

ICSM-CREP Recommendations: FAQ

About the Recommendations

- Why were these recommendations developed?

Collegiate athletes have experienced an increasing number of incidents of exertional-related injuries and death under the supervision of strength and conditioning staff. These incidences have drawn much needed attention to the actions and competency of individuals working as strength and conditioning coaches in colleges and universities. In the interest of ensuring an adequate level of athlete safety and physical and mental well-being, all aspects of the strength and conditioning position have been examined for their impact and factored into the recommendations. These include minimal educational requirements, requisite training and professional preparation, professional qualifications as measured by legally defensible certification, and influence of the reporting structure within the athletic department.

- What process was used to develop the recommendations?

A thorough review of the available literature examining the incidents and issues that have contributed to athlete injury or death and the current evidence-based, institutional best practices were conducted. Following the review, a task force was convened; made up of expert stakeholders from the Coalition for the Registration of Exercise Professionals (CREP) and the Intercollegiate Council for Sports Medicine (ICSM). The task force was comprised of practicing strength and conditioning coaches, athletic trainers, exercise scientists, and representatives from credentialing organizations, and given the assignment to develop a series of recommendations for the collegiate strength and conditioning profession that would provide for improved athlete mental and physical well-being and reduced incidence of exertional injury and death. The task force surveyed both a large cross section of practicing strength and conditioning coaches that reflect the diversity of institutions across the divisions of collegiate sport and the geography of the United States as well as academic programs that provide education and training for careers in strength and conditioning. The results of those surveys were distilled into the set of recommendations advanced to the NCAA.

- Which stakeholder(s) participated in the development process?

The stakeholders involved in the development process included representation from:

- The three (3) exercise professional certification organizations that offer a strength coach certification program with third-party accreditation through the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). Those organizations are the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association (CSCCa), the National Council on Strength and Fitness (NCSF) and the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA)
- The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) Committee on the Accreditation for Exercise Science (CoAES), a CHEA-recognized accrediting organization for college academic programs

- The Intercollegiate Council for Sports Medicine (ICSM)
 - The Board of Certification for the Athletic Trainer (BOC)
 - The Athletic Director Chair for NCCA D-1 institutions
 - 721 currently practicing strength and conditioning coaches
 - 125 Professors from Exercise Science Academic Units offering preparations in strength and conditioning
- What is the goal/expected outcome of the recommendations?

The goal of the recommendations is to provide guidance to stakeholders for best practices in academic preparations, professional activities and institutional oversight for strength and conditioning. Therefore, several stakeholders can benefit from the recommendations including academic programs preparing students for future careers in strength and conditioning, institutions that hire strength and conditioning professionals to improve the athletic performance of student athletes and practicing strength coaches. Ultimately the intention of the recommendations is for an outcome of improved safety and wellbeing for student athletes.
 - What is the potential negative outcome if these recommendations are not adopted?

If the recommendations are not adopted student athletes will continue to suffer unnecessary injuries that have their roots in poorly designed or ill-advised conditioning programs administered by unqualified or underqualified strength coaches or coaching staff members that result in more deaths, more lawsuits and ultimately intervention in the form of government regulation.
 - What are the costs to implement the recommendations?

Most of the recommendations do not require a financial investment by stakeholders with the exception of fees associated with programmatic accreditation for colleges and universities that would like to offer academic programs that specifically prepare students for careers in strength and conditioning. A continuing education requirement already exists for certified strength coaches to maintain their certifications so the courseware/workshops in the recommendations would not be an incremental expense. Additionally, a significant pool of professionals are available for hire that already meet the requisite qualifications for the strength and conditioning professional based on the recommendations.

Recommendation 1, 5: Eligibility criteria to work as a Strength Coach:

- When would the recommendations go into effect?

The timelines for the implementation of the recommendations have not been determined. They would be implemented over a reasonable period of time to mitigate the impact on students, institutions and currently practicing professionals.

