Meet Our ACSM Past Presidents

Melinda (Mindy) Millard-Stafford, Ph.D., M.A., B.S., FACSM
ACSM President 2008-09

AMERICAN COLLEGE of SPORTS MEDICINE
LEADING THE WAY

Name: Melinda (Mindy) Millard-Stafford

Education:
Ph.D., Exercise Science/Physiology, University of Georgia, 1983-86
M.A., Physical Education, University of Florida, 1979-80
B.S., Health & Physical Education, Pennsylvania State University, 1975-79

Current or most recent affiliation:
Professor, Georgia Institute of Technology (School of Biological Sciences)
Director, Exercise Physiology Laboratory

Honors & Awards:
2021 Distinguished Alumni, Department of Kinesiology, University of Georgia
Georgia Power Professor of Excellence, Georgia Tech, September 2016
Citation Award Recipient, ACSM, 2012
Service Award, Southeastern Chapter of ACSM (SEACSM), 2004
Inducted member, National Academy of Kinesiology (formerly American Academy of Kinesiology and Physical Education), 2003
Appointed Member, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sport Committee, 2001-04
Invited Member, Olympic Medical Support Group for 1996 Olympic Games, 1993-96

Professional Interests:
Sports Nutrition, Hydration, Thermoregulation
As a professor at Georgia Tech in the School of Biological Sciences, I teach undergraduate Exercise Physiology and Introduction to Sport Science to nonmajors (as there is no kinesiology major) and a graduate specialty course in exercise metabolism. Typically, I have five to six undergraduates (science or engineering majors) working in the exercise physiology lab and enjoy exposing them to research in our field. Often these students are intercollegiate or club athletes. I serve on the Georgia Tech Athletic Association Board of Trustees, formerly chairing the Compliance and Equity subcommittee, which actively reviews women's opportunities in collegiate athletics. I've also worked with our athletics teams and metro-Atlanta professional and youth sports teams over my career in providing exercise science and sports nutrition support and guidance. Although I was certified as an ACSM Exercise Specialist early in my career, I have only worked in academia — never in a hospital or clinic.

ACSM Service:

	Offices held:
2020-present	Treasurer
2020-present	Chair, Budget and Finance Committee
2010-2011	Chair, Past President Advisory Committee
2007-2010	President-Elect, President and Past President
2005-2007	Vice President for Education and Allied Health
2000-2001	President, SEACSM
1998-1999	Member, ACSM Board of Trustees Administrative Council
1997-2000	Member, ACSM Board of Trustees
1991-1993	Member-at-Large, SEACSM Executive Board

ACSM Service *(continued)*:

	Committees:
2021-present	Member, Strategic Planning Committee
2021-present	Investment Subcommittee
2016-present	Member, Task Force for Social Responsibility
2013-2015	Appointed Member, Executive Committee, as SEACSM Representative to ACSM
2012-present	Member, Budget and Finance Committee
2012-2013	Mentor, Leadership & Diversity Training Program
2012	Member, Task Force, Credentials Committee
2011-2013	Member, Nominations Committee
2012-present	Member, Ethics Committee
2011-present	Member, Founding Board, National Youth Sports Health and Safety Institute
2011, 2012	SEACSM Service Award Nominating Committee
2003-2006	Appointed Member, Professional Education Committee
1993-1996	Member, Credentialing Committee

Q&A: ***What first inspired you to enter the exercise science/sports medicine field? What made you decide to pursue an advanced degree and/or line of research/service?***

My father was a physical educator and high school coach (basketball, baseball, soccer and later golf). My sister and I were totally immersed in sports (e.g., swimming) growing up. After competing and later coaching a summer swim league team, I decided to follow in my father's footsteps, pursuing an undergraduate degree in health and physical education at Pennsylvania State University. There was no such major as kinesiology or exercise science at that time! While at Penn State, I was fortunate enough to take a graduate class in exercise physiology held in the Noll Research Lab. That experience opened my eyes to the possibility of continuing graduate school in exercise physiology (although I still wanted to be a collegiate swim coach armed with this scientific knowledge).

My path led me to the University of Florida (a top national swimming power at that time), and I studied under Christian Zauner. A big influence in my future line of research, however, was working with Dr. James R. Cade — the inventor of Gatorade — while pursuing my master's thesis in examining potential overtraining biomarkers in world-class swimmers (still an important line of research to this day). I did, in fact, subsequently coach swimming as my first job at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts (my only interview and, fortunately, job offer). Women's collegiate swimming was not an official NCAA sport (but under the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women) at the time, and so scholarships were just starting to become available for women in the sport. I still had a passion for exercise physiology, which then led me to take an academic faculty position at Georgia Tech, where I could combine my interests in swimming/coaching and exercise physiology.

As a student, who were your mentors, and what role did they play in your professional development? As a professional, was there anyone who was also instrumental in your career development?

During my early faculty career, my longstanding colleague Phil Sparling (past president of SEACSM) was a fantastic mentor and co-author in the work that we published together out of the exercise physiology laboratory he had established (a renovated racquetball court) in 1979. In fact, it was Phil Sparling and my chair at the time, Dr. James Reedy, who encouraged me to complete my Ph.D. at the University of Georgia. I had been teaching a required course at Georgia Tech, "Drownproofing," that every undergraduate student was required to take. After two years, I knew there had to be a better, more sustainable, career path!

While studying exercise physiology at the University of Georgia under Dr. Kirk J. Cureton, I was so fortunate to have his unwavering guidance and support — but also the fact that he had at least five to six other Ph.D. students concurrently working in the Human Performance Laboratory providing mentorship during the time of my training. Later, as a professional, additional unofficial mentors (beyond my doctoral mentor) included ACSM leaders such as Priscilla Clarkson and Emily Haymes, who encouraged me during discussions we had at the ACSM annual meeting and regional chapter meetings. Both helped me get my start on editorial boards, committees and writing letters for my promotion and tenure!

