



Society for the Teaching of Psychology (APA Division 2)  
**OFFICE OF TEACHING RESOURCES IN PSYCHOLOGY (OTRP)**  
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## **SO YOUR STUDENTS WANT TO BE SPORT PSYCHOLOGISTS!** (2001 OTRP Instructional Resource Award)

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### **Overview**

This document serves three purposes and is arranged in three parts that correspond to these purposes. First, it introduces the field of sport psychology, describes the current state of the field and identifies issues facing the field. This section includes resources such as current textbooks, journals and organizations. Second, it provides guidelines and tips for advising students who want to explore this field. Included are the paths to becoming a sport psychologist, sources of information on graduate programs and questions students should ask when investigating graduate programs. Also included are suggestions for courses to be taken by students interested in sport psychology. Third, it gives psychology professors some activities that may be used to introduce sport psychology into their courses.

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#### References

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## Introduction

So, your students want to be sport psychologists? Perhaps they want to work with Tiger Woods or the Baltimore Orioles or Jennifer Capriati or the New York Yankees or whatever professional teams and athletes are in the local area in which they live.

Sport psychology is a specialty that continues to show increased interest and visibility. The media tells stories of sport psychology used by professional athletes, the movies feature the profession, although Renee Russo's sport psychologist in *Tin Cup* is not the best portrayal of one, and the field was featured in the November 1999 issue of the *APA Monitor*.

Judging from inquiries on both the online Teaching in the Psychological Sciences (TIPS) discussion group and the Sport Psychology (Sportpsy) discussion group, a large number of professors and students do not know where to look for information on the field. Frequently, there is confusion about what the field of sport psychology is and what sport psychologists do.

Like many specialties, specific courses should be completed in order to gain admission to graduate school and to succeed in those programs. Sport psychology, as all other specialties, requires an understanding of what is involved in being a sport psychologist when making choices about graduate programs. One purpose of this document is to provide undergraduate faculty members with information to use in advising students who are interested in being sport psychologists.

### Part One: Guide to the Field

#### A. The Field of Sport Psychology

The field of sport psychology is interdisciplinary, comprising both sport science and psychology, especially clinical and counseling skills. Sport psychology programs are housed mainly in sport science or kinesiology departments but there are a growing number of programs that straddle both departments. Sport psychologists today work in many diverse settings. What they do covers the spectrum from injury rehabilitation to performance enhancement to counseling on eating disorders to termination of career either on time or prematurely. Clients may meet with the sport psychologist once or for a number of sessions.

Technically people can use the title sport psychologist only if they are a licensed psychologist. Licensed psychologists are bound by the American Psychological Association (APA) code of ethics, which limits practice to areas of competence so licensure alone is not sufficient. Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of APA is working with APA's Commission for Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP) to develop a specialization in sport psychology.

The Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) does offer a voluntary certification process and those who complete the process are eligible to use the designation "certified sport consultant, AAASP." Criteria for this certification are in the *Directory of Graduate Programs in Sport Psychology* (Sachs, Burke, & Schrader, 2000). AAASP-certified consultants also are eligible for inclusion in the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Register.

#### B. Issues Facing the Field Today

As with any "new" field, sport psychology is undergoing some growing pains. A number of critical issues have surfaced at conferences and in publications. Because the field is less well-defined than many other specialties, students need to understand that these are ongoing issues. Graduates do not fit into a ready-made niche. Many people have forged their own careers in somewhat varied arenas. Although that can be exciting, it does add stress. Thus, it is important for students entering the field to understand the most salient issues facing the field.

One critical issue is credentialing. Without some sort of credentialing, it is difficult for practitioners to gain respect. Similar fields certify and license their practitioners. The issue raises questions including under whose

auspices the credentialing should occur, and who should supervise those who seek credentialing. Once someone is credentialed, who should monitor his or her behavior? These questions have yet to be resolved.

Another issue of primary importance to graduate students is the development of supervised internships and practica. There is a need for well-developed, highly supervised practical experiences, yet few programs incorporate these as a matter of routine. Many graduate students must create their own experiences. A related question is supervision. Clinicians know that supervision is critical to the development of students' skills in clinical and counseling areas. What can sport psychology do to develop better supervised experiences?

A third critical issue concerns territoriality. Any interdisciplinary area is likely to suffer these sorts of disputes. They impact all of the other issues. Sport psychology must come to grips with its divided nature and do so in a way that benefits the next generation of sport psychologists.

