

PEDAGOGY

An Alternative Model for Physical Education Teacher Education Majors: The Process of Programmatic Restructuring

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Abstract

This research paper introduces a novel program structure for a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) aimed at increasing enrollment by offering two career-driven, non-gated tracks. The declining interest in education professions among college students and the resulting deactivation of university PETE programs due to low enrollment necessitate innovative solutions. Current data indicate a significant reduction in the number of students pursuing careers in education, contributing to a shortage of qualified physical education teachers. To address this issue, the proposed program structure offers a tri-track system: one focused on traditional physical education teaching and the other two tracks on athletic coaching and physical activity leadership. Both non-gated tracks are designed to attract a broader range of students by eliminating restrictive entry requirements and providing clear, career-oriented pathways in a variety of fields related to health and physical activity, including coaching in private settings (e.g., sports clubs and academies) and community settings (e.g., municipal recreation programs) and leadership in community-based

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health and physical activity programs. By diversifying career options and removing entry barriers, this innovative structure aims to rejuvenate PETE programs, making them more appealing and accessible to prospective students.

Introduction

The number of undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree in education declined substantially over the last few decades, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (Schaffer, 2022). Data from 2019-2020 shows a 19% decline in the number of bachelor's degrees as compared to the period from 2000 through 2011 (Schaffer, 2022). The decline is even more significant compared to 50 years ago (circa 1970-1971) when education was the most popular field for U.S. undergraduates, representing 21% of all degrees conferred (Schaffer, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this decline in the U.S. teacher pipeline, with K-12 experiencing upheaval as it sought to find the best ways to teach: remotely, in person, or with a hybrid model blending the two modalities. A survey by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education found that 20% of institutions experienced at least an 11% decline in undergraduate education majors during the pandemic (2022, para. 3), and Teach for America, which recruits recent college graduates to teach in low-income U.S. schools, received fewer applications than in previous years (Goldberg, 2021).

The number of students pursuing a bachelor's degree in physical education has declined significantly, in line with other teacher education programs, which has precipitated the closure of some of these programs at institutions across the U.S. (Bulger et al., 2015). Although many hypotheses have been proposed to explain the decline in Physical Education teacher education (PETE) majors, it is difficult to determine definitively why such programs are in decline (Ward et al., 2016). Universities are facing budget cuts and reduced investment in public education overall (Flaherty, 2020), leading some to ask, "[A]re [teacher education programs] dying of natural causes or being killed off?" (para. 1).

In response to budget cuts, the University of South Florida's (USF) College of Education eliminated the bachelor's degree program in

education and focused on the Graduate School of Education, which better aligns with the demands of students seeking alternative, non-traditional pathways (Flaherty, 2020). Local school leaders opposed this plan, stating that it would result in teacher shortages in the local communities. A USF faculty member noted, “You can’t just learn the content disciplines without understanding pedagogical practices and how to structure learning in the classroom.” Others contend that to address declining enrolment, programs should invest in expedited degree pathways for paraprofessionals, scholarships/stipends for student teachers, and partnerships with local school districts and community colleges (Knox, 2022).

Similarly to USF, The Ohio State University phased out its PETE program in 2022 but continued to offer the master of sport coaching degree (King, 2022), while Purdue chose to phase out its PETE program in 2018 (Templin et al., 2014). At Purdue, Templin and colleagues (2014) believed enrolment was cyclical and would correct itself over time; however, as concerns grew, they proposed a new major called the Physical Activity Professional (PAP) designed to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to work with a variety of individuals in a breadth of settings. The proposed major included 50% common credits and three specialized tracks—(a) teacher education, (b) youth fitness development, and (c) sport coaching and instruction—and it was estimated that two years would be needed to reverse declining enrolment. Purdue’s administration chose to reject the proposal. Templin and colleagues advocate for thinking outside the box to provide curricular and professional options rather than simply eliminating PETE programs. Interviews conducted with PETE program coordinators throughout the U.S. revealed that 55.2% were not concerned about losing their programs, 38.7% expressed concern that their programs might close, and 6.1% were concerned their programs would close in the next two years (Ward et al., 2023, p. 5). Thus, nearly 50% of PETE programs in the U.S. may be at risk.

