

Spring 2016

Comparing Personal Training and Strength and Conditioning Certifications Across Multiple Organizations

Quentin Cieslinski
qtc1@ziips.uakron.edu

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Follow this and additional works at: http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects

 Part of the [Sports Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cieslinski, Quentin, "Comparing Personal Training and Strength and Conditioning Certifications Across Multiple Organizations" (2016). *Honors Research Projects*. 347.

http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/347

This Honors Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

Comparing Personal Training and Strength and Conditioning Certifications Across
Multiple Organizations

Quentin Gieslinski

School of Sport Science and Wellness Education

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College

Approved:

Judith A. Suvancic-Holtzel Date 5-11-16

Honors Project Sponsor (signed)

Judith A. Suvancic-Holtzel

Honors Project Sponsor (printed)

_____ Date _____

Reader (signed)

[Signature]

Reader (printed)

Cara Richardson Date 5-10-16

Reader (signed)

[Signature]

Reader (printed)

Tim Campbell

Accepted:

[Signature] Date 5/11/16

School Director (signed)

VICTOR PINHEIRO

School Director (printed)

Judith A. Suvancic-Holtzel Date 5-11-16

Honors Faculty Advisor (signed)

Judith A. Suvancic-Holtzel

Honors Faculty Advisor (printed)

_____ Date _____

Dean, Honors College

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS.....	12
IV. RESULTS.....	14
V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	24
REFERENCES.....	27

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Basic Information on Educational Requirements, Cost and Accreditation Status of Agency Certifications.....	14-15
2. Examination Specifics and Average Salaries of Certified Professionals.....	15-16
3. Continuing Education Requirements	22-23

ABSTRACT

Personal training is a largely growing field in the health and fitness industry. There are many different personal training and strength and conditioning certifications that accredit comprehension in the field, and it is often tough to make a decision on which certification to choose. PURPOSE: To centralize information on some of the most well known and sought after personal training and strength and conditioning certifications. METHODS: Research was conducted through the online database SPORTDiscus, on certifying organizations' websites, and through various other online resources. Categories that were research included educational requirements, cost of certification, NCCA accreditation, time to complete certification after registration, available training for exam, number of questions on the exam, and the average salary of trainers with the certification. RESULTS: All certifications require applicants to be at least 18 years of age, as well as possession of a CPR/AED certification. The American College of Sports Medicine, American Council on Exercise, and International Sports Science Association all require a high school diploma or equivalent, the National Strength and Conditioning Association Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist certification requires a Bachelor's degree from an accredited school, and the National Strength and Conditioning Association Certified Personal Trainer, Aerobics and Fitness Association of America, and National Academy of Sports Medicine certifications do not require either of these. The ACSM certification is the least expensive, (\$299 for non-members), while the NASM certification is the most expensive (\$599). All certifications except for the AFAA, and ISSA CPT and SSC are accredited by the National Commission for

Certifying Agencies. Most examinations range from 3-6 months to take the examination after registration, with the exception of the ACSM CPT exam, which allows 12 months. All organizations have training materials as well as additional training available prior to the exam. The ISSA CPT certification yields the lowest average full-time salary for trainers (\$31,000), while the ACE CPT the highest (\$52,537). CONCLUSION: With many options available, individuals should choose the certification that best fits their needs and career goals.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The field of Exercise Science is a very broad one, and for those in the field that have aspirations of becoming a personal trainer, additional education is required. Personal training is at the forefront of the field, and is predicted to grow at an incredible rate of 24 percent between 2010 and 2020 (Archer, 2014). Personal training was also listed among the top 10 of fitness training professions desirable fields by the United States Department of Labor (“Role of a personal trainer,” 2016). In such a growing field, there are many ways to get started. There are many personal training certifications that are acceptable by the majority of employers in the field, and for this reason, it is very difficult to decide which certification best meets the personal trainer as well as employers needs. Employers typically strive to hire candidates with certifications from National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) accredited institutions, often including the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), American Council on Exercise (ACE), National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), and National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) (“ICE,” 2016). Each certification has positive and negative factors that influence an individual’s choice, but a select few are widely accepted and regarded of higher quality than others.

