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Career Opportunities in Kinesiology

After completing this chapter you should be able to:

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

Notions based on outdated stereotypes sometimes make physical education out to be a field for “dumb jocks.” So it is not surprising that when people think about careers in health and fitness, visions of their high school physical education teachers often come to mind. However, secondary school teaching represents but one of many opportunities available to graduates in 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 physical and health education graduates is a continuing reminder that the old stereotypes and caricatures are fast disappearing.

At one time, “physical education” was the name given to all health and fitness programs because they were initially formed to train elementary and secondary school physical education teachers. 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; sports psychology; biomechanics and applied ergonomics; sports 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 of employment for graduates.

With the evolution of this expansion has come diversification and partial fragmentation of college and university physical and health education programs. To avoid a narrow association of physical education with training for the school system, many university programs have changed their names. Some of the names that physical and health education has evolved into include kinesiology, human kinetics, kinanthropology, and exercise science.

Whether university programs are called physical and health education, kinesiology, or

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. However, most programs are diverse and comprehensive enough to allow for study in many of these areas along with the development of various student interests. This chapter will survey the diverse learning and career opportunities available in the field of fitness and health.

Opportunities for Kinesiology Graduates

“So what are you going to do with that?” is the question many students face when they first tell their parents about their choice of major. The real question is, can you earn a living with that background? The answer for kinesiology students is an unequivocal “Yes!”

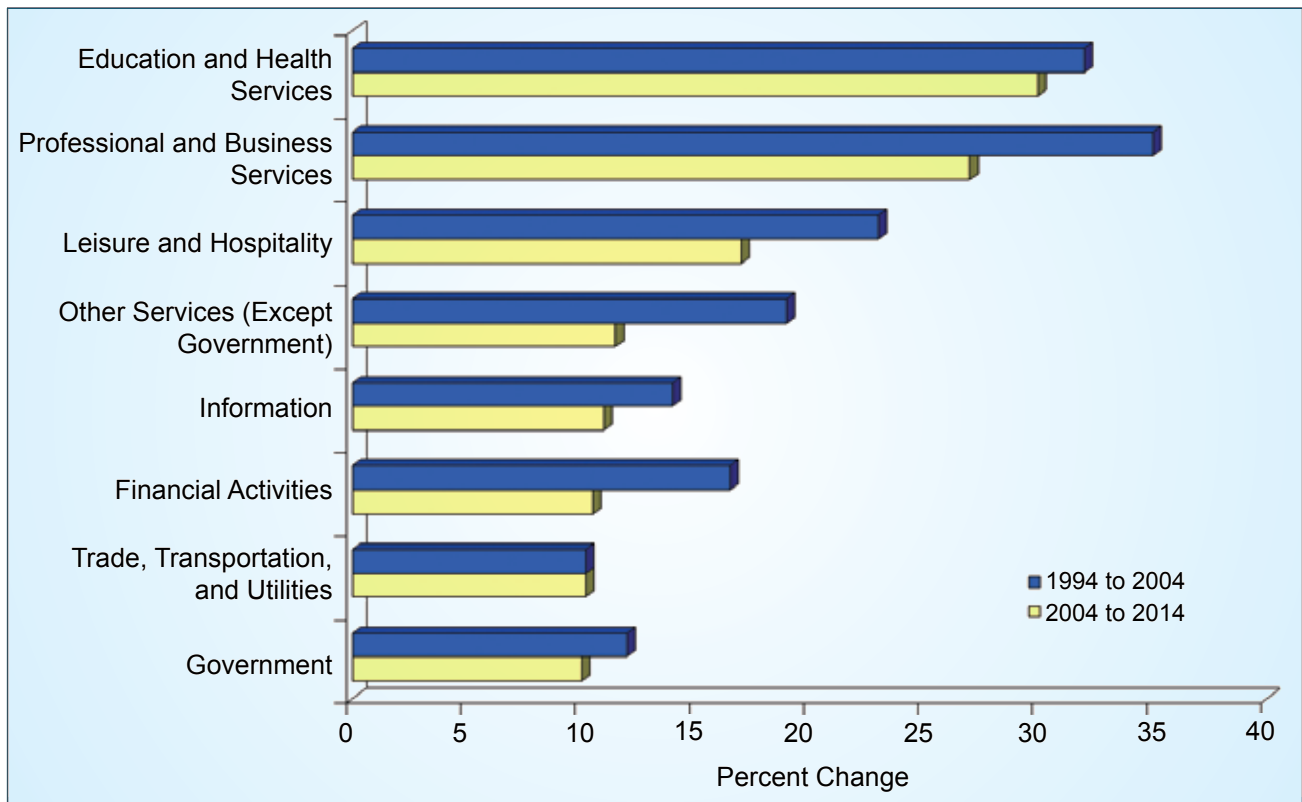
Kinesiology is a field that attracts many people with athletic backgrounds. Some are varsity athletes who juggle higher education and athletics. Others are former high school athletes who, for a variety of reasons, do not compete at the collegiate level but retain deep interest in sport. And while kinesiology graduates used to be relegated to narrowly defined careers as athletic coaches and trainers, today societal changes have opened the door to a wide variety of career opportunities.