In 2021, the Health and Physical Education (HPE) program at Kennesaw State University (KSU) was identified as a low-award program (i.e., graduated a low number of students annually, on average) and was in danger of being phased out if the program was not modified to include professional career options in physical activity

and sport. The rationale for revitalizing the program was to increase enrolment while simultaneously meeting the department's goals for student success, one of which is to recruit, retain, and graduate undergraduate students while increasing the quality and breadth of academic and co-curricular programs. The programmatic changes were also intended to support and engage with the local community. The purpose of this manuscript, therefore, is to share the process used by the PETE program coordinators and faculty at Kennesaw State University to restructure the gated, teacher preparation-only degree program to create two additional non-restricted degree tracks to explicitly expose majors to career-aligned options within the field of health and physical activity.

Method

The method used for program revitalization was grounded in the integration of Hanover's Research (Gibson, 2022), Atkins' (2023) qualities of a winning academic program, Bulgar et al.'s (2015) emphasis on unique programmatic features, such as non-certification tracks, and Full Fabric's (2024) strategy of designing a modular and integrated curriculum with established strategic partnerships. The process of restructuring occurred in three action phases. During the first phase, a *strong argument was proposed* for developing two new coaching and youth activity leadership concentrations. Throughout the second phase, a *dynamic new curriculum was prepared* consisting of a shared core and significant field hours to better align with students' diverse career aspirations. The last phase completed the cycle wherein *faculty and staff promoted the new major* on campus and throughout the community. Full Fabric (2024) highlights that launching a new academic program requires close collaboration with stakeholders from different departments, the office of academic admissions, and a marketing team. They identified eight key components to guide the process: (a) get the positioning right, (b) build a marketing plan, (c) define your admissions criteria, (d) create an admissions map, (e) craft content for the admissions journey, (f) host promotional events, (g) streamline the admissions journey, and (h) nurture a community.

Robert Atkins (2023) CEO and founder of Gray Decision Intelligence, advises that for each unique academic program to be successful, it must be (a) mission-centred, (b) market-smart, and (c)

margin-conscious. He further states that stakeholders should not look at instructional costs in isolation, assuming a program with few students will yield a small margin. Cutting small programs without understanding economics may make the financial challenges worse. Similar to Full Fabric's recommendations, Atkins notes the importance of including academics and administrators in the decision-making process to ensure it is intensive, transparent, collaborative, and data-informed.

Results

Phase 1: Propose a Strong Argument

KSU, the third-largest university in the University System of Georgia with an enrollment of more than 43,000 students, is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). One of 11 colleges comprising KSU, the Wellstar College of Health and Human Services (WCHHS), is experiencing enrollment growth, with 11% of the KSU student population participating in a WCHHS program.

The Department of Health and Physical Education (HPE) is a dynamic department of multidisciplinary full-time faculty, part-time faculty, one staff member, and approximately 900 students enrolled in three undergraduate programs (i.e., Integrated Health Science, Public Health, and Health and Physical Activity Leadership) in addition to a graduate certificate program in mHealth (mobile health), a minor in Public Health, and a certificate in Coaching Education.

At the time of restructuring, national trends in teacher preparation showed a decline across all disciplines, and enrollment was not expected to grow significantly in the next five years with the current Teacher Preparation-only model. Two additional factors that constrained program growth were (a) the prescriptive nature of the program, which allowed no room for electives, and (b) the cohort model that limited potential candidates to admission only during the fall semester each year.

The Teacher Preparation Concentration has a formal admission process. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) requires that teacher-preparation candidates complete 36 semester hours of accredited college coursework (KSU and transfer credit, if applicable), maintain a KSU institutional (adjusted) GPA

of 2.5 or higher, and receive a grade of “C” or higher in lower division major and teaching field courses required for upper division education courses. In addition, for admission to the Health and Physical Education (P-12) Program, students must submit a narrative expressing their desire to enter the HPE field and demonstrate professional behavior and participation in professional activities. Students must also receive a grade of “C” or better in the following courses: Introduction to Health and Physical Activity Leadership; Fundamentals for Teaching Health and Physical Education; and Anatomy and Physiology for Health and Physical Activity Leadership.

Although 25-30 students register annually for the Fundamentals of Teaching Health and Physical Education course, only one-third persist to graduation. One reason for this is the cohort model of admission, which limits student applications to the Fall semester only; many students leave the program upon learning that the matriculation process would take them an extra year.

