkage, sounding much like other science and social science departments (e.g., biology, sociology, psychology, anthropology). Although it evokes the “feel” of these department names, it is unique, which allows it to remain independent and intact rather than subsidiary to another field. It is brief and avoids the problem of patchwork titles

designed to be all-inclusive that combine several different areas of study into one long department name. At the same time it covers all the bases and offers opportunities for greater cooperation, collaboration, and integration between a true community of scholars in the field.

Spheres of Scholarly Study

The Diversity of Higher Education

For any field of scholarly study to be universally accepted in a nation’s higher education system, it must be able to fit into a wide range of college and university models from community colleges to research universities, from technical colleges to liberal arts universities. Although the basic building blocks of the academic field remain constant, the design and function of the curriculum should vary with the mission of the university if the academic field is going to be a good fit in that institution. As it has expanded from teacher training settings to all of the other types of universities and colleges, the emerging field of kinesiology has broadened its appeal in recent years.

Training Physical Education Teachers

The traditional mission of training physical education teachers remains intact and strong in schools

