Chapter 1: PETE Recruitment and Retention: Current State of Affairs

Amelia Mays Woods
University of Illinois

Suzan F. Ayers
Western Michigan University

Karen turned to the other soccer parents at halftime and queried, “Did you hear Ms. Thompson is retiring in May? That’s the third PE teacher to leave in three years! They haven’t even replaced Norton or Stevens yet! Summit only has PE twice a week now instead of daily. What next? Once a month?” Jasmine winced. “I know. Crystal is always so restless. She loves phys ed. I can’t imagine her sitting at a desk all day with no physical activity. I bet she drives the teachers crazy!”

Alex leaned in, “When I was choosing a major 20 years ago, I considered PE but was warned against it. My advisor cautioned that there were limited positions open for graduates—that candidates were a dime a dozen. What happened to change that?”

Similar conversations on the shrinking teacher pool are echoed across the United States and in the academy. Several factors, some interrelated, contribute to the shrinking supply of teachers. Fewer individuals are pursuing teaching as a career; in the United States, for example, teacher education enrollments plunged 35% between 2009 and 2014 (Berry & Shields, 2017). California alone lost 53% of teacher education enrollments (22,000 candidates) between 2008–2009 and 2012–2013 (Sawchuk, 2014). According to Beverly Young of the California Teacher Credentialing Commission, “very severe shortages” of teachers will occur if teacher education enrollment continues to drop as predicted (Freedberg, 2013, p. 1). In direct relation to the decrease in students entering preservice teaching, fewer teacher education programs exist to prepare future teachers (Sawchuk, 2014). Additionally, many of those who enter the teaching profession leave prematurely, with more than 41% of teachers exiting the profession within their first 5 years (Perda, 2013). This trend has gradually increased over the last 25 years, as the retention of first-year teachers continues to decrease (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

Both recruitment and retention of Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) students are critical to graduating teachers for the work force. Woods, Richards, and Ayers (2016) endorse active recruitment strategies that PETE faculty members, in collaboration with K-12 teachers and community college contacts, can incorporate to improve PETE enrollments. Retaining students who enter teacher education programs is also a means to support the completion of teaching degrees. Higher education leaders recognize the importance of student retention and implement strategies to increase students’ sense of affiliation and belonging within the university environment (Pokorny, Holley, & Kane, 2017). Specific to teacher education students, professional commitment during the preservice phase is essential; this can be promoted by making teacher education students responsible for their own learning and focusing on their teaching abilities and the intrinsic value of a teaching career (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2015).

In line with other content areas, PETE programs have experienced recent enrollment declines. Once-robust programs are experiencing drastically lowered enrollments, contributing to the closure of several prominent PETE programs across the United States (Bulger, Braga, DiGiacinto, & Jones, 2016; Templin, Blankenship, & Richards, 2014). The state of Illinois serves as a reference point, as the number of K-12 physical education teaching licenses conferred in Illinois shrank from 477 in 2011 to 226 in 2016 (Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2018). In Chapter 2, Ward (2019) offers initial data about physical education teacher shortages across the United States to substantiate this conundrum. Decreased enrollments of this nature could contribute to a shortage of qualified teachers that may threaten the physical education profession. Alternatively, some suggest that the lower number of physical educators prepared to teach might be appropriate, given the overproduction of physical educators in the past, and that the market has self-corrected. Clearly, the decline in the number of certified K-12 teachers is a complex issue that warrants examination.

In response to lowered enrollments in PETE programs, this monograph presents the results of an initial, exploratory study to better understand perspectives on and practices for recruiting and retaining preservice physical education teachers to degree completion within the U.S. context. This examination was initiated through the development of an online survey administered to PETE program coordinators across the United States to ascertain current views and practices. Follow-up interviews were conducted to more fully understand PETE coordinators’ perspectives with regard to recruiting and retaining preservice teachers.

In Chapter 2, Ward (2019) addresses the nuanced and multifaceted nature of the physical education teacher pipeline by offering a perspective for considering the current state of affairs in PETE programs specific to recruitment practices as well as recruitment and retention of new K-12 teachers. Identifying and aligning pressure points with associated institutional and programmatic responses lays the groundwork for this chapter’s consideration of the practical and policy implications currently playing out around the country, and provides the rationale for the study reported in this monograph.

Woods is with the University of Illinois, Urbana, IL. Ayers is with Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI. Address author correspondence to Suzan F. Ayers at s.ayers@wmich.edu.
Chapter 3 connects this work to the occupational socialization literature. Richards and Templin (2019) contend that recruitment and retention in PETE programs are related to the ways in which the physical education profession reproduces itself through inter-generational socialization. They propose that active, progressive recruitment in physical education is connected to breaking the cycle of ineffective teaching and low-quality physical education programs, and that this requires a reexamination of those who traditionally pursue careers in PETE. The purpose of their chapter is to present a conceptual framework for understanding PETE recruitment and retention that is grounded in occupational socialization theory and provides the theoretical underpinnings for the study that follow in this monograph.