These issues continue to be discussed at Division 47 and AAASP meetings. Students interested in the field should keep informed about developments concerning these issues.

### C. Organizations in Sport Psychology

At present, Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of APA and AAASP are the two major organizations devoted to sport psychology. The International Society for Sport Psychology (ISSP) is important for those with international aspirations. Some other organizations such as the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) and North American Society for Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA) feature presentations on sport psychology at their conferences.

Division 47 sponsors programming at the annual APA conference and, in collaboration with AAASP, disseminates a brochure on recertification processes for licensed psychologists. AAASP is the primary organization that focuses on applied sport psychology although most members are academics.

### D. Internet and Websites Related to Sport Psychology

Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) – American Psychological Association  
<<http://www.apa.org/about/division/div47.html>>

Division 47 site with links  
<<http://www.psyc.unt.edu/apadiv47/index.html>>

Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP)  
<[www.aaasponline.org](http://www.aaasponline.org)>

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD)  
<[www.aahperd.org/](http://www.aahperd.org/)>

North American Society for Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA)  
<[www.naspspa.org](http://www.naspspa.org)>

Sportpsy Listserv  
<[LISTSERV@VM.TEMPLE.EDU](mailto:LISTSERV@VM.TEMPLE.EDU)>

The last entry, Sportpsy, is operated by Michael Sachs from Temple University. It is a good place for faculty to learn about issues in sport psychology.

### E. Publishers of Sport Psychology Materials

Fitness Information Technology  
1137 Van Voorhis Road  
Chelsea Square, Suite 32

Morgantown, WV 26505  
<[www.fitinfotech.com](http://www.fitinfotech.com)>  
1-800-477-4348

Human Kinetics  
P. O. Box 5076  
Champaign IL 61825-5076  
<[www.humankinetics.com](http://www.humankinetics.com)>  
1-800-747-4457

#### F. Current Texts and Books in Sport Psychology

- Biddle, S. J. H. (Ed.). (1995). *European perspectives on exercise and sport psychology*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Press.
- Cox, R. H., & Cox, S. H. (1998). *Sport psychology*, (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
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- Williams, J. M. (Ed.). (2001). *Applied sport psychology* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

#### G. Relevant Journals

##### *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology (JSEP)*

*JSEP* is published quarterly and is the official publication of North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity (NASPSPA). It features scholarly articles and reviews.

Human Kinetics  
P.O.B. 5076  
Champaign, IL 61825-5076  
Phone: 800-747-4457

##### *The Sport Psychologist (TSP)*

*TSP* focuses on applied research and its applications. It includes review of current materials and is published quarterly.

Human Kinetics  
P. O. Box 5076  
Champaign, IL 61825-5076  
Phone: 800-747-4457

*Journal of Applied Sport Psychology (JASP)*

JASP is the official journal of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology and is published quarterly. It includes scholarly articles as well as Association news.

Taylor and Francis  
325 Chestnut Street, Suite 800  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

## **Part Two: Advising**

### A. Jobs in Sport Psychology

Sport psychology is not an undergraduate major. It is a graduate degree, either at the masters or doctoral level. Unlike some majors, such as accounting or education, graduates in sport psychology are not prepared for specific job titles as are accountants and teachers. Rather, graduates of sport psychology programs develop a set of skills and a body of knowledge that enable them to work in diverse positions.

Some doctoral level graduates work at universities and colleges in athletic departments as sport psychologists. Because the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the governing body of college athletics, does not recognize sport psychologists as separate from coaches, few schools hire full-time sport psychologists because they count against the NCAA limits on coaches. Several professional sport psychology organizations are working to change this limitation in the hope that more colleges will hire sport psychologists full-time.

Many doctoral level graduates teach at the university level, conduct research on sport topics and teach sport psychology and other courses. Others teach at medical schools and work with physicians and residents to enhance their mental skills such as concentration. Still others develop full-time consulting businesses, consulting with organizations and athletes. Some of these athletes are at the professional level, while others are amateur athletes who can afford private consulting. Very few professional teams hire sport psychology consultants. Even the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) does not pay its consultants and it has very specific requirements for working with Olympic teams and athletes.

Master's level sport psychology graduates have many options as well. A few are able to develop private consulting businesses. Many work as athletic department support staff in the athletic academic counseling area or in Life Skills, an NCAA program designed to help athletes prepare for a life after sports. Others work at private health clubs as trainers or in the corporate world in wellness programs. Still others work in research positions.