Several factors were taken into consideration during the program revision. One of those factors is the popularity of sports in our society and its impact on employment opportunities. The popularity of sports has spawned an increasing need for competent and ethical coaches. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the job market for coaching is projected to grow 26% through 2030, faster than the average for all occupations. Annually, there are approximately 45,000 openings for coaches and scouts, and in Georgia, the annual demand for professionally prepared coaches with a bachelor’s degree exceeds the number of degrees awarded each year. The Coaching Certificate helps address this gap by preparing students for careers in coaching using existing coursework offered by KSU.

Although public schools are currently the largest employers of sport coaches, an emerging growth area has been the privatization of sport over the last 20 years. Young athletes can now access the sport(s) of their choice through private enterprise and programming outside the traditional high school sports programs. Organized youth sports are popular among youth and their families, with approximately 45 million children and adolescent participants in the U.S. Seventy-five percent of American families with school-aged children have at least one child participating in organized sports. To foster a positive

youth sport experience for these young athletes, formal preparation in coaching education is needed.

The Certificate in Coaching Education is designed for teacher candidates and students in other majors interested in youth sports. The HPE Department has offered a Coaching Minor, which typically enrolls more than 150 students per year. Due to U.S. Department of Education regulations limiting federal financial aid funds to courses in a student's program of study, students pursuing degrees with few or no free electives or upper division electives can no longer pursue this minor unless they pay for the courses themselves. However, the newly created coaching certificate, as a distinct and independently recognized program of study, allows students all students to use their federal financial aid toward courses within the certificate.

The phenomenal growth in youth sports over the last two decades, both internationally and within the U.S., has resulted in a \$24 billion youth sports market worldwide—a market that is poised for even greater expansion, with projected growth expected to reach \$77.6 billion worldwide by 2026 (Research and Markets, 2019). The U.S. youth sports market is currently valued at an estimated \$19.2 billion, a not insignificant sum, given that the U.S. National Football League is estimated to be a \$15 billion sports enterprise (Research and Markets, 2019).

Within the U.S., the sports market has been described as nascent with no end to growth in sight, given that youth sports teams are becoming more organized and increasing management efficiency is leading to more opportunities for young people to participate (Research and Markets, 2019). Two statistics that are good indicators of the demand for youth sports in the U.S. are (1) nearly 60% of the country's youth play organized youth sports, and (2) families spend a combined \$30 billion annually for their kids to participate in (Stubbs, 2022). The cost is often steep, with families at the high end spending more than 10% of their income on sports camps, private lessons, travel, registration fees, club fees, and the like (Gregory, 2017).

This surge in demand for youth sports opportunities is primarily being met by private organizations rather than through the traditional means of schools, which can only accommodate a relatively small number of athletes. The private organizations that offer club

teams and travel sports opportunities range from small organizations to professional, well-organized large academies. Since these private organizations and youth sports teams need facilities for team practices and games, more than \$9 billion has been spent in the last six years to build state-of-the-art sports facilities across the U.S., further testament to the demand for youth sports opportunities now and in the foreseeable future (Stubbs, 2022). This demand has, in turn, fuelled a need for qualified coaches.

Youth sports organizations cater to the desires of parents and participants for the young athletes to improve their skills and advance to the next level; therefore, coaches who can help players develop their capabilities and achieve results are in high demand. Coaches are needed not only for club and travel teams but also to meet the demand for private lessons, which can accelerate a child's development in their sport through individualized training to increase speed, foster agility, and improve strength and sport-specific skills. The tremendous demand for coaches is evidenced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, which projects a 9% growth rate from 2022-2032—much faster than the average growth rate predicted for all other occupations (2022).

Another area of demand for qualified coaches is in high school sports, especially in lower-profile sports (i.e., sports other than football and basketball). Many states require coaches to be credentialed teachers, but others are less restrictive, allowing “walk on/off-campus/community coaches” who do not teach at a school to serve as head coaches. In states that require head coaches to be teachers, community coaches are permitted to coach but may not assume the title of “head coach”—although they may perform as the head coach because of their superior knowledge of the sport. Of course, community coaches may choose to obtain teaching credentials if they wish to pursue a career as both a teacher and a coach. Finally, coaches interested in owning and managing their own business can create their own sports coaching business.