Are there any students you have mentored who have gone on to play a significant role within ACSM?

Georgia Tech has never had an undergraduate major in kinesiology/exercise science. Our doctoral program in applied physiology began about 15 years ago. I always encouraged our students to get involved with ACSM. Two former students were awarded the ACSM Carl Gisolfi Foundation Grant: Mary Beth Brown, now associate professor in rehabilitation medicine at the University of Washington, and Matthew Wittbrodt, now a research scientist at Northwestern University School of Medicine. Dr. Brown mentored one of her own doctoral students, who later became an ACSM President's Cup winner. I am confident they will continue to play important roles within ACSM and its regional chapters.

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

Our field of kinesiology now enjoys a seat at the scientific table that was not always recognized and respected in previous years. The widespread understanding of the importance of physical activity and public health is inspirational, along with the explosion in research (more publications, more journals than ever before). My hope is that with kinesiology being such a popular major today on college campuses that more students will ultimately become professionally involved with ACSM not only as leaders but also as certified professionals!

Why and how did you decide to get involved with ACSM? How did your service help you grow as a professional? How do you feel you were able to get elected to its highest position?

I started my involvement at the regional chapter level (SEACSM) as a student first by attending, then later presenting a poster. My first ACSM annual meeting was in 1981 in Miami Beach, where I presented my poster from my master's thesis while on crutches! It was clear from these exposures that ACSM would be my professional home.

> ***"We are stronger together than focusing just on one's own core interests. Dig in! It's worth every ounce of effort!***

How did I get elected? That is still to this very day a head-scratcher to me! I guess in this busy world, when you are asked to volunteer to serve on a committee or a writing group or do a professional task and you accept and follow through on doing the job, people take notice! Again, SEACSM being my first experience in professional leadership was absolutely instrumental in this regard. I always felt the greatest thing about ACSM is the people — staff, volunteer members and the leaders who came before you. The four women presidents before me — Barbara Drinkwater, Toby Tate, Priscilla Clarkson and Angela Smith — were not only inspirational but critical to my becoming comfortable in this role! But, truthfully, while on crutches in Miami Beach attending my first annual meeting, never did it cross my mind that one day I would be introducing the Joseph Wolffe Lecture!

What are your most memorable moments from your service to ACSM?

There are many, many memorable moments, most of which involve either notifying or introducing our award recipients (that year Barry Franklin received the ACSM Honor Award) and other elected leaders of ACSM. Although I played no direct role in this landmark event for our field, it was during my tenure as ACSM president that the first Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans was released. That led to several key events during which I represented ACSM in Washington, D.C. These included a press conference with key senators and professional sport icons to support a bill asking the Department of Health and Human Services to require future updates to these guidelines. We also hosted a joint ACSM-NIH conference in Bethesda, Maryland, to increase federal funding for and underscore the importance of physical activity and health research. Being located in Atlanta, I had numerous occasions to work directly with the physical activity and health branch at the CDC to discuss important initiatives (e.g., Exercise Is Medicine®). Most memorable perhaps of all was in May 2009, I flew to New York City to "ring the bell" during the NASDAQ Closing Bell Ceremony (and the market closed up that day)!

How did you become a fellow, and in what year? How do you feel that played a role in your development as a professional?

I became an ACSM fellow under the research category in 1990. My Ph.D. mentor, Dr. Kirk Cureton at UGA, always stressed the importance of getting professionally involved in addition to making scholarly contributions. My ACSM involvement started with presentations (as a graduate student) and subsequently committee service (as a junior untenured faculty member) to SEACSM. The importance of going to meetings not only to present your work but discuss others' science is invaluable in professional development. Moreover, the opportunity to network and establish new relationships (and potential collaborators) may be even more important! To me, making financial sacrifices to attend meetings and devote volunteer time to ACSM have carried me through the highs and the lows of my academic career.

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

Following the release of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, ACSM made efforts to also gain more traction in federal agency funding with recognition of the appropriate study sections with content experts in physical activity research. ACSM increased its public policy efforts at this time to influence concussion return-to-play guidelines by the states (the first, the Zachery Lystedt Law, was signed in the state of Washington in May 2009) along with other important initiatives. Affiliate societies were formed for the first time, the Clinical Exercise Physiology Association (CEPA) and International Associate for Worksite Health Promotion (IAWHP) to enhance more focus areas across the breadth of interests in our membership. With the growth of our field overall in physical activity and health/sports medicine, competition arose with the birth of several new professional societies within the various areas of specialization for our members.

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

Our lab has historically been interested in factors that improve human performance, particularly in thermally challenging environments. To that end, our research has focused on nutritional and hydration strategies in sustaining performance. I'm not sure that my scholarly contributions rise to the level of other ACSM presidents. However, I always prioritized my professional service contributions to ACSM (and the field of kinesiology).

What advice do have for future leaders of ACSM?

It is one of the most exciting (yet exhausting) endeavors of a lifetime! As a uniquely integrative society, it is vital that all leaders cohesively work across the areas of medicine, basic/applied science and education/allied health to continue to advance ACSM in both the public eye and a number of professional arenas. We are stronger together than focusing just on one's own core interests. Dig in! It's worth every ounce of effort!

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

Follow your passion for physical activity, exercise and sport (but expect to work hard). There are many career paths available to students (some of which they may not even know currently exist). Seek out both volunteer and internship experiences to verify what opportunities align with your goals and interests. If you enjoy what you do, you'll never work a day in your life!