

# Meet Our ACSM Past Presidents



**Brian Sharkey, Ph.D., FACS**  
ACSM Past President, **1991-1992**



**Name:** Brian Sharkey, Ph.D., FACS

**Education:** B.S., East Stroudsburg University; M.S., West Chester University; Ph.D., University of Maryland; postdoc at Pennsylvania State University Human Performance Lab, 1967-8

**Current or most recent affiliation:** University of Montana, professor emeritus, U.S. Forest Service Technology and Development Center

**Honors & Awards:** International Association of Wildland Fire Safety Award, 2009  
U.S. Department of Agriculture Distinguished Service Award, 1993

**Professional Interests:** Communicating information about physical activity, fitness and the relationship to health through research, teaching and writing  
**ACSM Service:** ACSM Past President, 1991-1992

**Questions to answer** *What first inspired you to enter the exercise science/ sports medicine field?*

I thought about that a lot over the years. One thing that influenced me when I was young was having rheumatic fever at least twice, forcing prolonged bed rest. Eventually I was able to start doing moderate activities. In high school I became a miler for our high school track team. You appreciate physical activity when you can't do it. Also, I lived during the evolution of the definition of fitness and its relationship to health.

*What made you decide to pursue your advance degree and/or line of research/service?*

I wasn't sure if I wanted to teach or coach. I had been coaching for eight years for a swimming team. So, I became interested in the field and had some good teachers along the way. The ACSM annual meetings were important and defined the direction I would take professionally in terms of research specialization.

*As a student, who were your mentors and what role did they play in your professional development?*

I didn't really have a good exercise physiology teacher in college. I took a course in the chemistry of food and nutrition that was quite interesting. At the master's level, my advisor was also the soccer coach who won the NCAA soccer title. He gave me the opportunity to do my thesis on a topic that included physiology and performance.

*As a professional, was there anyone who was also instrumental in your career development?*

My first boss, the chair of the department I was in at the University of Montana. He was old school, he had this sense of family in the workplace and he tried very hard to make that happen and I appreciated his advice. He helped you see your role at the local level but also your role in the community, and your role in the profession.

***Are there any students who you feel you have mentored who have gone to play any significant roles in the field?***

When I first got to Montana, I had a half dozen graduate students; one of them was Rainer Martens. He finished his master's and then went on to Illinois to pursue a doctorate. He stayed at Illinois and eventually started his own publishing company. He went on to found Human Kinetics, the largest exercise and sports medicine publisher in the world. My 1979 book *Physiology of Fitness* helped the fledgling company get established. Future titles came over the years.

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***It has just been a marvelous experience! The opportunity to practice what I preach.***

***What is it about exercise science/sports medicine that still inspires you today?***

It's a personal thing: I get out to be active in a strenuous way, climbing up and down mountains. One of the things that I enjoy is training and then having that work pay off. When you have that wonderful feeling of training and seeing that pay off. It allows me to keep up with the guys I've run, hiked, cross-country skied and biked with for 50 years.

***Why and how did you decide to get involved with ACSM?***

When I was in graduate school at the University of Maryland, the annual meeting was being held in Washington, D.C., only a few miles from me in College Park, so that was a great chance for me to get exposed to ACSM, and once you were there, you get wrapped up in the history of it. I had the opportunity to meet D.B. Dill and other giants in the history of exercise science. It's why I think ACSM should keep moving the meeting around the country.

***How did your service help you grow as a professional?***

Well, it expands your vision for what is out there. I have enjoyed getting involved with firefighters, soldiers, athletes and the population at large, and translating research into effective programs.

***How do you feel you were able to get elected to its highest position?***

I have no idea. The guy on the ballot with me ended up becoming president as well down the road. I did not seek the job, and I was amazed — and overwhelmed — when I was elected.

***How did you become a fellow?***

It was just a natural gravitation; I was sending in papers to get them approved. It just seemed like the next logical step to take.

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

We had just finished a needs assessment where we went over all the different parts of ACSM, and we had developed goals for each of those areas; that was right about the time I got into the president-elect cycle. I felt like we ought to focus on the things that we identified as a group. One was to recruit more women for leadership roles.

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

I would never pretend that anything I have done in the field was of any major consequence. I have been engaged in the needs of wildland firefighters, their physical demands and training needs, nutrition demands, hydration, etc. Since I retired, our faculty members have continued the work that we have done since 1964. I retired in 1997, and that's also when a new test for firefighters was developed, and it is still in use today.

***What advice would you have for future leaders of ACSM?***

Solve the medical/doctor problem. We need to address our physician membership. Other than that, I think that it is moving along well.

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

Help them see what the steps are involving a degree program and selecting an institution that you are interested in. Help them see what the route is and help them understand what is important along the way. Get them pointed in the right direction.

I would have a tough time imagining a more interesting career than I had, the people the places I was able to collect data — just wonderful experiences, working with wildland firefighters, the military (with Paul Davis), athletes (U.S. Nordic Ski Team), developing fitness and wellness programs, writing a dozen books and so on.

It has just been a marvelous experience! The opportunity to practice what I preach.