

An Evaluation of Adapted Physical Activity/Education Cataloged Course Descriptions: Exploring Content, Disability Frameworks, and Course Benefits

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Abstract

This study examined undergraduate Adapted Physical Activity/Education course descriptions for content, disability frameworks, and course benefits. A total of 599 course descriptions from 590 universities in the United States were evaluated using content analysis. Notably, disability-related content, such as definitions, was most frequently referenced. Of concern, medical model terminology and nonpreferred disability language were prominent, and only a small proportion of course descriptions directly highlight the benefits of taking the courses, minimizing their potential to recruit students into the classroom. Findings may have general and discipline-specific implications for revising course descriptions, including the need to replace offensive language to accurately represent courses and the value of course enrollment. Recommendations for how disability services offices, university faculty, and academic departments can engage in these efforts, both independently and through creating collaborative partnerships, are discussed.

Keywords: disability, course catalog, Kinesiology, content analysis, higher education

On September 20, 2021, a full-page ad in the *New York Times* read, “Dear fitness industry, there’s something you should know. 81% of people with disabilities don’t feel welcome in your spaces” (Degree, 2021). This press release from *Degree Deodorant’s* #TrainersForHire campaign directly called to action physical activity and fitness organizations to better serve and include disabled persons. Such a call out was needed, given that research shows primary barriers to accessing physical activity for disabled children and adults include the lack of skill or limited awareness of disability among physical educators and other kinesiology professionals (Haegele et al., 2018; Shields & Synnot, 2016). As academic members of the Adapted Physical Activity (APA) field who strive to build a “knowledge base supporting the development of activities and delivery of services in the field of sport and physical activity for people with a disability” (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007, p. 15), we feel the sting of this call-out. There remains a substantial need to prepare professionals to facilitate accessible and equitable physical activity opportunities for disabled persons.

Higher education institutions offer opportunities for kinesiology pre-professionals to enroll in courses and gain experiences in APA and in Adapted Physical Education (APE), the latter of which focuses on teacher training and the delivery of school-based physical education services to disabled children. In fact, courses in APA and APE (hereby abbreviated APA/E) often address and build competencies for implementing physical activity or physical education inclusive of disabled people (McNamara et al., 2022) and have elicited improvements in preservice physical educators’ self-efficacy beliefs toward working with disabled students (Taliaferro et al., 2015). Exposure to and capacity building for APA/E is of great value to kinesiology pre-professionals and the broader field, especially as current rates recognize that one in four adults (27%) in the United States is disabled (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). However, APA/E classes are seldom required across the undergraduate kinesiology curricula (Kwon, 2018). Unless kinesiology students choose the course as an elective, many will graduate without disability-related training

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and may feel unprepared to support disabled persons in their future practice. Requiring all kinesiology students to enroll in an APA/E course is optimal but may be unrealistic given differences in institutional resources and faculty expertise.

Targeted efforts to attract students to elect APA/E courses may ensure a larger base of pre-service professionals with capacity to develop and implement accessible programming. One strategy is attracting students through easily accessed, public-facing course content, such as course descriptions on university websites (Moogan et al., 2001). The purpose of this study was to analyze undergraduate APA/E course descriptions. Examining APA/E course descriptions allows for an initial understanding of how the course is portrayed to prospective students. Importantly, given the relevance of APA/E to disabled persons, examination of the language and word choices in APA/E course descriptions is a novel way to investigate how disability is contrived within written course materials and conveyed to students. Current discussions within APA/E question the language used in teaching, research, and practice to describe disability (Spencer et al., 2020), and thus it is important to critically evaluate course descriptions for alignment with contemporary discourse.

Literature Review

A diverse body of literature focuses on understanding and predicting student decision-making in higher education, including decisions to select courses (Szekeres, 2010). Students may make decisions about their programs of study based on a wide variety of influences, such as academic advisors, guidance counselors or service providers, parents, course syllabi, course descriptions, online rating services, connection to future employment, word of mouth, student workload, and level of convenience, among others (Babad, 2001; Davison & Price, 2009; Kim & Ekachai, 2020; Kulkarni & Vinuales, 2020; Milliron, 2008; Mourey et al., 2022; Szekeres, 2010). When selecting courses, students may also seek information from several sources, including university course catalogs that display course titles and descriptions (Babad et al., 1999; Kulkarni & Vinuales, 2020).

Researchers suggest that course descriptions may influence student attitudes toward, or interest in, enrolling in an undergraduate course (Mourey et al., 2022). Course descriptions are public-facing representations of academic studies and can offer a snapshot of course content, frameworks, and relevance to students (Lancelloti & Thomas, 2009; Rosa et al., 2016). With many courses competing for students' at-

tention, strategic course descriptions can be necessary. Students may respond to course descriptions differently depending on their education stage and content familiarity. For example, simplified descriptions may attract prospective students, whereas those that hint at higher learning may be preferred among upper-division students (Mourey et al., 2022). Additionally, students with low confidence in the content may be more likely to enroll if the usefulness or benefits of a course are clearly stated, while students with high confidence prefer descriptions to focus on the content they will access (Lancelloti & Thomas, 2009). These data emphasize that course descriptions impact student enrollment decisions and therefore, exploration of APA/E course descriptions may have implications for understanding content trends, evaluating course alignment with training needs and social perspectives, and attracting a large range of kinesiology-related majors toward course topics. Increasing student enrollment in courses may strengthen the capacity of professionals in the field to enact inclusive and accessible teaching practices and increase equity within physical activity programming for disabled persons.

