

# Preparing the Next Generation of Physical Education Teachers

Brent Heidorn

The goal of our profession in physical education is to “develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity” (SHAPE America – Society of Health and Physical Educators, 2014, p. 11). Our National Standards continue by stating that “to pursue a lifetime of healthful physical activity, a physically literate individual

- Has learned the skills necessary to participate in a variety of physical activities.
- Knows the implications and the benefits of involvement in various types of physical activities.
- Participates regularly in physical activity.
- Is physically fit.
- Values physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle” (SHAPE America, 2014, p. 11).

Based on my own observation, however, the way in which we prepare teacher candidates to enter the profession with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to provide appropriate instruction, motivation, practice time, and accountability for student learning is not so consistent across physical education teacher education (PETE) programs. Although there are national recommendations and state standards for PETE (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2008), there is also much liberty in how PETE programs are developed; what emphases are embedded throughout the program; and what knowledge, skills, and dispositions candidates possess upon graduation and induction into the profession.

Therefore, the aim of this viewpoint is to simply provide an overview of what I consider to be the *essential ingredients* for a PETE program (see Table 1). The



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content presented here is based on my personal experiences teaching K–12 physical education; on the *National Initial Physical Education Teacher Education Standards* (NASPE, 2008), which is the curriculum from which I earned a graduate degree in physical education; on my current experiences coordinating a PETE program; and on the many presentations and conversations I have participated in along with numerous professional scholars from across the United States. However, with that purpose in mind, I also recognize (as one of my former professors continually reminded us) that “the bag is only so big.” There is some content, some knowledge, and some information that just will not fit in the bag; meaning, with a limited number of credit hours in an undergraduate PETE program, it is not possible to accomplish everything. Therefore, PETE program faculty might consider the following *essential ingredients*.

## Initial Preparation

**Quality Academic Advisement.** It is critical that candidates receive quality

academic advisement when they enter and throughout a PETE program. This counsel may come from the general academic advisement center and/or from the advisor (professor) for each student within the PETE program. This academic advisement should provide an overview of the profession, guidance about the hurdles that must be cleared throughout the program, and any other specifics (e.g., registration, certification, and other program requirements). The quality of the academic advisement is one of the components that can make or break the “semesters to graduation” of the undergraduate physical education teacher candidate.

**Professional Standards.** Standards should be used to assist PETE programs in helping candidates reach the culmination of their preparation — earning certification as a physical education teacher. While states have their own policies and requirements for earning an undergraduate degree, PETE programs should also know and use the *National Standards & Guidelines for Physical Education Teacher Education* (NASPE, 2009). These standards form the foundation for program design and provide direction for PETE programs. Physical education teacher education faculty should be extremely familiar with the National (and state) Standards, use them, and refer to them consistently in their programs (e.g., National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, SHAPE America, etc.).

**Other Program Requirements.** There are numerous other requirements for PETE programs, often governed by each respective college/university or governing body. Examples include entry exams, test scores, the minimal grade-point average for program entry, program criteria (e.g., CPR/AED certification),

**Table 1.**  
**Summary of the Essential Ingredients for a PETE Program**

Initial Preparation	Content	Professional Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic advisement</li> <li>• Professional standards</li> <li>• Other program requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogical methods</li> <li>• Curriculum and assessment</li> <li>• Skill development</li> <li>• Exercise, fitness, and science</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Additional content (coaching, health education, etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capstone experience</li> <li>• Professional organizations</li> <li>• Comprehensive school physical activity programs</li> <li>• Job preparation</li> </ul>

and state and/or national assessment and evaluation. While the minimal test scores and procedures are needed for entry and continuation in a program, additional accountability measures are being implemented in many states (e.g., edTPA; for more information, go to [edtpa.aacte.org](http://edtpa.aacte.org)). In addition, many PETE programs have continued or have begun to monitor the professional dispositions of candidates to measure characteristics such as professional growth and development, ethics and diversity, communication, collaboration, and other qualities essential for effective teaching. The PETE program faculty should consider what components are mandated for the program and perhaps any additional requirements (similar to a rubric assessing professional dispositions) that should be developed and/or implemented.

