2014

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Why Teach PE? Factors that Affect Students’ Decisions to Teach Physical Education Revisited

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Abstract

Many times a child will be asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The answers are varied, yet their responses usually reflect what their parents employ may be. For this study, factors were investigated that have an effect on college student’s decision to become a physical education. For this study it was found that former physical education and coaches were the most influential people affecting college student’s decision to become physical education teachers, not parents. It was also found that many of these college student’s were actively involved in high school athletics, thus also affecting their decision to become a physical education teacher. The results from this study can serve PETE faculty to capitalize on their PETE student’s excitement to teach physical education.

Introduction

The profession of teaching is considered to be a noble calling in today’s society (Buskist, Benson & Sikorski, 2005). Teachers have the opportunity to play an influential role in educating those students in which they come in contact. Although much of society considers the teaching profession to be a noble profession, there are segments within society that regard the teaching profession with contempt. In many cases the teaching profession is not considered a top tiered profession. If this is the case, why do college students choose teaching as their desired profession?

The education literature has shed light on the multiple reasons why college students choose the teaching profession. Watts & Richardson (2008) suggested a general or main reason why college students choose to teach, is they have altruistic reasons towards others. It was also found by Younger et al., (2004) that college students became teachers because of their love of the subject area and the opportunity to continue to work in that subject area. Because of the students love for the content, they can share their enthusiasm for the content with their students. Furthermore, the college students stated that because of their love and enthusiasm for the content, they would have the opportunity to shape students beliefs regarding the content they would be teaching. The authors summarized that these college students were passionate about their decision to become teachers and work with their future students.

Other research has indicated that college students become teachers because they “love working with children” (Jantzen, 1981, Thornton & Bricheno, 2002, Watts & Richardson, 2008). Other reasons for choosing
the teaching profession are the following: giving back to the community, time off in the summers, and good benefits (Ramirez, 2010). A final reason the research provides for college students choosing to teach is that they believe that they will be good teachers (Jantzen, 1981).

In the area of physical education, the literature has asked the same question, “Why teach physical education (PE)?” Lawson (1983) discussed the topic of subjective warrant, which consists of a person’s perceptions of the requirements for teacher education and for actual teaching in schools. The results are from years of socialization. For example, a student spends many hours in the gymnasium or on the playing fields, and this contact with physical education’s content matter, provides opportunities for a subjective warrant to be formed. Templin (1982) further explained a physical education major’s subjective warrant by stating they have had an extensive background in sports, physical activity and physical education, and they express enjoyment of, and attachment to these activities. Another factor is that their subjective warrant has to do with their involvement in teaching and coaching experiences. Templin, Woodford, & Mulling (1982) address the importance of influential people as a major reason for physical education majors’ choice of teaching physical education. College students identified former teachers and coaches, or family members as people that served as positive influences.

Spittle, Jackson, & Casey (2009) investigated the motivational forces of becoming a physical education teacher. In this study it was found that college students chose to become a physical education teacher because of several reasons: confident interpersonal reasons, sport and physical activity participation while growing up, low perceived demand, role models in their life, family influences, desire to work in a school setting and wanted sports and physical activity to be part of their job.

For this study Lawson’s (1983) conceptual framework of subjective warrant serves as a model for investigating what affects PE majors to become PE teachers.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influence college students’ becoming PE teachers. If factors and motivation compelling students’ to become PE teachers could be identified, then that information could be used to influence teaching practices and the development of course content. Also for physical education teacher educators, this is an ideal time to capitalize on college students’ positive attitudes and excitement of becoming a physical educator. If previous research has already been conducted investigating why college students become PE teachers, how can this study benefit physical education teacher educators? The researchers hope to add to and strengthen the literature on this topic, in the hopes of shedding light on other variables affecting college student’s decisions to become PE teachers.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants for this study were 67 PE majors (42 males & 25 females) from two universities, one located on the west coast (n=22) and the other university located in the central plains (n=45) of the United States. The universities Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval to conduct the study. These participants were all enrolled in a method of teaching physical education course.

**Instrumentation**

For this study the researchers used a survey created by Yerg (1997), specifically investigating factors affecting PE majors’ decisions for choosing physical education teaching as a career choice. The survey was composed of 40 statements. Six statements were yes/no statements requiring a response from the PE major. Thirteen statements asked the PE majors about their PE experience in the K-12 schooling years. Ten statements asked the PE major regarding their career choice as a physical educator. The other eleven statements dealt with demographic matters of the students. To establish content validity the author of the survey had 25 PE majors (these students were not participants in the study) to review the survey. The survey was found to be valid (see Appendix 1).