Only one known study, by McNamara and colleagues (2022), has examined course descriptions in APA/E courses. The researchers performed a content analysis on 30 syllabi, including the stated course descriptions, of introduction to APA/E undergraduate courses in the United States. Based on their analysis, McNamara et al. (2022) concluded that most courses heavily focused on disability-specific content, aligning with past summaries of APA/E course content (Kwon, 2018; Piletic & Davis, 2010). Also highlighted by the researchers was the use of outdated terminology that reflected the medical model of disability. Discussions of disability, including in APA/E, have historically been rooted in the medical model, emphasizing deficits and pathologies through terms like "handicapped" and "the mentally ill" (Andrews et al., 2022; Haegele & Hodge, 2016). In response, disabled persons and scholars encourage the integration of additional views of disability like the social model, which identifies social and environmental barriers. Proponents of the social model advocate for language that combats stigma by directly naming disability ("say the word") through the use of person-first and identity-first language (Andrews et al., 2022; Grenier, 2007; Rosa et al., 2016). Based on their findings, McNamara et al. (2022) recommended that faculty be critically aware of the language used in their course materials and their classrooms.

Findings from McNamara et al. (2022) provide meaningful, preliminary information on course descriptions in the APA/E field. However, several

delimitations of their work impact our capacity to understand course descriptions on a large scale or consider their potential to attract students to the field. First, the authors included a relatively small convenience sample that centered on physical education undergraduate programs, potentially eliciting a biased view of course descriptions compared to what is widely available within kinesiology programs nationally. Additionally, McNamara et al.'s (2022) discussion of disability terminology observed in their sample of course materials is important. APA/E has, over time, evolved from the provision of medicalized rehabilitation services to individualized, inclusive, and adapted programming for all (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007). This shift has contributed to changes in knowledge and increased conversations of terminology and culturally informed representations of disability. However, the extent to which APA/E course descriptions across the field have been updated to reflect this evolution of terminology remains unknown. Course descriptions are public facing and the language used should represent the contemporary and preferred values of the field and disabled persons. Examinations of how disability is presented, including through disability models and language choice, across a larger national sample serve as an audit of current practices and may identify opportunities for necessary updates. Lastly, our current knowledge of APA/E course descriptions does not lend insight into the qualities of course descriptions that may entice students to enroll, such as the potential benefits or usefulness of courses to students' personal or career goals (Babad, 2001; Lancelotti & Thomas, 2009; Mourey et al., 2022). Further examinations of how course descriptions present or state a course's benefits may therefore be a critical addition to understanding APA/E course descriptions and their utility in the field.

An updated, large-scale evaluation of APA/E course descriptions can provide a current representation of courses that addresses the aforementioned issues. The present research, therefore, surveyed a nationally representative sample of APA/E course descriptions for course *content*, *disability frameworks*, and *course benefits* to provide a unique summary that updates and builds upon past literature. Specifically, the aims of this study were to examine the content (aim 1), the disability frameworks (aim 2), and course benefits (aim 3) directly presented within course descriptions of undergraduate APA/E courses in the course catalogs of 4-year U.S. institutions of higher education.

Method

Sample

A total of 599 APA/E course descriptions were included in this study. Course descriptions were drawn from 590 four-year universities across all major regions of the United States. Of the 590 universities, 311 (52.7%) were public and 279 (47.3%) were private non-profit. Table 1 provides additional characteristics of the universities from which all course descriptions were drawn.

Scope of Study and Search Strategy

Identification of relevant universities

The U.S. Department of Education offers public access to an online tool known as *College Navigator* (<https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>), which can be used to explore the information of nearly 7,000 U.S. colleges and universities. Additional information regarding *College Navigator* and its use in research can be found elsewhere (Barnett et al., 2015; Ginder et al., 2018). A *College Navigator* search was conducted in June 2020 to identify all four-year, public or private non-profit, universities that offered bachelor's or graduate degrees in at least one of four categories (at the time of the search): (a) kinesiology and exercise science, (b) health and physical education/fitness, general, (c) health and physical education/fitness, other, and (d) physical education teaching and coaching. These degree options and categories were selected to represent programs that may offer undergraduate APA/E courses, given the cross-disciplinary nature of the field (Gill, 2007). Due to the search engine's result capacity (max 500), two separate searches were conducted to capture all universities. The complete search identified 869 U.S. universities and generated an Excel document that included the following information for each listing: university name, address, official website, type, degree(s) offered, campus setting, total student population, and undergraduate student population.

Identification of course descriptions

To locate APA/E course descriptions, the official website of each of the 869 universities were systematically audited for key course information. Trained research assistants used the university name (e.g., [masked for review process]) to conduct an internet search and access each university's website (e.g., [masked for review process]) and the respective 2020-2021 course catalog. The catalog was manually reviewed for APA/E courses. If the 2020-2021 catalog was not published or available online, the most recent academic catalog was searched instead, back dating no earlier than 2018 (e.g., 2019-2020 or 2018-2019).