Back in the late 1800s, when the first professional athletic competitions arose, few people would have predicted that sport would become a multibillion dollar industry in North America. That growth, coupled with an explosion of amateur and club sports, on top of concerns about health, fitness, and weight management, all contribute to robust career opportunities for kinesiology students.

Concerns about obesity, establishment of new guidelines for healthy eating, and the aging of the “baby boom” generation are all contributing to the need for the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of kinesiology graduates. The health and fitness



Figure 16.1 Percent change in wage and salary employment, service-providing industry divisions, 1994 to 2004 and projected 2004 to 2014.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor

industry integrates exercise, personal responsibility, and prevention in ways that meet the needs of popular North American culture. Decades of research and reports by the U.S. Surgeon General, Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Public Health Agency of Canada, and Health Canada all point to the need for physical activity to promote health.

The U.S. Department of Labor is forecasting that the health services and leisure and hospitality industries will continue to be among the highest-demand positions in the country (Figure 16.1). When it comes to prospects for kinesiology students, Figure 16.2 provides an insight to where the opportunities may be greatest.

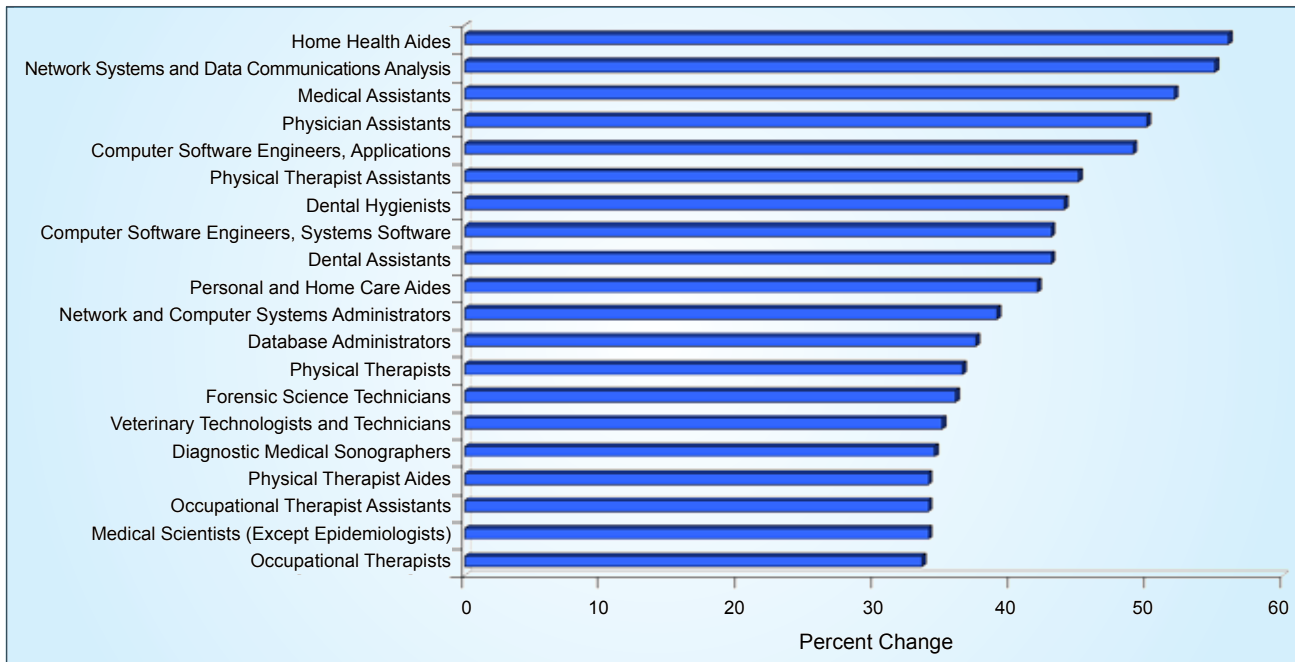
Health and fitness careers fall into several fields, each with its own subcategories:

- Health and fitness
- Exercise therapy

- Teaching and coaching
- Sport management
- Other careers

Health and Fitness

The **health and fitness industry** is a phenomenon of the late 20th century – and the explosion of career opportunities for kinesiology graduates has matched its evolution. For example, Life Time Fitness was founded by Bahram Akradi in 1992 after cofounding and working for U.S. Swim & Fitness in the 1980s. (And Mr. Akradi's 2005 compensation is listed as more than \$40 million!) Today, Life Time Fitness has 48 large fitness centers in nine states, with plans to open 6 to 10 each year. Each requires a full staff, ranging from personal trainers to physiotherapists and nutritionists – from entry-level positions to

Figure 16.2 Percent change in employment in occupations projected to grow fastest, 2004 to 2014.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor

experienced professionals with highly specific training.

But this is just one type of development in the health and fitness category. Typically this field involves four principal programs – worksite, commercial, clinical, and community – in varying stages of development or service delivery. For example, at the University of Minnesota, worksite programs entail self-managed and self-directed activity encouraged by employee communications. There are on-site fitness facilities for students, faculty, and staff, but the delivery of fitness programs for employees is at the personal level at each person’s worksite.

Worksite Programs

Health care costs are skyrocketing, and companies are reaching out via employee health and fitness programs in an effort to manage the expense. The side benefits of improved health are improved worker productivity and reduced absenteeism.

Worksite programs first appeared in the early 1980s, exploded in the 1990s, and extended to include health education classes, health risk

appraisals, and lifestyle change initiatives. In the boom economy of the late 1990s, the quality of worksite programs was a hiring differentiator for some companies – especially in fields where competition for key skills was most intense. Many companies with worksite fitness facilities contract out the staffing and management of the facilities, recognizing that it requires specialized skills and knowledge. Many kinesiology students find themselves employed as these “consultants” in a wide variety of corporations and institutions.

Commercial Programs

Many different types of health and fitness activities can be classified as commercial programs. They all have one thing in common – their objective is to generate a profit for their owners or shareholders. Some are large franchised or corporate-owned chains such as Bally Total Fitness, GoodLife Fitness Clubs, and Gold’s Gym. Others are independent, locally owned and managed operations, such as the Southview Athletic Club in St. Paul, Minnesota; gender-specific facilities, such as Curves for women; or focus-specific facilities, such as L.A.



A Career in Personal Training

NAME: Kelby James Klosterman
OCCUPATION: Owner/Director Personal Training Company (TrailRipped™ LLC)
 Spa and Fitness Manager at a Private Country Club (Superstition Mountain Golf and Country Club)
BACKGROUND/EDUCATION: BSc Exercise Science, University of North Dakota
 Minor: Psychology
 MSc Exercise and Wellness, Arizona State University
 Emphasis/Thesis: Strength and Conditioning, Testosterone
 Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) (NSCA)
 CPR/AED/First Aid

What do you do?

I currently own and direct a seasonal outdoor personal training company called TrailRipped located in Phoenix, Arizona. Along with myself, there are two other trainers who lead resistance training and heart rate-based sessions throughout the valley's trails. As an addition to the trail sessions, TrailRipped also offers year-round sport-specific performance training and in-home personal training. TrailRipped also provides individualized exercise protocols, body fat analysis, nutritional analysis, and monthly newsletters, as well as professional exercise consulting.

I also manage a spa and fitness center at a private country club where I oversee daily operations and budgeting as well as spa services, group fitness, and personal training personnel. I also lead group fitness classes; conduct personal training; and create health/fitness seminars, fitness incentives, and newsletters.

What is unique about your job?