There are several employment opportunities in youth sport and physical activity that college graduates can pursue at agencies such as YMCAs, Jewish Community Centres, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, Boy & Girls Clubs, Special Olympics, and the Military through Morale, Welfare, and Recreation—a network

of support and leisure services designed for U.S. servicemembers and their families—to name a few. Organizations such as these help meet the needs of families seeking supervised activities for their children. With divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation on the rise, the traditional family consisting of a married couple with children (the dominant family structure—73% of all family units—in the 1960s) is on the decline, with only 37% of today’s U.S. households maintaining this structure (Aragao, 2023). Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) reports that in two-thirds of U.S. families with children, both parents work (Sullivan, 2020), and it is well-documented that the U.S. has the highest rate worldwide of children living in single-parent households (Kramer, 2019).

Given the above, there is a need for supervised activities for children, particularly after school, during the summer, and at other times when the demands of work or other obligations prevent parents from being present to supervise their children themselves. Youth sports and physical activity programs are healthy activities that many parents find attractive options for ensuring their children are not only well-cared for in their absence. However, they are also engaging in constructive and meaningful experiences. Consequently, agencies seek qualified coaches to ensure their programs are well-run and provide high-quality experiences.

In summary, college graduates seeking employment in youth sports and physical activity have ample opportunities to engage in fulfilling careers at schools, with club teams, and in agencies that offer sports and physical activity programming for children and adolescents.

When these demographic data are considered in toto, it becomes clear that parents need healthy, supervised activities in which their children can participate when they are not available to supervise them. These opportunities manifest in after-school, summer, and weekend programming—often in the form of organized sports and other physical activities. In summary, college graduates seeking employment in leadership involving youth physical activity have ample opportunities for engaging and fulfilling careers, given the demographic trends within the U.S.

Phase 2: Prepare a Dynamic New Curriculum

Based on HPE majors and interests at KSU each Fall, the six-year historical enrolment trend indicated a three-year average of 77; the award trend over three years averaged only 10 graduates. Based on this data, the HPE program was identified as a low-award program, and an action plan was developed to increase enrolment and graduation numbers, partly through the revision of the HPE program to create the Health and Physical Activity Leadership (HPAL) program. The target goals are to increase program enrolment from 77 to 100 students by Fall 2024 and to graduate 15 majors in the academic year 2024. The Spring 2024 enrolment in the Teacher Preparation Foundation course (30 students) exhibited an upward trend. Additionally, it was anticipated that students transferring from other majors into the Coaching and Youth Activity Leadership concentrations would have sufficient credit hours to complete the HPAL degree program in one year, increasing degree awards in just one year. Finally, with a strong marketing campaign, enrolment in the HPAL program was anticipated to increase during the first year (i.e., the 2023-2024 academic year), with significant growth in enrolment and awards in year two once the HPAL major was fully implemented and broadly marketed.

Predictions of awards and enrolment during year one of the HPAL program were primarily anecdotal. An informal survey of students in the Coaching minor and Certificate programs indicated that many would be interested in pursuing coaching as a major. Given the flexibility of the elective coursework in the Coaching concentration, it was hypothesized that several of these students, and others in the Integrated Health Science program in WCHHS, could be ready for graduation in Spring 2024. It was also anticipated that the same would happen with the Youth Activity Leadership concentration for the same reasons. Students currently in the HPE Teacher Preparation Concentration, and other students across campus, have expressed informal interest in pursuing a career working with youth in movement settings, based on sign-in and interest sheets collected from classroom visits, athletic team visits, and student interest surveys, which were sent to students enrolled in programs housed in WCHHS as well as KSU student-athletes.

In creating the HPAL program, programmatic changes were made that aligned with KSU's strategic planning R2 Roadmap in the following areas: (a) removal of the cohort model from the teacher preparation concentration to give students more flexibility and accessibility to courses, (b) coordination of HPAL faculty with BCOE to implement additional Double-Owl Pathways—accelerated progress toward a master's degree by taking up to 9 hours of graduate coursework as an undergraduate student, (c) enhanced graduate opportunities, and (d) additional opportunities for community engagement through field experiences and internships.

The HPAL program offers engagement with the community through experiential learning opportunities tailored for each concentration. The Teacher Preparation concentration includes connections to the local community, primarily with placements in local schools where students work with young children in a real-world setting. The Coaching concentration places students in schools, including field placements in community recreational settings that offer coaching opportunities. The Youth Activity Leadership concentration further expands community relations, with planned placements in community recreation departments, activity clubs, faith-based organizations, and after-school programs.