Personal training certifications are meant to serve as adjunct training in addition to a college education. As Thompson (2015) found in his study of popular fitness trends, personal training was shown as the number six trend for 2016, and has been in the top ten for the past 9 years. However, ranking above personal

training at number five, is “Educated, Certified, and Experienced Fitness Professionals,” demonstrating that education and certifications are important factors in choosing one personal trainer over another (Thompson, 2015). Due to the competitive field of personal training in today’s society, it is nearly impossible to get a job as a personal trainer without a personal training certification; however, a majority of employers that hire fitness professionals do not require a Bachelor’s degree. Third-party organizations such as the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) accredit academic institutions based on the “the quality of institutions, programs and services, measuring them against agreed-upon standards and thereby assuring that they meet those standards,” (“About accreditation”, 2016; Thompson, 2015). Certifications vary in prerequisites, covered material, and even exam format; with some being written, some oral, and some practical. Personal training certifications cover a wide variety of material that encompass the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for a personal trainer; having a Bachelor’s degree in Exercise Science or a related field can provide more extensive knowledge and training.

With so many personal training certifications available, it is often difficult for trainers to decide which certification best fits their needs. This study hopes to serve the purpose of informing students and peers which personal training certification would best suit their goals in becoming a personal trainer. Comparisons will be made between highly regarded certifications such as American College of Sports Medicine Certified Personal Trainer (ACSM-CPT), National Strength and Conditioning Association Certified Personal Trainer (NSCA-CPT) and Certified

Strength and Conditioning Specialist (NSCA-CSCS), American Council on Exercise Certified Personal Trainer (ACE-CPT), National Academy of Sports Medicine Certified Personal Trainer (NASM-CPT), Aerobics and Fitness Association of America Certified Personal Trainer (AFAA-CPT), and International Sports Sciences Association Certified Personal Trainer (ISSA-CPT). Certifying agencies were researched to ascertain the following: educational requirements of each certification, cost of certification, time to complete certification process, available training prior to the exam, and average salary of trainers with certification. The conclusions that are made hope to serve as a resource to finding the most highly regarded personal training certification to fit an individual's goals and meet prospective employer needs. The purpose of this study was to compare multiple personal training certifications in multiple concentration areas including the certification and educational requirements, accreditation, and type of examinations, as well as average salaries of those holding each certification.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Personal trainers are often thought of mainly as people to help you exercise through written workouts; however, two of the more important reasons personal trainers exist in the exercise field are because of safety and motivation to exercise (Cotton, 2013; “Top Ten,” n.d.). Janot (2004) states that everyone who participates in exercise may be at risk for injury of some kind, whether it is cardiovascular, muscular, etc., but exercise also reduces risks for multiple chronic health conditions. Exercising with a certified personal trainer helps to eliminate the potential risks of exercise, and focus on the health benefits associated with exercise (Archer, 2014; Janot, 2004). For this reason, it is imperative that personal trainers are properly educated and certified, so that they can provide safe and appropriate exercise plans (Ashmore, 2009). Exercise adherence and compliance are also positive factors that are increased while exercising with a personal trainer (Kennedy-Armbruster, Shipley, Yoke, Calvert, 2015). Due to social support and many other factors, studies have shown that exercising with a personal trainer increases exercise adherence (Kennedy-Armbruster, et al., 2015; Kravitz, 2011).

Safety should be the main concern of all personal trainers when working with clients. Currently, there are no minimum standards for personal trainer education or training requirements in the United States (Bracko, 2011). However, some organizations including the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) are implementing standards for minimum expectations of health and fitness facilities and employees, which if universally implemented could greatly benefit consumers

in choosing where and with whom to exercise or train (Cotton, 2013). With the current lack of minimum standards for exercise professionals those working with unqualified exercise trainers are at increased risk of injury while exercising. The most common injuries in non-elite, untrained individuals are sprained ligaments, muscle tears, joint pain, tendonitis, fractures, and dislocation (Grice, Kingsbury, Conaghan, 2013). In a report from the Center for Disease Control, injury rates from exercise increased four percent from 1997 to 2007, largely in part to unqualified personal trainers (Archer, 2014).

Certification, education, and training background are the top three factors that influence clients when choosing a personal trainer. Currently, most facilities have their own standards for certification, education, and experience when hiring a personal trainer. Possessing an NCCA accredited certification ensures the validity, reliability and competency of individuals holding one of these certifications. Such agencies with NCCA accredited personal trainer certifications include: ACSM, ACE, NASM, or NSCA (Archer, 2014). Furthermore though education is listed as the number two benchmark for elevating the personal training profession by Archer (2014), as well as the number five worldwide fitness trend for 2016 (Thompson, 2015), having an education does not equal the ability to apply the knowledge in a practical setting (Archer, 2014). This is why so many organizations are pushing for minimum standardization of personal training certifications.