Being the director of TrailRipped is unique because it allows me to be creative in exercise design and with each individual and group on the trail. It is an intense workout that combines resistance, flexibility, and cardiovascular-monitored training unlike any other exercise program. TrailRipped was designed as a way to improve overall health issues such as weight loss, muscular development, aerobic conditioning, and nutritional habits outside of the health club environment. TrailRipped has been shown to be one of the most intense and personally satisfying workouts available anywhere. TrailRipped provides a *real* step on the path to healthy living. It is especially appealing to outdoor enthusiasts because we embrace the outdoors as nature helps us achieve our health and fitness goals. TrailRipped can be tailored to meet any fitness level, from beginner to advanced.

Why did you choose a career in exercise science? What was your motivation for pursuing this field?

I chose a career in exercise science because of my

passion for athletics and the opportunity to affect others' levels of health and fitness. Originally I was motivated to pursue a career in sport performance and held strength and conditioning positions with college and professional teams. However, I soon decided to operate TrailRipped as well as pursue a career with the general population in the country club setting because I felt there was less resistance for the rate of promotion. I suppose you could say I was motivated by the opportunity to manage myself and others as well as the opportunity for rapid salary advancement. Because of this choice to manage early, many different options are now available within the health and fitness field.

What do you enjoy most about your profession?

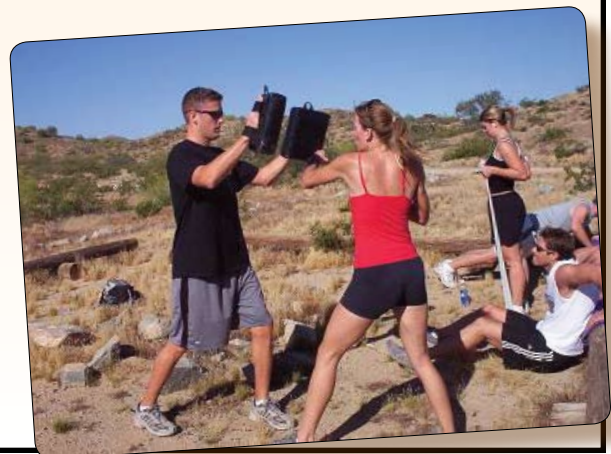
My profession allows for daily interaction with others who are interested in increasing their health and fitness levels and constantly seeking reliable knowledge. The exercise science field is very gratifying in the fact that as a reputable source you can affect others' quality of life while creating mutually rewarding relationships.

What other career options are available to students interested in this area?

Many career options are available to aspiring students in the exercise science field. Viable options include doctor of philosophy (professor/researcher), strength and conditioning, personal training, cardiac rehabilitation, fitness and spa management, sport nutrition, sport psychology, massage therapy, physical therapy, coaching, and many more.

What career advice would you give to students interested in entering this field?

Pursuing a master's degree was the one stepping stone that allowed me the opportunity to begin my career at my desired level. It provided me with the knowledge and respect from others to design and operate TrailRipped. As well, without a master's degree I believe I would be years behind in acquiring the corporate position of where I started. Without any hesitation, I would recommend pursuing a master's degree as a minimum to any entrepreneur in the exercise science field.



Weight Loss centers. YMCAs sell health club memberships to offset the cost of other programs offered by the nonprofit organization. Should YMCA health and fitness programs be included in the commercial sector? You decide.

Membership sales are the major focus of these facilities, supported by retail sales of clothing and equipment, restaurant and entertainment facilities, special events such as tennis tournaments, fees for consulting and training, and fees for weight-loss programs and accompanying specialized meals. Health and fitness is *big* business in sales-based facilities across North America today.

Some commercial facilities focus more on member retention by meeting the long-term needs of their clients. Market research shows that it costs far more to attract a new member than to retain an existing member, so facilities that follow the retention business model tend to advertise and promote less than sales-based facilities.

Clinical Programs

Hospitals, general medical clinics, and specialized clinics such as physiotherapy facilities represent one of the largest segments – though often hidden – in the health and fitness field. The services offered in clinical programs are often more specific than in commercial programs. Health screenings, health risk identification, cardiac rehabilitation, nutrition and weight management consulting, water exercise therapy, and even childbirth and parenting education are all found in clinical health and fitness programs.