For Strength Coaches:

- Will currently practicing strength coaches be impacted by the recommendations?

The vast majority of practicing strength coaches meet the credentialing requirements outlined in the recommendations. The anticipated impact would be limited to those that do not have a current strength and conditioning coach certification.

- As a current strength coach, what can I do to ensure that I am able to continue to work in the field?

Maintain a current strength and conditioning coach certification that is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA).

For Institutions:

- How do we identify those individuals that do not meet the recommended criteria?

Strength coaches should hold a current strength and conditioning certification from a NCCA accredited certification program. Currently there exist three (3) certifications that meet the criteria: Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association (CSCCa) Strength and Conditioning Coach Certified, National Council on Strength and Fitness (NCSF) Certified Strength Coach, and the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) Certified Strength and Conditioning Coach. Credential verification for these certifications can be done quickly and easily using the United States Register of Exercise Professionals (USREPS). Simply go to USREPS.org, scroll down the page to find "US Registry of Exercise Professionals" and click the "Click Here" link. This will take you to a verification tool where you can enter an individual's information and the search will indicate their certification status and expiration date. Multiple coaches can be searched simultaneously using the "Verify Employees" option.

- What do we do if we have strength coaches that do not meet the requirements contained within the recommendations?

Strength Coaches that do not currently meet the certification requirement should contact one of the NCCA accredited strength and conditioning programs and pursue certification. Certification exams are offered throughout the year, so any coach that meets the pre-requisite requirements can register and sit for an exam in a relatively short timeframe which most often varies by preparation needs.

- How will we identify and verify qualified candidates for strength coaching positions moving forward? (is a new position needed?)

There currently exists tens of thousands of exercise professionals that meet the requirements outlined for future hires. Human resource departments preparing search and screen documents

can simply insert the requisite minimum qualifications recommendations in the job posting. While any institution can add to the requisite minimum qualifications, there does not exist a need to create a new position or job description unless so desired by the hiring agency.

Recommendations 2-4: Academic Requirements

For Individuals

- Why is a degree in exercise science or a related field recommended?

A key element in protecting athlete safety is understanding the physical mechanisms that facilitate desired adaptations and those that present undue risk for harm. Exercise science curricula cover these specific areas and promote the knowledge and skills to program safely and effectively for sports performance. Programs that exclude specific course work in topics including anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, and exercise physiology fail to set the foundational knowledge for safe programming for student athletes. Likewise, having specific education in exercise programming and engaging in training instruction are intimate to the tasks of the strength coach. These essential elements in education are found in exercise science-based collegiate programs.

- If adopted, when would the recommendations go into effect?

The timelines for the implementation of the recommendations have not been determined. They would be implemented over a reasonable period-of-time to mitigate the impact on students, institutions and currently practicing professionals.

No one is arguing that a strength and condition coach should be properly trained and certified to protect student athlete safety. All institutions maintain the resources to easily meet the recommendations as they come with extremely limited cost in human and monetary resources. Since the recommendations state all current, unsupervised strength and conditioning professionals need to hold a current strength and conditioning certification from a program accredited by the NCCA, it should be the goal of each institution to meet that minimum criteria across their strength coaching staff as soon as possible.

- I am a current student and would like to pursue a career as a strength coach, how do these recommendations affect my career path?

The recommendations actually outline the career path. Identifying and enrolling in a program of study that prepares students for roles in strength and conditioning is the first step – hundreds of recognized programs exist across the United States. These programs include internship experiences which should be specific and meaningful to the chosen profession. Once qualified, sitting for, and passing the exam for one of the NCCA accredited certification programs in strength and conditioning would finalize the process for successful employment in accordance with the recommendations.

- How can I ensure that I have access to a relevant internship experience?

Collegiate programs, in general, have internship experiences available within athletics at the institution of study. Additionally, most colleges and universities accept student interns from other institutions. Meeting with an internship coordinator early to identify the best situation is strongly encouraged.