Table 1*Detailed characteristics of universities (n=590) that offer APA/E courses*

University Characteristic	All (n = 590)	Public (n = 311)	Private not-for-profit (n = 279)
U.S. Region:	-	-	-
<i>Midwest</i>	190 (32.2%)	82 (26.4%)	108 (38.7%)
<i>Northeast</i>	72 (12.2%)	43 (13.8%)	29 (10.4%)
<i>Southeast</i>	193 (32.7%)	99 (31.8%)	94 (33.7%)
<i>Southwest</i>	61 (10.3%)	38 (12.2%)	23 (8.2%)
<i>West</i>	74 (12.5%)	49 (15.8%)	25 (9.0%)
Undergraduates:	-	-	-
<1624 (min: 183)	147 (24.9%)	10 (3.2%)	137 (49.1%)
1624 – 3593	148 (25.1%)	49 (15.8%)	99 (35.5%)
3594 – 9937	148 (25.1%)	110 (35.4%)	38 (13.6%)
>9937 (max: 53,743)	147 (24.9%)	142 (45.7%)	5 (1.8%)
Campus Setting:	-	-	-
<i>City</i>	250 (42.4%)	150 (48.2%)	100 (35.8%)
<i>Rural</i>	33 (5.6%)	10 (3.2%)	23 (8.2%)
<i>Suburb</i>	114 (19.3%)	52 (16.7%)	62 (22.2%)
<i>Town</i>	193 (32.7%)	99 (31.8%)	94 (33.7%)

Note. Variables are drawn from the College Navigator database. U.S. Region and Campus setting variables levels reflect existing College Navigator labels. Undergraduate population variable levels were created to reflect descriptive quartiles across all 590 universities.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Listed course titles and descriptions were evaluated for APA/E content. All courses that met the following criteria were retained for further analysis: (a) the course related to physical activity, physical education, physical development, sport or performance (keywords include *physical education*, *physical activity* or terms such as *sport* or *movement*), (b) the course was specific to disabled persons, disability, or individuals with diverse abilities of any age group (keywords include *adapted*, *adaptive*, *modified* or *accessible*, *disability* or terms such as “*special*” or “*exceptional*”), and (c) the course included a lecture component. Upon further review, courses were excluded if the course: (a) focused primarily on fitness, exercise, or exercise prescription, (b) described the focus of the course as “special populations,” such as pregnancy, osteoporosis, which did not explicitly include disabled people; (c) referenced “adapting” activity but did not focus on APA/E based on the title

(e.g., Motor Development); or (d) could not be confirmed as a course offered in the previous three academic years (2018-2019, 2019-2020, 2020-2021) via the catalog. Courses not listed as recent as 2018 were assumed to no longer be offered. These inclusion and exclusion criteria were set to identify courses that primarily focus on disability populations and maintain a direct focus on courses that align with definitions of APA and APE (Hutzler & Sherrill, 2007).

Based on the catalogs, some universities offered more than one APA/E course, such as an introductory course and an advanced course (e.g., Advanced APA, Assessment and Program Evaluation in APE), that met the inclusion criteria. To standardize the number of courses analyzed per university, only the introductory (e.g., “Introduction to Adapted Physical Activity”) or general APA/E (e.g., “Adapted Physical Education”) course descriptions were included. This was consistent for all universities except for nine cases in which universities offered two separate

courses that both met the inclusion criteria and could not be distinguished as an introductory or advanced level based on the title, description, or course number (e.g., two courses titled “Adapted Physical Education” and “Adapted Physical Activity”). At the end of this process, 599 course descriptions from 590 different universities were included, indicating 67.9% of the 869 universities identified through *College Navigator* included at least one APA/E course, while 270 universities did not.

Data Extraction

Variables extracted verbatim from the university websites included: (a) course title, (b) course designer, and (c) course description, as reported in the official course catalog. All data extractions were reviewed manually at least twice and confirmed by the lead author. Any remaining disagreements were discussed with the research team until a final decision was made.

Data Coding and Analysis

A content analysis was conducted to manually code all course descriptions in alignment with the research questions. Content analysis is a descriptive, qualitative approach that can be used to systematically analyze text and uncover common themes among the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Content analysis was selected for this study for two main reasons. First, at the start of this study, little was known of APA/E course descriptions. Content analysis methods are especially advantageous when research or understanding of a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Additionally, a large amount of diverse data (i.e., 599 course descriptions using different formats, words, and word counts) were included in analysis. Content analysis is an efficient technique for describing and evaluating a large amount of data in a systematic way (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Methods of both directed and summative content analysis were used to identify and quantify the use of predetermined words and topics within course descriptions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Prior to the data coding process, several keywords and coding categories were deductively created based on relevant research findings in APA/E research, disability studies, and areas of interest among the researchers. For example, to explore how disability was framed within the course descriptions, three general categories commonly used to describe or define disability were identified (disability model, category, language). To initially generate the coding themes for each identified category, the first and second authors reviewed

the data, made note of recurring words and phrases in the data that aligned within identified categories, and discussed common notes and areas of interest for coding. Several coding levels that could be used to code the data were then derived based on the common observations. After this process, a codebook was drafted that defined each coding theme, alongside definitions, coding levels, guidelines, and example keywords corresponding to each coding theme (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During the data coding process, the first and second authors revised and refined the codes and coding definitions based on new observations in the data and conversations regarding coding disagreements. As observations of new or recurring data that could not be clearly coded were identified, new coding levels were discussed, added to the codebook, and applied to already coded data.

