

Meet Our ACSM Past Presidents



James S. Skinner, Ph.D., FACSME
ACSM President 1979-80



Name: James S. Skinner

Education: B.S. (Physical Education), University of Illinois, 1958; M.S. (Physical Education), University of Illinois, 1960; Ph. D. (Physical Education and Exercise Physiology), University of Illinois, 1963

Current or most recent affiliation: 2006- Professor Emeritus, Department of Kinesiology, Indiana University

Honors & Awards:

- 1985** Citation Award, ACSM
- 1995** Recognition Award, Southwest Chapter of ACSM
- 1996** Philip Noel Baker Research Award, International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education
- 2001** Sport Science Award of the IOC President for Biomedical Sciences, International Olympic Committee and International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (as member of the Steering Committee of the HERITAGE Family Study)
- 2001** Thomas K. Cureton Lecturer, ACSM Annual Meeting
- 2001** Peter C. Farrell International Visiting Professor, Department of Health & Sport Science, School of Physiology & Pharmacology, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
- 2002** Michael L. Pollock Lecturer, ACSM Annual Meeting
- 2011** Doctor Honoris Causa, Semmelweis University, Budapest, Hungary
- 2014** Honor Award, ACSM
- 2021-24** Fulbright Specialist

Professional Interests: My research has focused on the acute effects of exercise and the chronic adaptations to training on health, wellness and fitness on such diverse categories as age (i.e., children, adults and elderly), sex, race, fitness (i.e., sedentary, active and athletes) and health state (healthy, high-risk and patients). I have also investigated the role that genetic factors play in the response to training of risk factors for cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

ACSM Service: I have been an ACSM member since 1964 and a Fellow since 1968. I have served as a committee member or chair, Board of Trustees member or an officer continuously since 1968.

Committee Member: Finance; Certification; International Relations; Awards & Tributes; National Center Fundraising, Relocation and Building; Long-Range Planning; Nominating; Fundraising Advisory; Program; Exercise is Medicine (EIM); EIM Credential; International Relations Task Force.

Committee Chair or Co-Chair: Finance; Certification; National Center Fundraising; International Relations; Restructuring of the Preventive/Rehabilitative Exercise Committee (ad hoc); Organizing 1998 FIMS World Congress; EIM International Advisory Council; EIM Planning for 2010-2021 International Congresses.

Officer: Vice President, President, Treasurer

Other: Delegate (Fédération Internationale de Médecine Sportive [FIMS]; Confederación Panamericana de Medicina del Deporte [COPAMEDE]; and Red de Actividad Física de las Américas – Physical Activity Network of the Americas [RAFA-PANA]); Member, Editorial Board (*Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, *ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal*[®]).

**Questions
to answer**

What first inspired you to enter the Exercise Science/Sports Medicine Field? What made you decide to pursue your advance degree and/or line of research/service?

I was always interested in sports and science. I started out in pre-medicine but later switched to physical education. The course I enjoyed most was physiology. Thus, it seemed logical to me that I should study for my master's and doctorate in exercise physiology.

As a student, who were your mentors and what role did they play in your professional development? As a professional, was there anyone who was also instrumental in your career development?

For my master's and doctoral degrees, my professor was Thomas K. Cureton, Ph.D. He not only made me question what he and others said, but he attracted other great students and future important researchers (e.g., Mike Pollock and Bill Haskell) to his laboratory. As students, we learned as much from what he said that was correct as what he said that we questioned. We had many discussions outside of class that honed my curiosity and taught me how to think.

Dr. Cureton also attracted Samuel Fox, a cardiologist from the U.S. Public Health Service. Fox sent John Holloszy to Cureton's lab for two years to look at longitudinal data on fitness programs at the University of Illinois. The quality of the data was less than expected, so I had many hours talking with John about exercise and medicine. He and I also did several studies together involving my doctoral dissertation. John went on to do his first study on exercise and muscle while I went to work with Sam Fox, where I was involved in reviewing the literature on physical activity and health and in planning research to study this area. I was closely involved for several years with cardiologists (e.g., Robert Bruce, Herman Hellerstein and Al Kattus), physiologists (e.g., Bruno Balke, Henry Taylor and Elsworth Buskirk) and epidemiologists (e.g., Richard Remington and Henry Montoye). This laid the groundwork for my career.

Are there any students who you have mentored that have gone to play significant roles within ACSM?