For Institutions:

- What impact will these recommendations have on students that are currently working towards a degree?

Degrees of study in exercise science will not require changes in curriculum. An institution may want to review the recommended best practices in strength and conditioning through the Committee on Accreditation for Exercise Science (CoAES) programs and ensure students are getting the requisite education to prepare for certification as a strength and conditioning coach from a program accredited by the NCCA. Programs dominated by coursework that falls outside the focus of strength and conditioning, such as clinical exercise physiology, may want to add courseware in strength and conditioning content as described by the CoAES documents.

- How can we ensure that our academic programs cover the required content within the degree program?

There exist three ways to align education programs with the recommended NCCA accredited certifications in strength and conditioning. The first and easiest is to audit the CoAES knowledge and tasks document for competencies in strength and conditioning. This document is based on a mapping of the three (3) recognized NCCA accredited programs in strength and conditioning and provides the collective knowledge and task requirements of the content that should be included in the education program. The second is to contact one of the NCCA accredited certification organizations and review the tasks, knowledge, and skill statements from the role delineation study for certified strength and conditioning professionals. The third is to download one of the public-facing exam content outline documents available online from each of the NCCA accredited strength and conditioning certification programs and review the domains, tasks, and knowledge statements.

Recommendation 6: Athlete Health and Safety Training:

- What are the steps to comply with the recommendations?

The organizations offering NCCA accredited certification programs in strength and conditioning require ongoing continued competency through qualifying professional development courses and activities. The athlete health and safety training will be in compliance with the continued education requirements to renew the respective certification. Each organization will provide

details to the requirements for recertification and how to attain the contact hours specific to the athlete health and safety training requirement.

- Will a standardized minimum competency for CEU in this area be outlined?

Yes, while different certifications organizations exist, the role reflected by certification for the strength and condition professional is the same. The specific requirements for qualifying content will be outlined, as will be the number of contact hours needed to meet the minimum competency requirement; both of which will be publicly available on the website of each respective organization offering an NCCA accredited certification in strength and conditioning.

- Can the education be done through the school/college/University/online?

Yes, any credible, qualifying education developed to encompass the specific content areas in athlete health and safety will count towards the education requirement. The minimum number of contact hours must be adhered to for it to be recognized as meeting the criteria required by the certifying organizations and in compliance with the continuing education requirements.

Recommendation 7: Balancing Autonomy and Oversight for the Strength Coach

- If adopted, when would this recommendation go into effect?

The timelines for the implementation of the recommendations have not been determined. They would be implemented over a reasonable period-of-time to mitigate the impact on students, institutions and currently practicing professionals.

- What if a sport's coach wants to select their own strength coach?

Any institution has the right to decide the process used for selecting and hiring a strength coach. The recommendations simply state, the person selected needs to meet the criteria outlined for student athlete safety.

- Why does it matter who a strength coach reports to?

Sport coaches have undue influence over the decisions and actions of their subordinates. To avoid unintended consequences of this influence, strength coaches should report to a director-level supervisor that will provide for autonomy in decision-making and allow for training decisions, including those for exercise load and volume, to be based on expertise in physiology, to protect athletes from harm. Institutional leaders, directors, sports coaches, and strength coaches should keep in mind that these recommendations are for the safe and effective training of their student athletes and advancement of the strength and conditioning profession. Having strength coaches report to director-level supervisors who are not sports coaches provides strength coaches with the appropriate buffer to keep their primary strength and conditioning

focus on athlete safety and performance, rather than a specific sport outcome that may be the primary focus of a sport-specific coach.

- Why should athletic programs embrace these recommendations?

Student athletes deserve the opportunity to train and compete in environments that continuously account for their mental and physical wellbeing. All data indicates that current practices do not fulfill this duty. It is unacceptable that student athletes are injured and die from exertional stress and poor management. These recommendations are consistent with best practices as determined by over a decade of evidence and represent what should be the goal of every institution for their student athletes and athletic programs.