In Chapter 4, Richards, Killian, and Graber (2019) detail the methods used for the data collection and analyses specific to the larger study presented in latter chapters of this monograph. More specifically, in Chapter 4, they provide an overview of the quantitative and qualitative methods used to investigate PETE program coordinators’ perceptions of preservice physical education teacher recruitment and retention. This chapter defines the study participants, the development of the survey and interview guide and related procedures, and the qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures used to generate the results. The University of Illinois PETE program database served as the sampling frame for this project, and all data were collected through a survey and follow-up interviews.

Chapter 5, the first of two chapters addressing recruitment, offers descriptive data and interpretation about recruitment efforts provided from the survey. Herein, Ayers and Woods (2019) outline PETE program coordinators’ perceptions and reported use of student recruitment strategies, barriers to participation in student recruitment efforts, and marketing strategies employed. Differences in all variables among program coordinators from baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral institutions are considered. Specifically, the study found moderate correlations \( r = .46 \) (50) between the extent to which PETE coordinators used specific strategies and their level of perceived effectiveness for recruiting high school students to PETE programs. In addition, the four strategies participants ranked specific to currently enrolled college students’ recruitment were ordered the same for perceived effectiveness and extent used. Participants most frequently identified lack of training and no workload credit as the barriers preventing their participation in recruitment activities. The most commonly implemented marketing strategies were using department websites and distributing flyers/pamphlets.

Chapter 6 presents and interprets qualitative recruitment data. In this chapter, Kern, Richards, Ayers, and Killian (2019) more deeply examine the common themes, trends, and unique approaches employed by participating programs. This study expands upon the quantitative data Ayers and Woods (2019) report in Chapter 5, and offers an in-depth description of PETE coordinators’ perceptions of the contributing factors leading to declining enrollments, along with consideration of their individual role in the process of recruiting new students into PETE. Additionally, a rich description is offered regarding the barriers PETE coordinators encounter in recruiting and the recruitment strategies they consider to be most successful and practical. Key findings from these interviews include participants’ perceptions that declining PETE enrollments are related to: (a) negative public perceptions of education, (b) low-quality K-12 physical education, (c) PETE students’ weak academic preparation, and (d) the impact of restructuring programs to emphasize other kinesiology areas. Consistent with survey results presented in Chapter 5, many PETE coordinators did not actively engage in recruitment, citing workload conflict and lack of time and training as primary barriers.

In Chapter 7, the first of two chapters addressing retention, Richards and Graber (2019) present descriptive survey data about themes, trends, and unique aspects PETE programs implement specific to retaining future professionals. This study specifically examines PETE program coordinators’ perceptions and reported use of student retention strategies and how their use relates to perceived effectiveness. Barriers to participation in student retention efforts are also examined, and differences in all variables among program coordinators from baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral institutions are considered. The major retention survey findings include relative alignment between the perceived effectiveness of recruitment strategies and the extent to which programs employ them. Additionally, a preference for retention strategies that develop relationships among students is evident. Limited differences in variables were noted across Carnegie Classifications, which is slightly different from the recruitment survey findings reported in Chapter 5. Unique to Chapter 7 is the suggestion that physical education doctoral programs should prepare future faculty members to serve in retention roles. At the same time, however, the authors argue that retention of all students who initially enroll in PETE may not be most desirable for the profession, and that students whose beliefs do not align with best practice may need to be counseled out of PETE programs.

In Chapter 8, Kern, Ayers, Killian, and Woods (2019) unpack perspectives, trends, and unique ways in which PETE faculty facilitate retention of PETE candidates in their programs, garnered through interview data. Detailed descriptions of PETE coordinators’ viewpoints on their role in retaining students and the intricacies of factors that encourage and discourage student retention in PETE are presented. Like the relationship between Chapters 5 and 6 regarding recruitment, the qualitative data presented from in-depth interviews in Chapter 8 build upon quantitative survey data reported in Chapter 7 and provide a rich description of PETE coordinators’ perceptions of the issues surrounding student retention in PETE. Primarily, Chapter 8 reveals that coordinators in this study perceive retention to be: (a) aligned with core job expectations, (b) grounded in relationships, (c) impacted by external and policy factors, and (d) limited by time and resources. Similar to the Chapter 7 finding that relationship building is key to retention, the interview data detailed in Chapter 8 reveals that a sense of belonging can be fostered among PETE students when faculty members utilize a constructivist approach. Additionally, it is suggested that PETE faculty may address retention issues through involvement with state policy makers and professional organizations.

Culminating the monograph, in Chapter 9, Templin, Graber, and Richards (2019) provide further synthesis of the results related to recruitment and retention in PETE programs. They then react to the collection of works presented in the monograph through an analysis and commentary aimed at understanding how PETE programs can retain an important role in professional preparation in the future. They additionally deliberate the future of PETE programs, arguing that if the profession is to survive, bold redefinition must be explored.

**References**


**JTPE Vol. 38, No. 1, 2019**