**Procedures**

For this study the researchers asked the students from their method of teaching physical education class to complete the survey. The researcher explained the study, and asked the students to volunteer for the study. Students that did not participate in the study were assured that nonparticipation or withdrawal from this study would
not negatively affect their grade in the class. After the surveys were completed the researchers collected them.

Data Analysis

As a result of the nature of the survey, the results are qualitative and quantitative. The short answer questions were read and re-read until themes became evident (O'Sullivan & Tsangaridou, 1992). The quantitative end of the results will be reported as percentages.

Results

The results of the data will be presented in four categories, a) participation in sports and physical activity, b) PE experiences in K-12 school, c) reasons for choosing PE to teach, and d) people that affected the PE major’s decisions.

Participation in Sports and Physical Activity

This category explored the PE majors’ history regarding their participation on athletic teams and participation in activities requiring physical activity. The data revealed that 88% of the majors played on an athletic team in high school. Student responses to these questions found many of the students that played on high school sport teams were team captains, all-state performers and received other awards for top athletic performances. Students were also asked about participation in intramural sports at the university they were attending. Over 70% of the students played on a team or participated in an individual sport activity. Student responses found that students played on teams with friends, classmates (other PE majors), and that they played multiple sports (basketball, flag football, softball, volleyball, tennis, etc.).

PE Experiences in K-12 school

The data dealing with PE experiences in K-12 school found that 73% of the majors had physical education class from kindergarten to 10th grade. Participation in PE classes in 11th and 12th grades sharply declined to only 18% of the PE majors having PE classes. Of the 73% that had physical education class up to 10th grade, these students had physical education class three days a week.

Another point from the data covered the curriculum the majors were exposed to as students. The following are the curricular areas to which students were exposed. Motor skills were heavily taught in elementary school (78%), team sports were emphasized in middle school (76%) and high school (66%), racquet sports were not taught as much to PE majors at all three levels. It was found that 85% in elementary, 63% in middle school, and 69% in high school were not exposed to racquet sports. Similarly, the data showed that the majors were not taught dance at all three levels just as they had not been taught racquet sports. In elementary 88%, 85% in middle school and 94% in high school were not exposed to dance. Data from students’ participation in individual sports showed that 82% in elementary, 71% in middle school and 66% in high school were not exposed to individual sports (golf, tennis, bowling, etc.). And lastly, results revealed that a majority of the PE majors had some participation in cooperative games/activities (64% elementary, 58% middle school and 67% high school).

Reasons for Choosing PE to Teach

For this set of data the PE majors were asked 17 statements regarding why they chose to teach PE. The majors then ranked each statement from a Likert scale provided for them (1=least important; 2=slightly important; 3=neutral; 4=important and 5=very important). When analyzing the data from this statement, the top five responses with a “very important” response were; 1) to have fun at work (60%), 2) to be helpful to others (60%), 3) to stay associated with sports (57%), 4) to work with children (46%) and 5) to be paid for having fun (44%).

People That Affected the PE Majors’ Decision to Teach PE

The next set of data asked the PE majors what people influenced them in their decision to teach PE. For this statement there were 17 different groups of people the PE majors ranked regarding how influential they were on the PE majors’ decision to teach PE. The PE majors would rank each group of people with a Likert scale (1= least important, 2=slightly important, 3=neutral, 4=being important and 5=being the most important). The data revealed that mothers (23% being the most important) and fathers (22% being the most important) had minimal influence on the PE majors. Interestingly, legal guardians (82%), brothers (60%), and sisters (57%) had the highest percentages for being the least important for having an influence on the PE majors. The group of people that had the greatest influence on PE majors were their PE teachers/coaches (31% being the most important and 33% being important).
Student responses from this statement found that students appreciated their former PE teacher/coach because of "the way they carried themselves", "I liked how they treated me and my classmates", and "they seemed to have it together".

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that influence college students preparing to become PE teachers. Results from the four areas examined in this paper give a good picture as to why college students become PE teachers. First, PE majors participated in high school sports and were presently participating in intramural sports while attending college. These findings concur with Lawson's (1983) theory of subjective warrant, which involves a person's exposure in a certain type of environment and experiences within that environment. The subjective warrant for these students involved them having spent many hours in the gymnasium or on the playing field practicing or playing games. For this study, the researchers did not inquire of the PE majors level of enjoyment and satisfaction while they participated in high school sports; however, it can be surmised that it was enjoyable and satisfying because of the PE majors' responses to a survey question of wanting to still be associated with the sport.