Some clinical programs are leaning toward the commercial model in that they are extending services to local employers to manage worksite programs for a fee. So the overall trend in the field is a blurring of boundaries between types of programs, with many areas of overlap and competition.

Community Programs

The city of Minnetonka, Minnesota, competes head to head with local and national fitness facilities with its city-owned and managed Williston Fitness

Center. It also operates the Lindbergh Center, a multisport fitness and training facility shared with an area high school. The Lindbergh Center is a multicourt basketball facility featuring an indoor running track, weight training rooms, exercise facilities, and a swimming pool.

Although community recreation facilities are nothing new, the expensive multidimensional complexes built in recent years as nonprofit municipal facilities are a relatively new phenomenon. For example, Chaska, Minnesota, owns and operates a large recreational water park, and neighboring Hennepin County operates a large outdoor water park open only in the summer months, cross-country running and ski trails, downhill ski parks, and water sport facilities. Every dimension of community programs employs a wide range of skill sets.

Common jobs in all four of these programs include group exercise instructors, often focusing on aerobic programs; fitness instructors focusing on specific strength development; health and fitness counselors who work one on one with clients to help them develop personalized programs and achieve their goals, often involving changes in lifestyle; personal trainers who typically cater to clients in upper-income sectors; and specialists in a variety of settings (e.g., nutritionists, dietitians, physical and occupational therapists) (Table 16.1).

Many people with this type of experience go on to become directors of facilities – which requires training in health and fitness disciplines as well as management training such as accounting, sales management, and organizational development. These individuals require a multidisciplinary educational background and a strong foundation in kinesiology. Often they are called on to conduct market research, identify emerging trends in our society, and help develop plans for new facilities or equipment.

Today's health and fitness professionals, more than ever, need to obtain a broad education across a core scientific, behavioral science, and liberal arts curriculum. Students should strive to achieve a combined degree – perhaps a kinesiology major

**Table 16.1** Job descriptions chart.

| Job Title | Evolution | Job Duties | Skills and Competencies |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Group Exercise Instructor | This position has transitioned away from exclusively teaching aerobic dance classes. This position now involves teaching a broad range of classes to a diverse population. | Lead group exercise classes for various population groups including seniors, children, pre- and postnatal women, and medically based clients. | Bachelor's degree in kinesiology or another health and fitness related discipline preferred. Certification by a nationally recognized organization required. Additional certifications in a specialized area may also be required in order to teach specific types of classes. Strong teaching skills are a must. |
| Health/Fitness Counselor | This position has evolved from the more traditional fitness instructor position. The health/fitness counselor provides counseling on a broad range of health topics in addition to conducting fitness assessments and designing exercise programs. | Provide guidance to a diverse population in areas such as behavior change, stress management, smoking cessation, social participation, weight management, and exercise programming. | Bachelor's or graduate-level degree in kinesiology or another health and fitness related discipline required. Certification by a nationally recognized organization required. Additional skills in counseling, behavior change, cultural diversity, and teaching are a must. Marketing and promotional skills are also essential. |
| Personal Trainer | This position has transitioned from exclusively providing individualized exercise programs to providing individualized services on a broad range of health topics. | Provide ongoing support and guidance to a diverse population of clients on topics such as physical fitness, weight management, stress management, and sport conditioning. | Bachelor's degree in kinesiology or another health and fitness related discipline preferred. Certification by a nationally recognized organization required. Background in exercise programming is a must. Counseling and teaching skills are a must. Business, marketing, sales, and promotion training are also essential. |
| Specialist Positions | Examples include physical therapists, registered dietitians, clinical exercise specialists, and health educators. | Provide specialized health and fitness services to clients with special needs. | Graduate-level degree required. Additional certifications and licensure may be required in order to practice in specific states or provinces. Other specific experiences and skills are required for each type of specialist position. |
| Health/Fitness Director | Programming all health and fitness programs that are delivered in a facility. Responsibilities include delivery of programs to address all dimensions of health. | Manage all aspects of a health and fitness department. Responsibilities include departmental leadership, staff management, programming, and all aspects of business administration. | Bachelor's or graduate-level degree in kinesiology or another health and fitness related discipline required. Additional skills in business administration, management, marketing, and promotion are required. Previous experience in an entry-level health and fitness position required. |