Specifically, three general coding categories were generated to reflect the specific aims of the research question: to describe the (a) course content, (b) disability frameworks, and (c) course benefits presented in APA/E course descriptions. Course content was defined as APA/E topic areas that were directly named in the course description (Note: data were delimited to published course descriptions and were not verified in relation to course syllabi, calendars, or instructor practices). Content coding themes included disability content, teaching practices, behavior management, modifications and accommodations, legal issues, attitudes toward disability, and teacher orientation. These final coding themes represent common topic areas and recognized gaps in training identified by existing literature on APA/E course content (Kwon, 2018; McNamara et al., 2021; Piletic & Davis, 2010) and were selected by the authors to evaluate content (aim 1). It is important to note that codes were named to reflect common terms used in APA/E literature and that reoccurred in the data, regardless of alignment with contemporary disability discourse. For example, in APA/E literature, “managing” behavior is commonly described as an area that is missing from pre-service preparation. Therefore, the “behavior management” code was created prior to coding to reflect this literature and retained based on course descriptions in the sample that also used this term, despite that this specific phrasing problematically ignores the need for creating accommodating environments and providing consistent expectations. Disability frameworks were defined as the way in which disability was described, viewed, and referred to within the written course description. Disability framework coding themes included disability model, disability category, and disability language. These final coding themes represent common ways in which current literature has defined or

categorized disability (Andrews et al., 2022; Rosa et al., 2016) and were selected by the authors to evaluate how disability is referenced or conveyed within APA/E course descriptions (aim 2). Course benefits were defined as potential student benefits or learning outcomes of the course that were directly stated or referred to in the course description, regardless of confirmation or evidence of the benefit to enrolled students. Coding themes for course benefits included experiential component and benefit-based versus content-based. These final coding themes represent data-driven outcomes or benefits of APA/E courses and previous literature conducted on course descriptions and their benefits for prospective students (Lancellotti & Thomas, 2009). The final codebook used to guide the coding process is presented in Table 2.

To establish interrater reliability prior to coding the full sample, the first and second authors manually coded a small sample (10%, $n = 60$) of randomly selected course descriptions. Percent agreement was calculated as a measure of interrater reliability appropriate for coding the data (Feng, 2014). After the first round of coding, authors agreed on 405 and disagreed on 162 ratings out of 567 possible ratings (71.4%). Since at least 80% reliability was not met, the authors discussed their disagreements until consensus was met, revised the coding options and definitions to reflect their discussions, and restarted the coding process. After the second round of coding, authors agreed on 514 and disagreed on 86 ratings out of 600 possible ratings (85.67%). At this point, since at least 80% interrater reliability was reached for the first 10% of data (85.67%), the remaining data were distributed among the two authors and independently coded. Authors flagged any course descriptions that they were uncertain about coding; these descriptions were then reviewed and consensus coded. Upon completion of all data coding, descriptive statistics (n , %), alongside 95% confidence intervals (CI), were calculated for each level within the content (aim 1), disability frameworks (aim 2), and course benefits themes (aim 3).

Results

Descriptive statistics for all content, disability, and course benefits themes are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5, respectively. The most common topic referenced in the course descriptions was disability ($n = 572$, 95.49%, 95% CI [0.94, 0.97]), followed by teaching practices ($n = 335$, 55.93%, 95% CI [0.52, 0.60]). The least common topic referenced was attitudes toward disability ($n = 6$, 1.00% 95% CI [0.00, 0.02]), followed by behavior management ($n = 33$,

5.51%, 95% CI [0.04, 0.08]). One-hundred and twenty-six (21.04%, 95% CI [0.18, 0.25]) courses were oriented toward physical educators.

Among the disability themes, most course descriptions presented disability as a general population, without naming specific disability types or groups ($n = 378$, 63.11%, 95% CI [0.59, 0.67]). Language that directly named disability, including person-first and identify-first disability language, was used most frequently ($n = 229$, 38.23%, 95% CI [0.34, 0.42]), followed by disability euphemisms ($n = 165$, 27.55%, 95% CI [0.24, 0.31]), and outdated terminology ($n = 109$, 18.20%, 95% CI [0.15, 0.21]). The majority of course descriptions did not describe disability using a particular model ($n = 342$, 57.10%, 95% CI [0.53, 0.61]). However, those using a model use the Medical Model ($n = 226$, 37.73%, 95% CI [0.34, 0.42]) more often than the Social Model ($n = 21$, 3.51%, 95% CI [0.02, 0.05]) or both models ($n = 10$, 1.67%, 95% CI [0.01, 0.03]).

Regarding course benefits themes, 244 descriptions referenced an experiential course component (40.73%, 95% CI [0.37, 0.45]). Of these 244, the most common experiential component stated was a field experience ($n = 118$, 19.70%, 95% CI [0.17, 0.23]), while the least common was a disability simulation ($n = 3$, 0.50%, 95% CI [0.00, 0.01]). The majority of course descriptions did not present potential benefits to students for taking the course and instead only referenced course content ($n = 493$, 82.30%, 95% CI [0.79, 0.85]). Only 21 (3.51%, 95% CI [0.02, 0.05]) descriptions were benefit-based, and 85 (14.19%, 95% CI [0.11, 0.17]) referenced both content and benefits of the course.