Enrolment figures in the Coaching minor suggest there was strong interest in Coaching as a career field, and many Teacher Preparation students also expressed an interest in coaching at the high school level. Given the national trend for growth in physical activity careers, it is anticipated that the Youth Activity Leadership concentration will attract a new population of students to the department.

The new major, presented herein, deviates from the traditional PETE model by its various concentrations aimed at career paths beyond the educational setting. This new degree, the Bachelor of Science (BS) in Health and Physical Activity Leadership (HPAL), is designed to prepare students for employment in a variety of fields related to health and physical activity, including health and physical education in both public and private schools; coaching in schools, private settings (e.g., sports clubs and academies), and community settings (e.g., municipal recreation programs); and leadership in community-based health and physical activity programs.

Three significant changes made to the PETE degree to create the Teacher Preparation concentration are expected to yield an increase in retention, progression, and graduation rates compared to the former program. First, the GPA required for admission to all teacher preparation programs across campus has been reduced from 2.75 to 2.5, and the college entrance exam (SAT/ACT) is no longer required. Second, the cohort admission model has been removed so students may apply for and begin the sequence of professional courses during either the Fall or Spring semester. Third, the total number of credit hours for graduation has been reduced from 125 to 120.

The Teacher Preparation concentration remains prescriptive with no elective hours, but the Coaching and Youth Activity Leadership concentrations include six hours of elective coursework. The major program requirements include two new courses that better align with the program outcomes of all three concentrations: (1) Technology in Health and Physical Activity Leadership and (2) Teaching Games and Sports. New requirements, mandated by the Board of Regents for all public institutions in the State of Georgia, dictate that all degree programs be limited to a maximum of 120 credit hours. The former HPE PETE program required 65 credit hours beyond General Education and lower division major field hours, totaling 125 credit hours. The new HPAL program has 42 hours of common major requirements and 36 hours of specific coursework for each concentration (Table 1); these requirements, added to the required 42 hours of General Education courses, result in 120 credit hours for the degree program.

To address program weaknesses identified during a SACSCOC review, two new courses were added to the HPAL degree, and the recommended sequence of courses during the final two years of study was revised. Results from Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators content exams, taken before graduation, revealed that students have difficulty understanding and applying health content. Additionally, Physical Education and Health practicums at the middle and high school levels have historically been taught and implemented during the same semester, causing students difficulty distinguishing between the content and teaching methods for the two areas. The revised HPAL Teacher Preparation Concentration separates middle and secondary school methods and practicum courses

Table 1*B.S. Health and Physical Activity Leadership (HPAL) Curriculum*

B.S. Health and Physical Activity Leadership		
<p>Lower Division Major Requirements (18 credits)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Diversity in Education Contexts • Anatomy and Physiology for Health and Physical Activity Leadership OR Anatomy and Physiology I • Foundations of Health and Wellness • Introduction to Health and Physical Activity Leadership • 6 Credits of Lower Division Electives. <i>(*required for students in the teacher preparation concentration)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • *Investigating Critical and Contemporary Issues in Education • *Exploring Teaching and Learning 	<p>Upper Division Major Requirements (24 credits)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology in Health and Physical Activity Leadership • Teaching Games and Sports • Behaviors and Psychological Aspects of Physical Activity and Coaching • Motor Learning and Development • Measurement and Evaluation for Health and Physical Activity Leadership • Contemporary Health Issues • Child and Adolescent Health Issues • Applied Anatomy and Physiology for Health and Physical Activity Leadership OR Anatomy and Physiology II 	
Concentrations (36 credits)		
Health and Physical Education Teacher Certification	Coaching	Youth Activity Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Adventure Education and Facilitation *Skills-Based Approach to Health Education *Fundamentals for Teaching Health and Physical Education *Family Health and Sexuality *Curriculum, Instruction and Management for Early Childhood Physical Education *Curriculum, Instruction and Management for Middle Grade and Secondary Physical Education *Curriculum, Methods and Secondary School Health Education *Practicum in Middle and Secondary School Health Education *Practicum in Middle and Secondary School Physical Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Coaching Principles *Sport First Aid and Injury Prevention 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Advanced Coaching Methods for Strength and Conditioning *Coaching Practicum 1 *Coaching Practicum 2 *Capstone in Coaching *3 one-credit physical activity courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Youth Fitness Development and Assessment *Family Health and Sexuality *Practicum in Youth Activity Leadership *Capstone in Youth Activity Leadership <i>*15 credits of 3000-4000 level coursework</i>

into different semesters; this separation necessitated the move from a two-semester student teaching experience to a single semester with no change in total credit hours. Adding a new skills-based Health course offers new and revised health content; more importantly, it

presents the content separately—that is, the health content is not presented as part of the Physical Education content. Furthermore, the Practicum in Middle and High School Health Education course allows students to apply health content for an extended length of time in local schools.