While several former students who have distinguished themselves in various aspects of their profession, the two who have done the most in ACSM are Wendy Kohrt and Janice Thompson. I have always felt that a big part of my professional role, particularly in ACSM, is to informally mentor and assist young people (my students or not) to advance their careers in whatever way I could. I have enjoyed doing this and am pleased to see so many of them become leaders in ACSM and in Exercise Science/Sports Medicine.

What is it about Exercise Science/Sports Medicine that still inspires you today?

The word "philosophy" is associated with the love of knowledge. I still have a desire to learn because there is so much to learn. The more we learn, the more we realize that there is still more to learn. I told my students that what happens in the body during its response to exercise and its adaptation to training is logical. If they can understand the logic, it makes it easier to envision the next steps in the pursuit of knowledge. I feel that I have been privileged as a professor to have been paid to learn and to pass on that learning to others.

Why and how did you decide to get involved with ACSM? How did your service help you grow as a professional? How do you feel you were able to get elected to its highest position?

Becoming involved with ACSM seemed to be the most logical choice because of my interest in multi-disciplinary research. There are other organizations in which members compete to be seen as the best attorney, surgeon or researcher in a particular area. There are so many different types of backgrounds and expertise within ACSM that a person may think, "I am knowledgeable in my area, but I want to learn something from experts in other areas so that I can be better in my own." Thus, there are fewer problems of ego when there are so many other experts in so many other areas.

I do not know why I was able to get elected as President except that I got involved when ACSM was small and in the process of developing rapidly. Also, I was involved in many areas of the college and was active in my profession. There are many more highly qualified people today.

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What are your most memorable moments from your service to ACSM?

There are many, but perhaps the three of which I am most proud are certification, Exercise is Medicine® (EIM) and the evolution of ACSM as an international organization. I was very involved from the beginning (early 1970s) in the conception, establishment and implementation of the certification program until I became ACSM president in 1979. That program is now the gold standard. I was also involved from the beginning in leadership roles with EIM and continue to be active in that initiative that has grown so significantly since it began in 2007. I have been involved with international and regional organizations related to sports medicine, exercise science and physical activity promotion. ACSM members have a lot to give to and to receive from colleagues in other countries and cultures. Collaboration and exchange of ideas have made ACSM the premier international organization.

How did you become a Fellow and in what year? How do you feel that played a role in your development as a professional?

I became a Fellow in 1968 after publishing 10 articles between 1963 and 1967. Becoming a Fellow allowed me to become involved in the college. It should be remembered that I got involved very early in the history of ACSM, and the fields of exercise science / sports medicine were in their developing years. Thus, I feel that I got involved at an opportune time.

What were some of the main issues confronting ACSM at the time of your presidency?

According to the history of ACSM written by Jack Berryman (*Out of Many, One*), mine was a year of transition and a period of organization, consolidation and national center plans. The most important outcomes were related to the need and plans for a new national center.

What do you think are your most meaningful contributions to the field of exercise science/sports medicine?

I think that my multi-disciplinary approach to research on exercise, training, health and fitness was important. During my career, I have worked and published with persons from many different areas of physiology, medicine, epidemiology, nutrition, genetics, psychology, biomechanics and fitness. Perhaps my most important contributions are associated with my role as one of five principal investigators in the HERITAGE Family Study. This was the largest study funded by NIH (~\$40 million over 12 years) with exercise as the principal experimental factor. There have been >200 publications from that study and more are published each year based on analyses of the extensive data base.

What advice would you have for future leaders of ACSM?

Remember that ACSM includes many different professions and interests. This is its major advantage but can also cause challenges as each wants to have more time and importance in the annual meeting, in publications and in the college. We cannot be everything to everyone, but we can recognize that each has something to offer.

What advice would you give to students who are looking to pursue a career in exercise science/sports medicine?

I am happy that I do not have to start as a new student. The explosion of knowledge over the past 50+ years of my association with exercise science/sports medicine means that there is so much more to learn. I would tell students that if they decide to specialize in one area of research or clinical practice, there is still a great deal to learn from those in other areas. When looking for a professor for advanced studies, read the literature to see who are most often cited for their work in the area in which you want to study. Then try to work with one of them. These top people will provide a good environment for you to learn, including such things as a depth of knowledge and experience, research grants, good facilities and the presence of other good students with whom you can interact now and in the future.