Discussion

This study appraised a nationally representative sample of 599 course descriptions from U.S. undergraduate APA/E courses to synthesize the public-facing presentation of course content, disability frameworks, and benefits. The present findings align with previous analyses of APA/E course content while offering new insight into the language used to describe disability and stated course benefits in course descriptions. Notably, disability-related content, such as “definitions” and “characteristics” of various disabilities, was the most frequently referenced content area referenced across the course descriptions. Of concern, medical model terminology and nonpreferred disability language are prominent, and only a small proportion of course descriptions highlight the potential benefits of courses for students, minimizing the field’s potential to recruit a large range of kine-

Table 2*Definition, Levels and Coding Scheme per Coding Theme*

Theme	Definition	Coding Levels	Coding Description
Disability Content	Words used to indicate disability-related content	(1) Yes (0) No	References disability, generally or specifically, regardless of framework Does not reference
Teaching Practices	Words used to indicate teaching content	(1) Yes (0) No	References act of teaching or teaching strategies Does not reference
Behavior Management	Words used to indicate behavior management content	(1) Behavior management (2) Behavior, general (0) No	References implementing behavior management strategies References behavior broadly Does not reference
Modifications and Accommodations	Words used to indicate the act of modifying	(1) Yes (0) No	References providing modifications and/or accommodations Does not reference
Legal Issues	Words used to indicate legal content	(1) Yes (0) No	References legal mandates or historical perspectives of disability Does not reference
Attitudes toward Disability	Words used to indicate content related to attitudes	(1) Yes (0) No	References attitudes or attitude change toward people with disability Does not reference
Teacher orientation	Content is directed for prospective teachers	(1) Yes (0) No	References content, prerequisites, or testing specific to PETE Does not reference
Disability Model	The way in which disability is defined, presented, or viewed	(1) Medical Model (2) Social Model (3) Both (0) N/A	Disability or disability experiences described using medical content. Disability or disability experiences described using social content. Medical and Social content used Disability/ability not referenced
Disability Category	The way in which disabilities or diagnoses are named or labeled	(1) Disability, general (2) Disability, specific (3) Non-disability specific (0) N/A	References disability, diagnoses, or conditions in general or as a group References or provides examples of specific disability types or diagnoses References needs of all abilities and students, not just with disabilities Disability not referenced

Theme	Definition	Coding Levels	Coding Description
Disability Language	Words used to define, describe, or refer to disability or population	(1) Offensive	Contradicts recommendations for respectful language
		(2) Ableist	Devalues people with disabilities compared to those without
		(3) Euphemism	Words intended to replace or put a “positive spin” on disability, without directly naming disability
		(4) Direct	Person-first or identify-first language that directly names disability
		(0) N/A	Disability not referenced
Experiential Component	Type of practical or experience-based course component listed within the description	(1) Field experience	References field-based or practical experiences in school-based setting
		(2) Practicum, formal	References practicum experience, school setting not specified
		(3) Practical, informal	References practical activities but no formal lab or practicum component
		(4) Simulation	References the act of simulating disability
		(0) No	Does not reference
Benefit-based vs. Content-based	The way in which the course is presented through the description	(1) Benefit-based	References the benefit, value, or importance of the course only
		(2) Content-based	References content and structure of the course only
		(3) Both	References both content and benefit of the course

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics for Course Description Content*

Theme	Level	n (%)	95% CI
Disability Content	(1) Yes	572 (95.49%)	(0.94, 0.97)
	(0) No	27 (4.51%)	(0.03, 0.06)
Teaching Practices	(1) Yes	335 (55.93%)	(0.52, 0.60)
	(0) No	264 (44.07%)	(0.40, 0.48)
Behavior Management	(1) Behavior management	18 (3.01%)	(0.02, 0.05)
	(2) Behavior, general	15 (2.50%)	(0.01, 0.04)
	(0) No	566 (94.49%)	(0.92, 0.96)
Modifications and Accommodations	(1) Yes	219 (36.56%)	(0.33, 0.41)
	(0) No	380 (63.44%)	(0.59, 0.67)
Legal Issues	(1) Yes	139 (23.21%)	(0.20, 0.27)
	(0) No	460 (76.79%)	(0.73, 0.80)
Attitudes Toward Disability	(1) Yes	6 (1.00%)	(0.00, 0.02)
	(0) No	593 (99.00%)	(0.98, 1.00)
Teacher-Oriented	(1) Yes	126 (21.04%)	(0.18, 0.25)
	(0) No	473 (78.96%)	(0.75, 0.82)

Table 4*Descriptive Statistics (n, %) for Disability Frameworks*

Theme	Level	n (%)	95% CI
Disability Model	(1) Medical Model	226 (37.73%)	(0.34, 0.42)
	(2) Social Model	21 (3.51%)	(0.02, 0.05)
	(3) Both	10 (1.67%)	(0.01, 0.03)
	(0) Cannot be inferred	342 (57.10%)	(0.53, 0.61)
Disability Category	(1) General	378 (63.11%)	(0.59, 0.67)
	(2) Subgroup	146 (24.37%)	(0.21, 0.28)
	(3) All abilities	48 (8.01%)	(0.06, 0.10)
	(0) Cannot be inferred	27 (4.51%)	(0.03, 0.06)
Disability Language	(1) Offensive	109 (18.20%)	(0.15, 0.21)
	(2) Ableist	47 (7.85%)	(0.06, 0.10)
	(3) Euphemism	165 (27.55%)	(0.24, 0.31)
	(4) Direct	229 (38.23%)	(0.34, 0.42)
	(0) Cannot be inferred	49 (8.18%)	(0.06, 0.11)