Another finding from the data was that these PE majors are still physically active. These PE majors were actively involved in their universities intramural sports programs. Obviously, when these PE majors graduate they will not be able to participate in an intramural sport programs but it is hoped that the PE majors will know and understand the importance of being physically active, and in turn will promote and pass that on to their own students. This allows the PE majors to "walk the walk" as they talk and discuss being physically active with their students (Haskell, et al., 2007).

Another point was with the PE majors' PE experiences in K-12 schools. Once again, the results from the data align with Lawson's (1983) theory of subjective warrant. Many of these PE majors in this study were on sport teams and continued to be involved in their universities intramural sports programs. From the PE majors educational experiences, a large majority of these students were heavily involved in team sports in their middle school and high school years. Unfortunately, these PE majors were lightly exposed to such activities as racket sports, dance and individual sports. Because of this lack of exposure to these other types of activities there is the strong possibility that these PE majors will teach their PE classes in the same manner that they were taught when they were students (Doolittle, Dodds, & Placek, 1993).

The data reveals many reasons why PE majors choose to teach PE and are similar to what has been found in other studies. One of the main reasons students choose to be PE teachers is that they want to have fun at work. Templin (1983) addressed this point stating that many PE majors become PE teachers because they love activity and want to continue to be involved in this type of work. Activity and movement was always fun for them, thus PE majors want to continue to be involved in this type of work. Another reason students choose to teach PE is to work with children. From the literature this is probably the most common reason for students becoming teachers (Jantzen, 1981 & Thornton & Bricheno, 2002). One last reason students choose to become PE teachers is to help others. Throughout this study, students' stated that they wanted to help influence their students to be "active throughout their life", "show student's the importance of exercise" and "help fight obesity." These statements allude to the fact that these PE majors felt they could positively influence their students in regards too being physically active. This response was similar to what Watts & Richardson (2008) found among college students. In their study, college students stated that they wanted to be the person that would impart knowledge of the subject while trying to be positive and helpful influences in their students' lives.

The final and possibly the most influential point of discussion deal with the people, or person that affected the PE major's decision to teach PE. Templin (1985) reported that both mothers and fathers were very influential in a PE major's decision to teach PE. The results from this study do not concur with Templin's findings. The results from this study showed that for 64% of PE majors surveyed, the most influential person on their decision to teach PE was a former PE teacher/coach rather than a parent. These results indicate how influential a PE teacher can be to their students if these students eventually decide to teach PE.
Impact of the Study

These results suggest that the PE majors have been strongly influenced by many experiences and people in their lives. From these results former PE teachers/coaches have been shown to be the most influential people in affecting a student’s decision in becoming a PE teacher. This finding should cause current PE teachers to pause and consider the example that they are providing their students. Current PE teachers must realize the great responsibility that they have in potentially determining a student’s decision to teach PE in the future. Obviously not every student that takes a PE class will have a desire to become a PE teacher, but for those students that will teach PE, knowing how important it is that they expose their students to appropriate activities, games and fitness being taught in PE class can have a positive effect that can last a lifetime (Barney & Strand, 2008). The example being provided by the current PE teacher along with what activities the student participates in may very well be the determining factor in whether or not a student decides to become a PE teacher. Many of these students will watch and observe how they are taught in class, which in many cases will be carried over into their teacher preparation program (Doolittle, Dodds, & Placek, 1993).

Another consideration from the data is that physical education teacher educators need to stress to their current college students is the importance of being a good example when they become physical education teachers. It does not matter the level (elementary, middle school or high school) in which these college students will be teaching in, their students will always be watching and taking in what they do in class and how the class is taught. Thus, teaching PE is a very satisfying and personally fulfilling profession for so many because mentoring children truly is a noble calling.

References


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Appendix 1. Physical Education Majors Background Survey

Name

PART I: Personal Background

Instructions: Please check the answer, which best fits, your situation. Where blanks are provided, fill in the blank with the appropriate answer. Please answer every question that applies to you.

