The image of physical education, particularly that of the place of physical education in higher education, is one with much indistinctness of purpose in the eyes of many critics of education. It would not be committing remissness to say that a status of ambiguity, confusion and even deplorability is leveled on physical education by the many forces that shape the system of higher education. One need not go far to find those who simply commit physical education to athletics—in various manifest forms. Equally numerous are those who relegate physical education to play—with or without skill. Then, of course, the figure is not small when one counts those who unpretentiously understand physical education as plain sweat and exercise. One can also find those who have a vague conception of physical education as somehow remotely linked with health. There is little need to elaborate further concerning common conceptions and images of physical education in higher education. The important thing, of course, is to examine these with deeper concerns. Are these essentially conceptions, or misconceptions? Whichever they are, it is pertinent to understand some of the key developments which have been largely responsible for what has transpired.

Many practices, both historical as well as current, have contributed to this problematical business of confusion in multiple identity. The first colleges involved in physical education in this country were those which had programs that were developed and organized under the influence of medical men. Two notable examples of this were Amherst College with Edward Hitchcock, M.D., as Professor of Hygiene and Physical Education (1861), and Harvard with Dudley Sargent, M.D., as Professor of Physical Training and Director of Hemenway Gymnasium (1879). As a matter of fact, for a great length of time following this beginning, a large proportion of physical education leaders were M.D.’s.

Today, many of our leading institutions of higher learning provide for an administratively independent unit within the broad university structure with varying degrees of scope, such as a college, a school, a division, or a department which links together health education, physical education, and recreation (and some include intercollegiate athletics) under a single administrative head with appropriately corresponding responsibility, such as a dean, a director, or a chairman. In some institutions, it is not uncommon to find a coach who, though functioning essentially in a non-academic role, carries a rank of professor. Perhaps the greatest single force giving the appearance of a uniformitarian relationship to these several areas is the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. This organization is a department of the National Education Association and its membership rolls swell beyond the 43,000 mark. The sub-structure of the Asso-

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Physical Education in Higher Education

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ciation includes divisions of health education, physical education, recreation, men’s athletics, girls and women’s sports, safety education, dance, and a general division which includes research.

Thus, this brief sketch has shown some of the practices which have brought about the intermingling of physical education with health, recreation, and athletics. It is the primary concern of this writing, however, to go beyond the mere realm of practices and call attention to considerations that give perspective to education, physical education, and a general division which includes research.

Obviousiy, the concern to produce and disseminate scholarly knowledge is not peculiar to any one discipline, rather it is sine qua non to the very existence of higher education. Physical education, the study of man’s behavior in manifest forms of motor activity, is essentially concerned with the total well-being of man as a biological organism. This totality in optimal levels of living and performance is inextricably associated with a multiplicity of identities and interpersonal relationships involving organic and kinesthetic fitness, mental and cognitive alertness, personal and social adjustment, and emotional stability. All of this appears to be congruent to a branch of knowledge involving research.

Physical Education as a Contributory Subject Matter Field to General Education

The general education movement in higher education is becoming ubiquitous in an accelerating pace. This is evidenced by the current reflection of a greater concern for changes in the curriculum under the aegis of “general education.” The idea that common and universal experience in education be pervasive to all students finds support largely in the concern for man’s destiny in a free society. Enrichment of the personal life of the individual and his understanding of and preparation for his responsibilities to such a society have loomed to assume significant role in the curricular objectives of higher education. This is all well and good, but there is an underlying question which finds a serious need for practical answers — what makes up a complementary list of courses that adequately fulfills the needs of general education? Needless to say, there are many different viewpoints on this question and it might well be that there is no one list acceptable to every one of the many existing
views. There are different views on emphasis. There are different views on scope. Indeed, there are opposing views on efficacy. For example, there are those who subscribe to the point of view that is representatively characterized by Jacob who concludes that the values of college students are "remarkably homogeneous" and that neither teacher, curriculum, nor teaching method "liberalizes" the student during his tenure as a college student. On the other hand, there are those who are partial to the point of view that is characterized by Lehman who favors the support of the existence of "heterogeneity of student's values," thus giving credit to the college for having some influence upon their formulation. Physical education, by its very nature, predisposes itself to support the latter view.

The collective body of rationale in support of physical education as a vital subject area of general education is totally extensive and substantially intensive. An exhaustive examination of the literature would be exceedingly overbearing in an article of this nature. Therefore, it is necessary here to be selective. Among the most emphatic supporters is the President's Council of Physical Fitness. The "PCPF" has asserted that the nation looks to its institutions of higher education as the main source of enlightened leadership; and that these institutions, in preparing young men and women for leadership cannot ignore the obligation to provide for their physical well-being as an important element of their total fitness. It is notable that the "PCPF" unequivocally made the pronouncement that good health and physical fitness are the logical and necessary starting points for the pursuit of excellence in all things. The council further makes this generalization, "In short, physical fitness is an essential aspect of a balanced and productive life." To sum it up, the "PCPF" has taken this stand, "We can no longer afford to consider anyone fully educated until he knows how—and is thoroughly motivated—to keep himself in the best possible physical condition at all times. Achieving this end for all students should be one of the primary goals of every college."