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics (n, %) for Course Benefits*

Theme	Level	n (%)	95% CI
Experiential Component	(1) Field experience	118 (19.70%)	(0.17, 0.23)
	(2) Formal practicum	85 (14.19%)	(0.11, 0.17)
	(3) Practical	38 (6.34%)	(0.05, 0.09)
	(4) Simulation	3 (0.50%)	(0.00, 0.01)
	(0) No	355 (59.27%)	(0.55, 0.63)
Benefit-based vs. Content-based	(1) Benefit-based	21 (3.51%)	(0.02, 0.05)
	(2) Content-based	493 (82.30%)	(0.79, 0.85)
	(3) Both	85 (14.19%)	(0.11, 0.17)

siology students into the classroom. Our results suggest a critical need for course description updates that reflect disability community perspectives and showcase the value of APA/E coursework for kinesiology students more broadly.

Course Content

Disability-related content was prominent across 95.5% of course descriptions and is consistent with previous reports that APA/E courses center diagnosis- or impairment-specific content (Kwon, 2018; McNamara et al., 2022). This approach has received criticism as it may overemphasize the medical dimensions of disability, while underemphasizing the personal, social, and contextual factors that create barriers to participation across life domains (e.g., work, education, and recreation; McNamara et al., 2021). This imbalance can lead to the further stigmatization of disabled persons and limit professional preparation to confront systematic environmental and sociocultural barriers within physical activity and fitness programming. Moreover, the content themes that were observed least (e.g., attitudes, behavior, legal issues) are areas of content knowledge and skillsets frequently noted by physical educators, fitness professionals, and disabled persons as lacking in pre-service training programs and among practicing professionals (e.g., Healy et al., 2016; Wilson et al., 2020).

Disability Frameworks

Our findings offer new details of how disability is defined in APA/E course descriptions. Approximately one-third of the descriptions used only person-first and/or identity-first language in alignment with direct language models advocated for by some disability communities (Andrews et al., 2022). Of concern, the language used in the remaining course descriptions does not directly name disability, conflicting with contemporary disability discourse. About one-fourth used euphemistic language that does not directly name disability, including “special needs” and “exceptional,” that disability advocates deem ineffective and likely to become disability slurs (Gernsbacher et al., 2016). Almost one-fifth of course descriptions used outdated language, including terms deemed offensive or rude. For example, as listed in the online course catalogs, sample courses were described to include content regarding disabled persons using all words listed as examples of “offensive” and “ableist” language in the coding scheme (Table 2).

The use of offensive and outdated language is problematic for reasons continually expressed within the literature and beyond academia (e.g., Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021; Rosa's Law, 2010). This language is also

disheartening when considering course descriptions are outward facing, publicly accessible representations of APA/E courses and values. Using derogatory and offensive language can negatively influence prospective students, promote distrust from disabled persons who voice disapproval of such language, and largely misrepresent the values and mission of APA/E as an academic and professional field. Future research is needed to investigate the extent of this impact from the perspective of students with and without disabilities. In the meantime, course descriptions should be audited for offensive language and, ideally, regularly updated to align with direct, preferred, and evolving disability terminology. To support this effort, we offer examples of course descriptions, scored for varying disability model orientations and language that directly names disability, that may serve as templates (see Table 6). We acknowledge that faculty and disability services officers may be constrained by university policies, schedules, formats, or word counts when developing or contributing to course descriptions. Regardless, we hope the example templates offer support in this process.

Course Benefits

This study examined the representation of student benefits and the integration of experiential opportunities in the course as reflected in its description. APA/E scholars assert that hands-on experiential course components, especially practicum and field experiences, are essential for course effectiveness and key to student learning (Hutzler et al., 2019). For example, participation in experiential course components has been linked to improvements in favorable attitudes toward disabled people (Case et al., 2020), self-efficacy beliefs among pre-service educators (Taliaferro et al., 2015), and the likelihood of working with disabled people in the future (Shields & Taylor, 2014). Unfortunately, less than half of the course descriptions explicitly mentioned an experiential component. It is possible that some courses include an experience that was simply left out of the description or requires enrollment in a separate course. If accurate, however, the absence of experiential opportunities in much of the sample may suggest the possibility that a large cohort of pre-service kinesiology professionals are not receiving direct experiential training with disabled persons.