Someone trained in sport psychology can take many positions. Because there is not a clearcut path for sport psychology graduates, they may be able to turn their skills into a position that fits their own goals and interests.

### B. Paths to a Career in Sport Psychology

Division 47 (Exercise and Sport Psychology) of the American Psychological Association, in its brochure on training opportunities, delineates four tracks that can be followed to becoming a sport psychologist. All involve a combination of psychology and sport science coursework. The paths described are predicated upon being a psychology major during the undergraduate years. Following each route, I suggest some possible career paths.

#### *Master's in Sport Psychology – Sport Science Route*

This route prepares students to work as performance enhancement consultants. This route does not prepare one to do any clinical work. It may make admission to a doctoral program in clinical psychology more difficult although judicious course selection could make this option viable. Students who take this route may work in youth sports programs, as corporate wellness coordinators or they

may develop their own consulting businesses. This is a good route for students who plan to go onto doctoral programs, especially in sport science departments. This route could also be a good one for someone interested in coaching or coaching education.

#### *Master's Sport Psychology – Psychology Route*

This is a more difficult route as few programs in psychology departments offer a sport psychology emphasis, especially at the master's level. There is a program in Counseling with an athletic emphasis at Springfield College in Massachusetts that prepares students to work as master's level counselors who have a specialty in working with athletes. Another variation would be a master's in counseling with some coursework in sport science. These graduates would be prepared to work in athletic departments as athletic academic advisors or in NCAA Life Skills programs.

#### *Doctoral Programs – Sport Science*

This route prepares students to teach in sport science departments, to do research or to work as an applied consultant. The Association for the Advanced of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) certification requirements can be met by taking additional coursework in a psychology department. It is doubtful that this route would enable a student to become a licensed psychologist in most states.

#### *Doctoral Programs – Clinical or Counseling Psychology*

This route may lead to licensure and provides students with many options. In particular, if there are linkages to the sport science department and practical work with athletes is possible as part of the practicum experience, this route may offer the best of all worlds. This combination prepares the student to work in a myriad of settings and would (with some coursework in sport science) meet AAASP certification requirements. It also is likely to prepare students to meet the requirements of the proposed American Psychological Association CSRPPP specialty in sport psychology. Finally, this option provides students with research experience.

### C. Resources for Information About Graduate Programs

The best single source of information about graduate programs in sport psychology is the *Directory of Graduate Programs in Applied Sport Psychology* (Sachs, Burke & Schrader, 2000). The *Directory* is a compendium of information about various programs and is edited by professors from Temple University. The *Directory* is a product of AAASP and is published by Fitness Information Technology.

The *Directory* is updated frequently and is now available online. Although other graduate program listings include some information about programs in sport psychology, the information is not as well organized as the *Directory*. Division 47 of the APA also publishes a brochure with some guidelines on graduate training.

Used in conjunction with other materials, such as the general advising information from APA and the brochure from Division 47, the *Directory* provides a good starting point for choosing a graduate program.

### D. Tips for Advising

Begin by asking what students want to do as a sport psychologist. What they want to do will help determine their choice of graduate school (e.g. clinical, educational, researcher, etc.).

Suggest students read a number of texts and journals in the field so they have a sense of the type of work that goes on. The bibliography at the end of this document contains suggestions.

Encourage students to attend an AAASP conference. These conferences, held each fall, are student friendly and the student division of the organization is active. Undergraduate students can talk with current graduate students and get a sense of the different programs. A new feature of recent conferences is a graduate program fair where representatives of various programs display their materials and are available to answer

questions. Additionally, a number of regional conferences are organized largely by the students of AAASP. Information about these regional conferences can be found on the AAASP website provided in Part One, Section D.

Using guides such as the *Directory of Graduate Programs in Applied Sport Psychology* (Sachs, Burke, & Schrader, 2000) and the APA guides to graduate study as well as the *Guide to Programs in the Social Sciences* (Peterson, 2000), students should make a list of schools that interest them.

Students should use the attached questions (as well as others in the *Directory* or in other guides to selecting graduate programs) to investigate the programs of interest. It is critical to visit or at least contact current students via email so that a true picture of what is going on in that program can be drawn.

#### E. Questions to Ask of Graduate Programs

David Conroy, an assistant professor at The Pennsylvania State University who earned his PhD in sport psychology, recommends that students double-major in exercise science and psychology, if possible, or at least take courses in both disciplines. He further recommends that students become involved in research, especially if it is health-related.

