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Advanced-placement Physical Education: An Opportunity to Act

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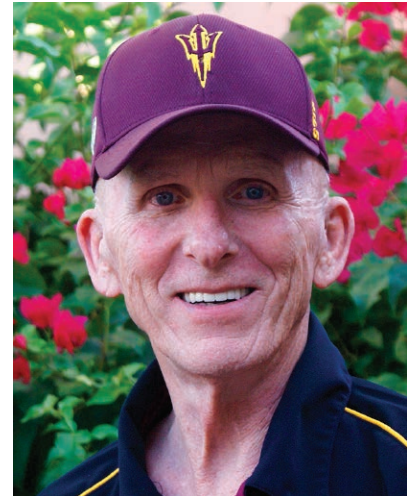
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In a recent post on the SHAPE America All-member Forum, a question was posed about advanced placement (AP) courses in physical education. Responses came fast and furious. This interest in AP courses prompted us to investigate further.

Typically, high schools offer various levels of a course to challenge students at particular ability levels. States and school districts have different names for these courses, including required general (core) education, electives, honors, and advanced placement. General education classes include math, language arts, social studies, science, foreign language, and health and physical education, and sometimes others. Credits for graduation exceed the general education requirements and are satisfied by taking elective classes (e.g., additional physical education classes). Some general education and elective classes can be taken as “hon-

ors” classes designed for high-achieving students. They include greater depth of coverage.

An AP course is more than an honors course. An AP course is a highly scrutinized, standardized and rigorous high school course that can be equated with a similar course taken for college credit (College Board, 2017b). Most higher education institutions accept high school AP as college credit. Students who take advanced classes (e.g., honors, AP) show greater growth and development than those who do not (Gamoran, 1987; Hallinan & Kubitschek, 1999). In addition to enhanced learning, honors and AP classes often provide extra grade points that enhance GPA.

Some schools have honors classes in physical education because standards for these classes are set locally. Advanced placement classes, however, are more difficult to establish because they are

administered by the College Board, a nonprofit organization that also oversees the SAT, PSAT, and the CLEP system of exams (College Board, 2017a). Advanced placement classes must be approved by the board as equivalent to an existing college class and must meet standards set by the board (e.g., syllabus, textbook, learning outcomes). Once approved, schools can offer one or more AP classes in various subject areas. After completing the class, students must pass a board-administered exam to qualify for college credit.

The approval process for AP courses involves university academicians to ensure that the course is college-credit worthy. Further, individual states and school districts must stipulate specific teacher capacities to teach an AP course, such as an advanced degree in the content area, outstanding teacher evaluations, and AP professional development training,

typically during the summer months. Currently, there are 38 individual AP courses offered in academic subject-matter areas. The content areas of health, kinesiology and physical education are not represented.

James (2011) noted, “In today’s educational landscape, physical education is undervalued and regarded as a low-status subject in schools.” **AQ1** Beddoes, Prusak and Hall (2014) also noted the need to take steps to overcome the marginalization of physical education. The passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 and its inclusion of physical education as a core subject along with other core subjects such as math, science and language arts is one important step in the de-marginalization process. It is fitting that physical education professionals now take the next necessary steps to offer AP classes.

For a physical education AP class to be available in schools, there must be a college equivalent class, and the College Board must approve the class. Perhaps the best option for an AP class are existing conceptual physical education (CPE) classes. Conceptual physical education classes were first introduced in the 1960s and are now offered in more than 90 percent of all colleges as required or elective classes (Cardinal, Sorensen, & Cardinal, 2012; Corbin & Cardinal, 2008; Kulinna, Warfield, Jonaitis, Dean, & Corbin, 2009). The classes are now most often offered in physical education and kinesiology departments with varying titles, and they typically focus on fitness, health and wellness. On many college campuses these classes are typically college general education classes open to all students. Numerous college texts are available for these classes. SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators published a Framework for Fitness Education in 2013 (SHAPE America, 2012) outlining appropriate content for K–16 (including college) classes. This initiative provides a beginning framework for college AP classes. If this route is chosen, schools should first introduce their own high school class, based on the framework, which would then be a prerequisite to the AP class. Many schools currently have such classes. For example,

Florida and several other states mandate a personal fitness (fitness education) class for all high school students (Jahn, Kulinna, & Corbin, 2010). An evidence base exists for these classes at both the college (Corbin & Cardinal, 2008; Kulinna et al., 2009) and high school level (Dale, Corbin, & Cuddihy, 1998; Dale & Corbin, 2000; Yu, Kulinna, Corbin, & Mulhearn, in press). **AQ2**

The second option is to offer introduction to kinesiology or introduction to physical education classes that are often required of kinesiology and physical education majors. Fewer students take these classes, and AP options would benefit only students planning to major in these areas. This option may also assist in creating a bridge for future physical educators into physical education teacher education (PETE) programs. Van der Mars noted in an informal survey that 61 percent of PETE programs have identified either a small or a large decrease in enrollment since 2010 (Van der Mars, 2015, as cited in Blankenship & Templin, 2016). With a teacher shortage, as well as undergraduate PETE programs closing (i.e., Purdue University), it is critical to provide an avenue for qualified candidates to gain an understanding and respect for the physical education profession (Blankenship & Templin, 2016). Textbooks are likewise available for these classes.

Success in getting an AP class approved no doubt would require groundwork by SHAPE America and its members. For such an effort to begin, physical education teachers nationwide must show interest. As mentioned earlier, a post on the SHAPE America All-member Forum showed considerable interest in AP classes. Our profession is undergoing a critical dialogue to initiate a much-needed paradigm shift, or rebranding of who we are and how society regards us (Johnson, Turner, & Metzler, 2017; Zeigler, 2015). There is work to be done if we are to increase respect for what we do. We all know that our content can be exceptionally rigorous and just as important to student success as other academic content areas. Advanced placement classes can also provide opportunities for students who have a passion for our subject matter

to challenge themselves. Therefore, we are proposing that it is time to begin the process of creating and launching an AP course focused on our subject matter. This is a small step toward more far-reaching appreciation and recognition for our content and our profession, but one that is necessary to continue the journey.

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