Researchers have also reported that students may perceive a course to be important to their learning or professional training based on the course description, particularly if possible benefits of taking the course are clearly indicated in the description (Lancellotti & Thomas, 2009). The majority of APA/E course descriptions only presented content (e.g., “Program

Table 6

Sample Descriptions with Direct Disability Language and Varied Model Orientations

Orientation	Sample Course Description with Direct Language
Medical model	Kinesiology majors learn to teach physical activity to persons with disabilities. Discussed are the etiology characteristics and best teaching practices (i.e., inclusion) for persons with mental, learning physical, emotional, sensory, health, and/or multiple disabilities
Social model	Provides awareness and understanding of the individual differences among individuals with disabilities. Pedagogical skills and adapting instruction to meet the needs of all individuals in physical education is a primary focus. Assessment, individualized educational planning, delivery of services, developmental and prescriptive teaching and advocacy for individuals with disabilities are content areas. Students are required to participate in work experience
Both medical and social models	The study of disabilities encountered in clinical and educational settings, including description, etiology, and characteristics of a variety of physical and cognitive disabilities. In addition, this course is designed to broaden awareness of disability beyond traditional cultural attitudes and norms, emphasizing a social-political definition of disability

needs of individuals with disabilities in physical education and physical activity settings”), without referencing potential benefits to students who take the course. Benefits detailed within sample descriptions focused on the potential for gaining knowledge and skills from the class, including the preparation of students to “provide safe, appropriate, and individualized accommodations” and “meet the professional and legal mandates pertaining to general physical education.” Notably, benefits identified in course descriptions were not confirmed through this study, and instead may represent views or biases of individuals who wrote the course description. In fact, some of the benefits identified in the course descriptions used ableist language and highlighted the provision of services to disabled individuals as beneficial for prospective students. Moving forward, faculty should aim to integrate the benefits of APA/E courses into their course descriptions, while critically considering how best to frame potential benefits of taking the course. Writers of course descriptions should avoid presenting course benefits in a way that perpetuates the notion that disabled people are in need of service, and instead convey the potential knowledge, awareness, and skills that students may gain for improving their own ability to create inclusive and accessible spaces. Highlighting the development of specific skills needed to improve meaningful inclusion and confront barriers in the professional field (e.g., creation of ap-

propriate modifications and collaboration; Haegele et al., 2021) may be especially powerful toward bringing in students who have an interest in building capacity for accessible programming in their future careers.

To display the relevance of course descriptions as attractors to APA/E content and the potential cascading impacts of highlighting course benefits, we conclude this section with a summary of personal communication (November 10, 2022) between the first author and Kasia Givenrod, MS:

Kasia is a well-known Adapted Physical Education specialist in California and was selected to be the Keynote Speaker at the 2022 National Adapted Physical Education Conference. Kasia’s keynote lecture began by emphasizing the many “bridges” that she crossed since childhood that supported her in becoming an accomplished APE teacher. One example was Kasia’s discussion of how she selected elective course credits in her final year of college as an undergraduate Psychology major. She spoke of reviewing the course catalog, flipping through countless pages of course titles and descriptions. Upon finding the Introduction to Adapted Physical Education entry, she perceived it as a beneficial and interesting course and decided to enroll in the course. Unbeknownst to her, the course experience would influence her to change her career path, leading her to attend

graduate school in pursuit of an APE specialization. Moving forward to present day, Kasia has received numerous recognitions, including SHAPE America's 2022 Western District APE Teacher of the Year award, for her dedication to teaching disabled students (Givenrod, 2022).

The previous anecdote showcases a genuine example of the goal of course descriptions and the possibility of recruiting motivated professionals to the field. In recent years, concerns regarding personnel shortages within school districts and low student enrollment in teacher education programs, including APA/E, have demanded creative solutions for student recruitment (Haegeler et al., 2020, 2021; Jung et al., 2022; Zhang, 2011). All opportunities to market courses, including through strategically written course descriptions, should therefore be capitalized on.

Limitations

This content analysis provides new information regarding course descriptions on a large scale, and findings should be discussed with consideration for study limitations. First, course descriptions were extracted from course catalogs with varying publication years. While different results are possible with all data extracted from the same year, we chose to represent the most-current data by including descriptions published within three academic years (i.e., 2018-2021) and using each course's most recent available version. As with other content analyses, our discussions and interpretations were limited to the codebook developed for this study. Therefore, potential differences in how content, disability frameworks (especially language), and course benefits are defined and categorized may not be captured by the codes selected for this study. In addition, because the scope of our content analysis is specific to APA/E course descriptions, our study does not reflect how disability may be presented in other kinesiology courses, such as Exercise for Special Populations. Our research questions were specific to APA/E; therefore, a focus on those courses was most appropriate. Follow-up studies may supplement our results by expanding the inclusion criteria to all disability-related courses or other subdisciplines. This supplement aligns well with "integration models" of higher education that advocate for stranding disability content across the curriculum (Braga et al., 2018).

In addition, the potential constraints of course descriptions must be discussed. First, some universities may have policies that restrict faculty from freely updating their course descriptions, including through standardized formats and word limits. It may also be possible that course descriptions are not seen as valu-

able, and therefore are not regularly audited. We were not able to discern which course descriptions were thoughtfully crafted or written without restrictions, and thus, our complete understanding of course descriptions may be limited. Similarly, the capacity for course descriptions to serve as a complete reflection of curriculum must be acknowledged. Publicly available course descriptions may be outdated or may not match current versions included on syllabi. It is possible that course descriptions reference content that is not taught in class, just as it is likely that some course content is not stated in the description. Our results depicting content should therefore be interpreted carefully. Specifically, course descriptions should be a preview of course content to prospective students and the public, but not necessarily representative of all content covered. Nonetheless, the commonalities and differences in content across the sample are important to reflect on as we make decisions about what topics should be previewed in course descriptions. When thinking of course descriptions as a direct window into course curricula, for example, there are evident gaps in the content (e.g., behavior, social model) that is currently recommended by APA/E scholars (e.g., increased skill building in creating accessible learning environments, multidimensional views of disability). Efforts to ensure courses incorporate specific topics are therefore warranted.