One additional course was removed from the prior Teacher Preparation program: *Improving Learning with Technology in High School Classrooms*. This course was included in the curriculum to meet the requirements of the GaPSC concerning technology use and implementations for teacher certification. This course was replaced with a new course, *Technology for Health and Physical Activity Leadership*, which will continue to meet teacher certification requirements while adding content relevant to coaching and related physical activity leadership careers.

The Coaching Concentration was designed in response to the need for knowledgeable and skilled coaches who can positively impact young lives by demonstrating the value of teamwork, the benefits of hard work, and how a good strategy can lead to results on and off the field of play. The program prepares prospective coaches to work with athletes at various age and ability levels, from physical preparation to understanding the emotional, social, and cognitive needs of athletes. Graduates will have the requisite knowledge, skills, professional attitude, and expertise to succeed in an entry-level coaching professional position in schools, sports clubs, community programs, colleges, or other athletic organizations. The Coaching concentration curriculum is based on the National Standards for Sports Coaching issued by SHAPE America. It involves aspects of physical education pedagogy, health promotion/injury prevention, and kinaesthetic principles of preparing athletes for performance. The curriculum includes advanced sport-specific coaching methodology courses, two required coaching practicums in sports settings, and a capstone experience.

The Youth Activity Leadership concentration was designed to assist students in gaining the competencies, knowledge, and skills to help young people develop into competent, well-adjusted, and contributing citizens. Completing this coursework prepares students to address issues facing youth in the context of family and community, emphasizing positive outcomes through a dynamic learning envi-

ronment. This concentration prepares students for leadership positions in youth development organizations, agencies, and institutions such as schools, 4-H Clubs, Boys and Girls Clubs, nonprofit organizations, recreation/community agencies, military settings, and many others.

Graduates may be supervisors of youth development staff in educational and social service work environments, faith-based advocates for youth well-being, program evaluators, fundraisers, grant writers, administrators, and supervisors. The program partners with youth-related agencies/organizations and engages them in providing experiential learning opportunities for students. While data is not exact due to the variations in career opportunities, it is estimated that between 2018 and 2028, the careers focusing on youth development will grow 18% across the United States.

Phase 3: Promote the New Degree Program

A comprehensive marketing plan developed for the HPAL program included target demographics (e.g., KSU students in other fields and those enrolled in basic physical activity courses, high school, and two-year college students) and process measures (e.g., spotlight stops on student tours, student fairs, high-school career days, athletic advising). Brochures and posters were created in coordination with UITs, and HPE faculty discussed the new major in their courses.

A comprehensive and coordinated advising plan is imperative to growing enrolment and retaining students in the HPAL major. The current HPE Teacher Preparation major has a single advisor based in BCOE who continues to work with students in the Teacher Preparation concentration of the new major. However, the two additional concentrations require at least one advisor within WCHHS. Further, it is anticipated that KSU athletes will be attracted to the HPAL major, so coordination with advisors in the athletic department was also paramount. The new HPAL major is attractive to athletes because it will not only allow them to participate fully in athletics by pursuing a Coaching or Youth Activity Leadership Degree and by subsequently pursuing a Master of Arts in Teaching Degree (pedagogy only) after their eligibility has expired, but also will allow them to have more flexibility in coursework, modalities, and times as well as an increased number of electives.

In January 2023, steps were taken to market the program at KSU and within the broader community. Meetings were scheduled with the Director of Marketing and Communications for WCHHS to design marketing material (e.g., pamphlets, flyers, social media announcements), Owl TV messaging (i.e., digital signage on campus), bulletin board displays, etc. Updates reflecting the new major and concentrations were made to the department and university websites. Articles highlighting the HPAL curriculum and field experiences, benefits of the program, and potential career opportunities were published on the KSU homepage and in KSU's student newspaper. HPAL accounts for Facebook and Instagram were also created to broaden the marketing campaign's reach.