Indeed, there are opposing views on scope. For example, there are those who subscribe to the point of view that is representatively characterized by Jacoh who favors the support of college student's values, thus giving credit to the college for having some influence upon their formulation. Physical education, by its very nature, predisposes itself to support the latter view.

Needless to say, this powerful voice in the support of greater emphasis on physical fitness has, in effect, generated a significant national interest in calling for increased attention to physical education. Albeit, it has fomented something of an issue that bears the earmarks of a controversy within the professional ranks. In the eyes of physical educators who insist on the broadest purview to physical education, a part of a program has seriously threatened to become the whole of the program. Duncan maintains that physical fitness is not the whole of physical education and that it is not the entire subject area. He has focused attention on the need to examine this issue and yet not to lose sight of the fact that this "national interest in physical fitness has established the most favorable climate for health, physical education, and recreation that has ever existed in the history of American education." Thus, we see the physical fitness movement as a powerful influence in the nature of a crowbar exerting tremendous force as a lever prying our physical education program toward greater emphasis on exercise designed to promote total physical fitness.

The worth of this physical fitness movement rests upon whether exercise, in fact, is conducive to physical well-being. An abundant literature has accumulated on this subject. Obviously, it is necessary to limit this discussion to a few notable examples which will help to shed the necessary light on this subject. Bortz, a leading figure in the medical aspects of metabolism, nutrition, and geriatrics, has suggested these corollaries based on persuasive clinical evidence: (1) osteoporosis in the elderly is accentuated by disuse, (2) muscles become flabby from lack of exercise, (3) when the blood stream flows at a slow rate, sludging of cells and metabolites occurs, thereby increasing opportunity for deposition of cholesterol, triglycerides, and fatty acids to settle in crevices in the intima and media of blood vessels, and (4) too rich a blood mixture is soporific for the nervous system. Karnoven has pointed to the great significance of the interrelationships of exercise, serum cholesterol level and coronary heart disease. He has presented evidence which supports the view that long-term exercise has a protective effect on the cardiovascular system and that such an effect may be due to: (1) an increased performance capacity of the heart, and (2) the suppression of the serum cholesterol level. Hein and Ryan give added support to these benefits to health as a result of exercise and reaffirm the stand that "exercise may still be considered good medicine." A joint statement on exercise and fitness issued by the American Medical Association and the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation provides a somewhat general and assuaging summary of this problem, "Exercise is one of the important factors contributing to total fitness," and "One must continue to exercise in order to maintain fitness."

Cogent as these supporting statements are, it is imperative to examine what remains to be the most crucial aspect of this whole issue—the quality of general physical education and the scope of its program. Brace points out the basic problems and offers a number of thought provoking suggestions, some of which are included in these points: (1) the requirement for physical education in
college should be based upon an appraisal of needs and abilities and of competencies which should be expected of men and women who graduate from American institutions of higher learning, (2) entering college students should be examined relative to established standards and programmed according to the results — those satisfying the standards could be excused from the basic requirement and those failing would be assigned to needed instruction, (3) physical education should be continued as elective offerings and should be of such a nature as to insist upon a high standard of scholarship. Any attempt to justify university instruction in physical education which is subcollegiate in character or which is simply a repetition of common offerings in secondary schools should be met with disdain. General physical education courses must be imbued with content and requirements commensurate with the level of standard established for all courses in general education to which academic credit is given. It is conceivable that such a standard could be too stringent for some students, who, for various reasons, may find it difficult to meet. For such students it may be plausible to offer a non-credit pre-requisite experience, which would be essentially orientational in character, and subsequently qualify them for the proper course or courses for credit. It seems that this sort of an arrangement would allow for the needed flexibility necessary to provide for individual needs and abilities and at the same time sustain a quality level program worthy of academic credibility. It is highly possible that this approach may serve to ameliorate the weaknesses of many prevailing programs which operate under the necessity of compromising the need for orientation and that of more intensive learning.

Variables of Program

The extent to which the general physical education program operates in any one institution rests upon many variables of which these are the major determinants: (1) facilities, (2) staff, and (3) policy. Generally, two concerns constitute minimum experience considered adequate to basic physical education: (1) acquisition of a satisfactory level of physical fitness with the necessary knowledge and appreciation of the scientific bases for the development and maintenance of physical fitness, and (2) acquisition of a satisfactory level of an adult recreational activity or sport with the necessary knowledge and appreciation of the cultural development of the activity or sport as well as the technical aspects such as rules, strategy and skill analysis. In certain locales where the physical environment includes large bodies of water, proficiency in swimming may be required or recommended in lieu of or in addition to concern number 2 discussed above. Further, in institutions where physical education is collaterally existent with health education, a basic requirement in personal health knowledge and practices may be an additional concern.

In view of the foregoing discussion concerning physical education in two facets, one as an academic discipline and the other as a subject matter field in general education, the presentation of ideas undoubtedly leaves much room for further discussion Keller, in addressing a group of college physical educators and speaking as an education dean looking at physical education, summarized his concern for physical education by pointing out that the dilemmas which surround physical education as a field do not fit into a neat package because of the multiplicity of problems involving service courses, professional programs—graduate and undergraduate, research, relationships with interscholastic athletics, facilities, etc. He left his audience with this thought, "The 'honeymoon' may be over but the future looks exciting!"