1. Female _____ Male _____

2. Age _____

3. Race/Ethnic Group:
   a. _____ Asian-American
   b. _____ African-American
   c. _____ Caucasian/White
   d. _____ Mexican-American/Chicano
   e. _____ Puerto Rican/American
   f. _____ American Indian
   g. _____ Other

4. Type of high school attended
   a. _____ Public
   b. _____ Private (religious affiliated)
   c. _____ Private (nonreligious)

Name of high school ____________________________
City ____________________________ State __________

5. In which high school track or program were you enrolled?
   a. _____ Business
   b. _____ College Prep
   c. _____ General
   d. _____ Vocational

6. High School Class Rank (if known) _____ out of _____ (number in class).

7. Present University status
   a. _____ Freshman
   b. _____ Sophomore
   c. _____ Junior
   d. _____ Senior
   e. _____ Fifth Year

8. Did you enter the PE major at Universities Name as a freshman or as a transfer student?
   a. _____ Freshman
   b. _____ Transfer student from another college or university
   c. _____ Transfer student from another program within this college
   d. _____ Transfer from another school/college at Universities name
9. If you were a transfer, Previous major ____________________________
   Name of previous college ____________________________

10. Parent(s) or guardian(s) occupation
    a. Male person/relationship ____________________________
       Occupation ____________________________
    b. Female person/relationship ____________________________
       Occupation ____________________________

11. Highest educational degree attained by parent(s) or guardian(s); check appropriate box
    High School ____ Associate Degree ____ Bachelors Degree ____ Masters Degree ____
    Doctoral Degree ____ Other ____

PART II: Background in Sport

12. High School Sports. Did you participate in sports sponsored by your high school?
    ___ No
    ___ Yes
    Sport __ Level: Frosh, JV, Varsity __ Grade you were in __ Awards you received

13. College/University Sports. Have you participated in or are you currently participating in an intercollegiate athletic
    program?
    ___ No
    ___ Yes
    Sport __ Starter or sub __ Years participated __ Awards you received

14. Outside or School Sports. Did you participate in formal, organized sport or dance activities outside of school at any
    age (for example, Little League, church league, community league, sport camps, sports lessons)?
    ___ No
    ___ Yes
    Sport __ Organization __ Age you participated __ Awards you received

15. Dance. Have you ever taken dance lessons?
    ___ No
    ___ Yes
    Kind of Dance __ Age you participated __ Who instructed? __ Performed in public?

16. Non Formal Sports. Have you participated in recreational or leisure activities with friends or family that were not
    part of a formal program (for example, playing tennis on weekends, playing pickup basketball, aerobics classes, lifting
    weights)?
    ___ No
    ___ Yes
    Sport/Activity __ Time of the year (FW, Sp,Su) __ Age you participated
17. Sport Related Roles. Have you been involved in sport or physical activity in a role other than as a participant or player (for example, officiating, teaching or coaching either paid or volunteer, e.g. assistant coach, recreation director, scorer, timer, equipment manager)?

___ No
___ Yes

Sport/Activity  Your role  Age(s) you participated  Were you paid?

PART III: Physical education background

We are seeking information on the physical education classes in which you participated in grades K-12. For our purposes, A PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASS IS DEFINED AS A FORMAL CLASS HELD DURING THE SCHOOL DAY AND SUPERVISED BY A TEACHER.

Please check or indicate as many numbers as apply for each question in each grade. Put DR in the blank if you don’t remember.

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<th>K</th>
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<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Check each grade in which you took PE as a class</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Check each grade in which PE was required</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Check each grade when a PE specialist taught your class</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Check each grade in which physical fitness tests were required</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Check each grade in which skill tests were used to measure your performance</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Check each grade in which there were more than 30 students in your PE class</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Average number of PE classes per week in grades you took PE (1, 2, 3, etc)</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Indicate where you usually had PE by writing in the following letters for each grade: G=gym; O=outside; C=covered outside area; X=other</td>
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26. Check the activities in which you had instruction in PE class in elementary, middle school/junior high, and high school. Put DR where you DON’T REMEMBER. Leave blank if the school did not offer or if the school offered but you did not take the activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elementary School</th>
<th>Middle School/Jr. High</th>
<th>High School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Basic motor skills: throwing, kicking, locomotor skills, etc.</td>
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<td>b. Low organization games</td>
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<td>c. Team Sports</td>
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<td>d. Racquet Sports</td>
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<td>e. Folk dance, ballroom dance</td>
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<td>f. Modern ballet, jazz dance</td>
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<td>g. Rhythms and creative dance</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Movement education (body, space, effort)</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Adventure/Ropes</td>
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<td>j. Outdoor activities-cycling, backpacking, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>k. Swimming-beginning, advanced</td>
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<tr>
<td>l. Martial Arts- judo, karate, self-defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>m. Relaxation-yoga, meditation</td>
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<tr>
<td>n. Track and Field</td>
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<td>o. Dance</td>
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<td>p. Other individual sports: golf, bowling</td>
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<td>q. New games/cooperative games</td>
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<td>r. Fitness development- jogging, weight training</td>
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<tr>
<td>s. Gymnastics</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