Recommendations for Universities and Course Instructors

Course instructors and academic departments hold the primary responsibility for updating course descriptions and ensuring course materials use respectful terminology. Disability services offices can be essential resources for inclusive instruction and can contribute to the design of course descriptions and the accessibility of other course materials, including the syllabi and learning objectives. We recommend increasing dialogue with and consulting disability service offices when revising or developing course descriptions for disability-related courses. Departments and course instructors should increase this dialogue and consult with disability offices, regardless of known presence of disabled students within their classes, to ensure inclusive language. Supportive faculty members, especially those in disability-related fields such as APA/E, should partner with and advocate for disability services offices to build connections between students, providers, and departments (Lombardi et al., 2018). Consultation with disabled students on how disability is represented within course descriptions is an important next step. Such collaborations, like surveying students registered

with campus disability services about how universities can better support disabled students (Fleming et al., 2017), have previously elicited valuable perspectives and may support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at the broader university level.

Based on our findings and existing literature, we recommend that course descriptions (a) include comprehensive depictions of course content that align with known training needs, (b) use respectful disability language that reflects views and preferences among disabled groups, and (c) promote the benefits of enrolling in the course to prospective students. Notably, based on our coding scheme, none of the 599 course descriptions in our national sample directly met all three of these criteria. We have therefore modified existing descriptions to provide disability services officers with examples and to guide faculty in updating their own course descriptions in alignment with our recommendations (see Table 7).

Recommendations for Disability Services Offices and Educators

Disability services offices may be key contributors to the auditing and development of course descriptions by faculty. As “the outward-facing voice” of disability services offices (Banerjee et al., 2020, p. 305), disability services websites often include various resources for accommodations, disabled students’ rights and responsibilities, and protocols for reporting or documenting disability. Websites serve as a

resource for faculty by providing important guidelines and inclusive instructional strategies (Banerjee et al., 2020). Disability services offices may expand resources for academic units to include examples of contemporary and preferred language when generating course materials, including course descriptions and syllabi. They may also provide students and faculty with mediums for reporting offensive and outdated terminology within course descriptions or academic materials for the goal of creating updates.

As a potential mechanism for updating language within course materials, disability services educators may incorporate information on disability language trends and preferences among disability groups into existing disability-related trainings and professional development across campus. Disability services offices may also build new or foster existing partnerships with campus-based organizations that focus on instruction and faculty training, such as faculty development offices, centers for teaching and learning, and new faculty mentoring programs, to infuse disability-related resources on inclusive language within course descriptions and other course materials (Lombardi et al., 2018). Although the scope of this study was specific to course descriptions in APA/E, the contents of this paper may serve as a resource or example for confronting problematic language published in course materials and by academic units more broadly (e.g., program websites).

Table 7

Example Course Descriptions to Serve as References for Revisions

Meets Recommendations	This course will provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively teach, support, and design programming for physical activity for persons with disabilities. Students will learn important disability characteristics, definitions, functions, and behaviors; theories, and techniques for adapting physical activities, equipment, and environments in inclusive and alternative settings; historical, legal, and contemporary trends and issues related to programming adapted physical activity and education; and specific safety considerations. Students will gain 10-hours of direct, hands-on experiences working with children with disabilities and applying course content throughout the course
Does Not Meet Recommendations	This course is an introduction to disability and adapted physical activity across school and clinical settings. Lab included

Note. Examples have been slightly modified from existing course descriptions to match our recommendations and do not represent any course or university.

Future research

Much remains unknown about the potential influence of course descriptions on variables like student enrollment and disabled students' perceptions of belonging within academic units. Future research is needed to assess this impact and understand the contribution of catalog content toward the development of culturally responsive professionals. At present, researchers have recognized course descriptions as "the most common form of course content" that prospective students use when deciding to enroll in courses (Mourey et al., 2022, p. 100). It is, therefore, essential that course descriptions are acknowledged as critical to recruiting within the field and serve as updated, accurate representations of the course. New discussions are also needed, including answering questions like (a) to what extent do course descriptions reflect course delivery and syllabi? and (b) what impact do course descriptions have on course enrollment or interest in the field? Answers to these questions may inform what should be prioritized in course descriptions when university-specific restrictions exist (e.g., limited word count, uniformity, scheduled updates).

Course descriptions serve as a tool for students in selecting their courses and require revision across APA/E courses and potentially other academic disciplines. A course description may be a prospective student's deciding factor for enrolling in a course or turning away from the major altogether. The use of outdated, offensive disability language, and the lack of course benefits, may indicate that course descriptions have not been viewed as influential or that regular revision is not prioritized. We encourage higher education faculty, departments, and administrators to inspect their own course descriptions for content, disability language, and benefits, consult with disability services offices, and make necessary revisions to course descriptions. We offer an example course description to support faculty with this task. Efforts to further delineate and guide how disability discourse can be meaningfully included not only in course descriptions, but also within materials across kinesiology curricula are warranted.

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