### Content

*Pedagogical Methods.* Preservice teachers need sound pedagogy training so they can provide quality opportunities for student learning in physical education. Physical education teacher education programs often provide this training in different ways, but faculty might consider a sequence of motor learning and methods courses progressing from simple to more complex, prior to the student teaching internship. In addition, candidates should have supervised teaching opportunities in real-world settings, working with K–12 students, plus opportunities teaching students with unique or special needs. Consistent feedback should be provided to candidates by PETE faculty, graduate students if possible, and other experienced education

professionals. Many programs integrate systematic observation, video recording, and other software analysis techniques so the candidates can effectively plan, teach, and reflect upon their teaching experiences to positively impact student learning.

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*Curriculum and Assessment.* With accountability measures embedded throughout the educational process in K–12 schools, PETE programs should provide candidates with the knowledge and skills to effectively plan a physical

education curriculum (across all levels) and to effectively administer student assessments. It is essential for physical educators to demonstrate student learning for program credibility and sustainability in the school curriculum. Multiple curricular models are available (e.g., skill theme, teaching games for understanding, sport education, teaching personal and social responsibility, SPARK, etc.) with different methods of assessment (e.g., formative/summative, process/product, PE Metrics, etc.). Faculty should model effective assessment in undergraduate classes, provide candidates with examples of effective assessment techniques for K–12 programs, and allow candidates to practice administering assessments in real-world settings.

*Skill Development.* Candidates also need opportunities to develop their own skill level in multiple physical activities and sports. In order to effectively plan, teach, and analyze the skill development of their students, candidates must be competent and/or proficient movers themselves in a variety of content areas, as described by Siedentop (2002) over a decade ago. For this reason, PETE programs should provide a variety of physical activity classes that provide quality instruction and practice opportunities for candidates, holding them accountable for learning (e.g., clearly listed assessments on the course syllabus, exit requirements, etc.). The PETE program could also consider the geographical area in which the students might gain employment, in order to determine which physical activities and sports should be included in the undergraduate curriculum.

*Exercise, Fitness, and Science.* In addition to skill-development opportunities, PETE programs should provide candidates with the knowledge and skills to develop and/or maintain their own level of physical fitness and assist others with developing and maintaining fitness across the life span. Opportunities should be provided for candidates to gain in-depth knowledge of fitness-training principles, program design, assessment methods, and safety concerns. Programs might also include FITNESSGRAM® (The Cooper Institute, 2010) instruction and assessment, as well as instruction related to Physical Best (<http://www.shapeamerica.org/prodev/workshops/physicalbest/>) and the Presidential Youth Fitness Program (<http://www.pyfp.org/>). Further, while variations may exist among PETE programs regarding the amount of science-based content that candidates receive, all programs should provide learning opportunities related to human growth and development, human anatomy and physiology, sport-skill analysis and/or biomechanics, and other science-based concepts (Standard 1, NASPE, 2009).

*Technology.* While some PETE programs embed technology throughout the curriculum and other programs incorporate classes dedicated solely to technology, all programs should integrate technology in significant ways. Candidates need familiarity with technology; should develop skills for health, fitness, and physical activity software; identify and use mobile apps, iPads, and other physical activity monitoring devices; and effectively use technology in the classroom and physical activity settings. The technological knowledge base and skill set developed by candidates in their undergraduate program can assist them with planning efficiency, can be used as a motivational tool for their K–12 students, and can become a means for additional professional growth and development throughout their career.

*Additional Content.* The essential ingredients related to content that have been provided here are certainly not exhaustive and may receive different levels of emphasis, depending on the PETE

program. Additional content that may be needed in a PETE program, however, might include health education, coaching education, certification as a personal trainer, or other necessary courses. While the goal of PETE programs is to provide quality instruction and certification for future physical education teachers to prepare K–12 students for a lifetime of physical activity, one must also recognize the need for effective ath-

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letic coaches, health teachers, or personal trainers in our local schools and communities. For example, administrators are continually seeking qualified candidates who not only teach physical education but can also coach one or more school sports. In some cases, filling a coaching position becomes a higher priority for the administration. As a result, PETE programs must consider providing quality coaching education opportunities for their candidates.