He suggests asking the following questions (D. Conroy, personal communication, February 18, 1996):

##### Program-related questions

- What is the focus of the program (research, applied, science-practice)?
- What coursework is required during the program?
- What electives are typically taken? What coursework, if any, is available in other departments? Can students readily take courses in other departments? Can students in an exercise science program take courses in counseling? (This is an especially important question to verify because some counseling departments do not admit students from other departments.)
- What kinds of opportunities exist for applied work with athletes?
- Is there much student-faculty collaboration?
- What are the professional goals of other students in the program?
- With what peer institutions does the department compare itself?

##### Admission-related questions

- How many students are enrolled in master's programs? In doctoral programs?
- How many students will be admitted next year at the level to which the student is applying?
- What is the typical student profile as far as undergraduate school, GPA, major, GRE scores?
- What coursework is required for admission?
- Are any faculty members planning sabbaticals in the near future? Are any of them planning to leave the institution?

##### Certification-related questions

- Are practicum experiences supervised? Is there a formal requirement for practicum experiences in the department?
- Are practicum experiences structured throughout the program or does the student have to find them independently?
- What is the nature of the supervision?
- Will students be eligible for AAASP certification or licensure in their home states? If not, how much extra coursework will it take to meet certification and licensure requirements?

##### Pragmatic questions

- Does the department routinely take students to conferences?
- Does the department support student presentations at conferences, both financially and otherwise?
- Is there any funded research in the department?
- Are faculty members active in Division 47 and AAASP?

- Where do students live in town?
- Is it an expensive town?
- What do students normally do during the summer?
- How are relationships and interactions with other departments? (For sport science programs especially, ask about counseling and psychology departments.)

Kevin Burke (1996), one of the editors of the *Directory*, suggests some additional questions:

- What is the cost of the program? How are students funded?
- How long has the program been in existence?
- What is the typical number of students in a class? What is the student-faculty ratio?
- What are faculty interests who are involved in the program? How many faculty are there?
- Where are some of the recent graduates working now?
- What is the expected time to graduation?

Burke's website at Georgia Southern University has some additional information about sport psychology careers. <<http://gsaix2.cc.gasou.edu:80/facstaff/kevburke/>>. More information can be found on his personal page at <<http://sport-psychology.com>>.

#### F. Suggested Undergraduate Courses

Sport psychology graduate programs are not yet accredited by any accrediting body, thus there are no lists of required prerequisite courses. However, many graduate faculty members give similar answers to the question of what courses students should take. Some suggestions for courses to include in a well-rounded degree program are provided below. Although it is not possible to include all the courses listed, students should strive to include one or more of the courses listed under each major heading. In addition, it is strongly recommended that students obtain some research experience.

##### Traditional Psychology Courses

Developmental Psychology (child, adolescence, adulthood)

Learning

Cognition

Introduction to Counseling

Motivation

##### Research Methodology/Writing

Experimental Psychology (research methods)

Statistics

Advanced writing courses

##### Group Behavior

Organizational Behavior

Group Dynamics/Behavior

Social Psychology

Industrial/Organizational Psychology

##### Biological Bases of Behavior

Biopsychology (physiological psychology)

Anatomy and Physiology

Motor Development

##### Sport-related Courses

Sport Psychology

Kinesiology

Sport Sociology

Athletic Training (athletic medicine)



## Part Three: Activities to Introduce Sport Psychology in the Classroom

### A. Developmental Psychology

- Have students create a speech for a parents' organization in which they discuss the physical, cognitive and psychological issues to be considered when children play sports.
- Have students create a coaching plan, with specific strategies and exercises, for specific ages of children, justifying each in terms of the normal development of children of that age. Include physical development as well as social and emotional development.

### B. Personality Psychology

- After discussing the various approaches to explaining personality, have students list the characteristics in each approach. Find a famous athlete whose public personality seems to be explained by the various approaches.
- Have students read an athlete's biography and then evaluate the athletes using one of the schools of personality theory.

### C. Social Psychology

- Have students examine theories of group formation and group behavior. Next, have them watch a team sport such as basketball or lacrosse (it can be live or on television) and evaluate the team in terms of the principles of group formation. Have them assign group roles to each of the players.
- Tape sporting events on television and edit the acts of aggression. Have students classify each according to the type of aggression displayed. Discuss the difficulty in labeling the type of aggression.

### D. Learning

- Teach a new physical skill (e.g., dart throwing, juggling) using the principles of shaping.
- Have students watch a team practice its sport and have them list and classify the types of reinforcement used by the coaches.

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