

Do You Qualify to Be a Strength and Conditioning Professional?

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AS A FACULTY MEMBER IN THE kinesiology and physical education department of a large university in sport-obsessed Southern California, I teach a class on advanced strength and conditioning, through which many students are introduced to NSCA membership and certification.

Students often ask me about employment opportunities in the field. I respond by informing them of the kinds of educational and practical experiences that would enhance their chances of having a successful career in strength and conditioning, as opposed to the fitness or personal training field. My intention is that such information will avoid generating unrealistic hopes of employment in the field for unqualified students.

The following background considerations do not in any way represent the totality of required and preferred knowledge and experience a person should have to be qualified for employment as a strength and conditioning professional. However, if a person does

not have most of the experiences and abilities listed below, his or her chances of gaining entry to the profession will be greatly reduced.

Academic training for candidates for a college head strength and conditioning position will likely include a masters degree with the Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist credential. A bachelors degree with the CSCS credential will be the likely criteria for most assistant coach positions, or for the job of head coach at a high school.

The academic degree emphasis should include a strong exercise science background, with classes in:

- Human anatomy
- Human physiology
- Exercise physiology
- Biomechanics (formerly kinesiology)
- Motor learning/development
- Nutrition, measurement, and evaluation (including statistics)

- Sport psychology
- CPR and first aid
- Sport injuries and rehabilitation (athletic trainer/physical therapy emphasis)

Practical experience should include a competitive sports background in which strength training was an important component. This can be either individual, high school, college, or pro sports. Individual competitive experience in weightlifting or powerlifting is a valuable and common sport background, but bodybuilding alone is generally *not* a satisfactory background, due to the training emphasis on appearance rather than performance.

Coaching experience in situations representative of the above are very valuable. Personal training experience alone is usually *not* a good coaching related background, however, due to the general emphasis on fitness

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rather than performance related factors.

The ability to demonstrate numerous free-weight lifting exercises, including competitive weightlifting movements and their variations, along with the power-lifts, is a must. Also required is the ability to teach proper use of resistance machines, medicine balls, and plyometrics. The coach must present a role model appearance to athletes when demonstrating and teaching lifts and other exercise techniques.

Additional valuable background items include:

- Basic computer skills, to include word processing and spreadsheets
- Familiarity with tools and minor equipment repair
- USA Weightlifting Club Coach certification

With such a background, students can realistically move forward to compete for entry level work experiences that will increase their chances of entering the strength and conditioning profession full time.

In the past few years I have used the criteria described above to choose graduate assistants, who then gain valuable on-the-job experience working with athletes in our strength training facility. ▲

John Garhammer is on the faculty at California State Univ., Long Beach. He is a former Vice President-Research of the NSCA, a former NSCA Scientist of the Year award winner, and former chair of the NSCA Certification Commission Executive Council.