### Professional Development

*Capstone Experience.* Most, if not all, PETE programs require some form of

a capstone experience, often referred to as the student-teaching internship. Different variations exist as to how the final semester of an undergraduate program is offered, but candidates should be provided extensive opportunities to implement the knowledge and practice the skills learned in the PETE program in a K–12 school setting on a consistent basis. The full-time student teaching internship can be extremely meaningful and practical for future physical education teachers. Multiple experiences should be provided during the internship, providing candidates with in-depth knowledge of the many different functions and organizational responsibilities of a full-time teacher (e.g., teaching, managing equipment, working with parents, edTPA, etc.). In addition, the internship should be supervised by a PETE professional (university supervisor) as well as a K–12 physical educator (cooperating teacher) who is knowledgeable of the PETE curriculum and regularly incorporates the “effective teaching practices” taught in the program. The PETE program should also have plans for partnerships with local school districts, individual schools, and expert teachers, so that candidates are placed in effective learning environments.

*Professional Organizations.* Because of the need for continual professional development, networking opportunities, and advocacy efforts, PETE programs should provide multiple chances for candidates to become involved with professional organizations in physical education. These opportunities might include attendance and/or presentations at state and/or national conferences, participating in local workshops and advocacy efforts, reading and writing for professional journals in the field, or getting involved in other meaningful initiatives in the local community and surrounding areas (e.g., coaching opportunities, fitness nights, food drives, etc.). Since many PETE faculty members are already connected to professional organizations in some way, the transition for candidates may be easier. As a result, candidates will soon develop an appreciation for professional involvement, will be more likely to stay connected after

graduation, and will have the potential to become leaders in the field. The profession needs a new crop of young educators who are motivated to advocate, lead, and serve others.

**Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs.** Recent trends and national initiatives (e.g., *Let's Move!* Active Schools, etc.) have led to the development of Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs (CSPAPs). Many professional workshops, trainings, webinars, and programs at state and national conferences are now focusing on CSPAPs. Research efforts are in place, and a host of schools and districts are adopting one or more components of the CSPAP model (i.e., physical education, physical activity during school, physical activity before and after school, staff involvement, and family and community engagement). A CSPAP should not be the core of a PETE program, but candidates should certainly be aware of the model, have experiences working with one or more components of the model, and have the skills and confidence to be a key player in the development and/or maintenance of a CSPAP in a K-12 school. The PETE programs can develop multiple avenues for providing candidates with the experiences necessary for incorporating a CSPAP in the future (e.g., implementing one or more components of a CSPAP throughout the PETE curriculum).

**Job Preparation.** In addition to the various components of a PETE program already mentioned, it is likely that candidates may continue to feel ill prepared or anxious, ultimately leading to a lack of confidence upon job application and employment. Furthermore, teaching candidates how to be exemplary professionals often includes concepts beyond the academic content of the PETE program. For these reasons, PETE programs should consider providing candidates with experiences related to resume building and effective interviewing, expectations and considerations for their first year of teaching, multiple concepts related to the Code of Ethics, and strategies for enhancing their career, pursuing

graduate school, and becoming leaders in their local schools and communities.

## Summary

Not all PETE programs can or should provide the same experiences for undergraduate students. Curricular decisions need to be made based on a variety of factors. However, I believe that some components of an undergraduate PETE program are nonnegotiable and should be considered essential to the development and preparation of the next generation of physical education teachers. While some of the mentioned ingredients might be prioritized differently, I believe that all are important; perhaps you agree. With that said, I encourage all SHAPE America members to post comments on our new online learning community, Exchange (<http://community.shapeamerica.org/home>), to continue this discussion.

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