27. Please write in any skills/activities not listed in question 26 in which you received instruction in PE class.

28. In your high school, did varsity athletics have to take physical education classes during their competitive season?
   ___ Yes
   ___ No

29. Were you ever a student leader/helper in physical education classes?
   ___ Yes
   ___ No

30. Did you ever receive an award or reward in a physical education class?
   ___ Yes
   ___ No
   If yes, what was it?
31. In your opinion, what should be the purpose of:
   a. elementary (k-6) PE
   b. middle school/ junior high PE:
   c. high school PE:

**PART IV: Career Choice**

32. If you are sure what career you want to enter immediately upon graduation from college, check ONE main career below.
   If you are not sure exactly what career you want to pursue when you graduate, rank up to 5 choices (1=first choice, 5=fifth choice).

Secondary includes both middle/jr. high and high school.

___ a. Teach elementary PE but not coach
___ b. Teach secondary PE but not coach
___ c. Teach secondary PE and coach
___ d. Athletic Trainer
___ e. Teach PE at a college or university
___ f. Coach at a college or university
___ g. Teach PE and coach at a college or university
___ h. Teach elementary PE & coach
___ i. Become a professional athlete
___ j. Only coach at the secondary level
___ k. Work in a health or fitness club
___ l. Coach & teach a non-PE specialist
___ m. Work as a pro in a private club
___ n. Teach adapted or special PE
___ o. College level athletic director
___ p. Sell sports equipment
___ q. Physical Therapist
___ r. High school athletic director
___ s. Sport management
___ t. Other

33. At what age did you decide on the career or the #1 choice you picked above? ___

34. Briefly describe how you became interested in that career.

35. How important are the following reasons as they apply to you current #1 choice? Circle the number that best applies.

1 is the most important.

a. To use my athletic ability 1 2 3 4 5
b. The number of available job opportunity 1 2 3 4 5
c. To be helpful to others 1 2 3 4 5
d. To work with children 1 2 3 4 5
e. To stay associated with sports 1 2 3 4 5
f. To continue participation in sports 1 2 3 4 5
g. To have fun at work: 1 2 3 4 5
h. To be paid for having fun: 1 2 3 4 5
i. Summers off: 1 2 3 4 5
j. Plenty of vacation time: 1 2 3 4 5
k. PE is an easier course of study in college: 1 2 3 4 5
l. The security associated with employment: 1 2 3 4 5
m. To improve the profession: 1 2 3 4 5
n. To have a job with high status: 1 2 3 4 5
o. To teach sports, games, and physical activity to young people: 1 2 3 4 5
p. To coach sports: 1 2 3 4 5
q. Other: _____________________________ 1 2 3 4 5

36. How important were each of the following people in influencing your immediate career choice (1 being the least important and 5 being the most important)?
a. Father: 1 2 3 4 5
b. Mother: 1 2 3 4 5
c. Legal Guardian: 1 2 3 4 5
d. Brother: 1 2 3 4 5
e. Sister: 1 2 3 4 5
f. Other relative: 1 2 3 4 5
g. Male Friend: 1 2 3 4 5
h. Female Friend: 1 2 3 4 5
i. School Coach: 1 2 3 4 5
j. PE Teacher: 1 2 3 4 5
k. PE Teacher/Counselor: 1 2 3 4 5
l. Classroom Teacher: 1 2 3 4 5
m. School Counselor: 1 2 3 4 5
n. Principal: 1 2 3 4 5
o. Other: _____________________________ 1 2 3 4 5

37. Rank order the individual from the previous question on the basis of who influenced you the most in your current career choice.

Most Influential ______________________________________
2nd Most Influential ____________________________________
3rd Most Influential ____________________________________

38. What career work would you like to be doing immediately after you graduate from college?

39. What career work would you like to be doing 10 years after you graduate from college?

40. Why did you enroll as a Physical Education Major?