Because registration for summer and fall classes opened in early March of 2024, HPAL information sessions were held in February and March. The department hosted virtual and in-person check-ins to inform KSU students of the new concentrations and advise them on transferrable credits. Information tables were reserved weekly at locations around campus, including the student dining hall, the Student Centre, and two academic buildings that experienced significant student traffic. HPAL faculty participated in two KSU Open Houses in the spring and held an HPAL Interest Night for current KSU students in April. Informational visits to classes and athletic team meetings were also held throughout the spring.

To inform potential KSU students about this new degree, HPAL was highlighted as a Spotlight Stop during campus tours for prospective students in April. Visitors to KSU received detailed information on the program and had the opportunity to observe students peer-teaching in an HPE class. HPAL was also represented and featured at the Cobb Future Fest, an event hosted by Cobb County School District.

Conclusion

Beyond the development and implementation of HPAL, the premise was to provide options for students interested in a career path involving leadership in health and physical activity beyond the traditional path of teaching Physical Education in a compulsory school setting. Given that the PETE program numbers were not robust, the HPAL major was developed as a potentially attractive alternative degree for undergraduate students.

Within three months of launching, the HPAL degree attracted significant interest. In the brief time (nine months) since the major was transformed from a traditional PETE degree to the HPAL major, 119 students have chosen to pursue an HPAL degree, an increase of 81%. Sixty-three students declared the HPAL Teacher Education concentration, 26 declared the Coaching concentration, and two declared the Youth Activity Leadership concentration. Twenty-eight HPAL majors have yet to declare a specific concentration.

It is and will be important to monitor and adapt the program by regularly evaluating the success of the concentrations through student enrolment numbers, graduation rates, and job placements. Data will be used to adapt the program as needed to ensure it remains relevant and appealing to future students. A continuous feedback loop is in place to gather student and faculty feedback to make real-time adjustments to course offerings, teaching methods, and recruitment efforts. HPAL coordinators are working to polish the program further by offering an additional concentration in Health and Wellness Coaching. Students pursuing a Health and Physical Education degree can seamlessly transition into a Health and Wellness Coaching career due to the substantial overlap in coursework and skills required for both fields. Core courses such as exercise physiology, nutrition, behavioral psychology, and health promotion are integral to both programs, providing a solid foundation in understanding the human body, health behaviors, and strategies for promoting well-being. These courses equip students to design and implement personalized health plans, a crucial aspect of health coaching. Additionally, practical experiences gained through internships and fieldwork in physical education programs often involve working directly with individuals or groups to enhance their physical health, mirroring the client-centered approach in health coaching. By leveraging their comprehensive education and hands-on experience, students can effectively transition to health coaching roles, where they can apply their expertise in motivating and guiding clients toward healthier lifestyles.

The new HPAL degree is poised for success. In developing the program, care was taken to monitor degree and labor trends to ensure the program prepared students for the career opportunities available upon graduation based on projected job trends (Gibson, 2022). One

recent trend is the rise in non-clinical health professions that do not involve direct patient care. The HPAL program capitalizes on student interest in the health career field by offering alternative career pathways. For example, aspiring nursing students not admitted into competitive nursing programs can redirect their passion and skills towards the equally vital health and wellness coach role. This approach maximizes educational resources and ensures students can pursue fulfilling health promotion and disease prevention careers.

Restructuring the PETE program to include two distinct, non-gated career tracks has significant potential to reverse the enrollment decline and revitalize interest in the field. Our research indicates that offering a traditional physical education teaching track and an athletic coaching and youth activity leadership track attracts a wider range of students by providing diverse career opportunities and eliminating restrictive entry barriers. The traditional track prepares students for K-12 teaching roles, maintaining the foundational mission of PETE programs, while the added tracks open pathways to careers in personal training, corporate wellness, and community health.

This multi-track approach enhances the program's appeal and aligns with the broader trends in the health and wellness industry, an industry experiencing robust growth. Initial feedback and enrollment data post-implementation reveal increased student interest and satisfaction, suggesting that programmatic flexibility is crucial for adapting to the evolving educational landscape. By addressing the root causes of declining enrolment—limited career options and restrictive entry requirements—this innovative program serves as a model for other disciplines facing similar challenges. Future research should focus on longitudinal outcomes of graduates from both tracks to further validate the efficacy of this approach.

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