It is crucial for personal trainers to be properly educated and certified because of the growing number of individuals looking for personal trainers. Archer (2014) predicts an increase in business growth due to employee incentives, health

care reforms, aging baby boomers, and an increase in the unfit youth population. This is why it is growing ever important that there are an ample amount of certified fitness professionals to competently address the growing health and wellness needs of our nation. The fitness industry generates over ten billion dollars annually (Halvorson, 2015), and personal training generates more revenue than any other service offered by gyms (Kennedy-Armbruster, et al., 2015). An estimated five million people currently use personally hired trainers or trainers provided through their gym (“Role of a Personal Trainer,” 2016). Due to other exercise options like CrossFit, more people are also asking for proper coaching in resistance training in order to perform power and Olympic lifting movements safely and effectively (Halvorson, 2015). In a continually growing industry measures need to be taken to ensure proper safety of clients.

“Role of a Personal Trainer” (2016) states, “a fitness professional possesses knowledge, skills, and abilities for safe and effective exercise and fitness program design, instruction, and assistance for the purpose of reaching personal health and fitness goals.” Three goals of kinesiology and applied biomechanics as emphasized by Ashmore (2009) to develop a proper exercise prescription include: safety, effectiveness and efficiency. There are many different ways that personal trainers can improve safety in fitness facilities. One way that personal trainers can reduce the risk for injury during exercise is through pre-participation screening such as the PAR-Q and You (Bracko, 2011). Also, many organizations require CPR and AED certifications for all personal trainers in case of emergencies (“Implementing Safe,” 2013). Properly trained and certified personal trainers also possess knowledge of

proper lifting technique, which can greatly reduce the risk of injury, as well as how to employ proper spotting techniques (“Implementing Safe,” 2013). Personal trainers should also implement proper planning of exercise progression and regression in order to reduce the risk of overuse injury (“Implementing Safe,” 2013).

Ashmore (2009) also goes in great depth about exercise safety in his article *Biomechanic Basics for Safe, Effective, Efficient Workouts*. As stated before, Ashmore lists the three goals of kinesiology and applied biomechanics: safety, effectiveness, and efficiency. He defines safety as correct exercise biomechanics or form, and also states that this can differ for every individual on the basis of age, fitness level, balance, and bone and joint health. Effectiveness in a workout program is defined as timely results meaning that clients achieve their goals through proper programming and progression (Ashmore, 2009). Finally, Ashmore (2009) defines efficiency as the degree of ease with which clients achieve safe and effective movements. The common theme of this article is safety. Not only is it the trainer’s job to provide a safe workout environment, but also monitor the client’s feelings of safety during the workouts (Ashmore, 2009). This includes a change in movement patterns from the norm, a shift in body weight, forward flexion during lifts, and improper biomechanics. If a personal trainer is properly educated and certified, they should be more than capable of recognizing exercise errors such as locked joints and improper alignment.

Using a personal trainer is a great beginning to ensure safety during training; however, true safety will not be completely achieved until there is standardization of fitness facilities and employees. With the help of the major certifying

organizations, this standardization could occur in the near future. Along with added safety, standardization could increase the volume of potential clientele. For example, if there is no guaranteed standard in the fitness industry, doctors may refrain from referring health-related obesity patients to personal trainers, and instead use hospital programs which may not be covered by insurance (Halvorson, 2015). Standardized certifications may allow personal trainers to be considered allied health professionals in both the prevention and treatment of the lifestyle related chronic diseases so prevalent in our society.

Not only should personal trainers help to create and maintain a safer environment for clients, but they should also be able to provide effective strategies for sustainable behavior change (Janot, 2004). Health and wellness coaches, a close relative to personal trainers, are known for their focus on facilitating motivation and confidence in clients (Sforzo, Moore, Scholtz, 2015). Their benefits include improved program satisfaction, physical health, healthy behaviors, weight management, mood, and participation (Sforzo, et al., 2015). With proper standards in the fitness industry, all personal trainers could acquire these skill producing similar benefits, which would help to motivate clients, and facilitate their ability to adhere to exercise programs.

In a United Kingdom study analyzed by Sforzo, et al. (2015), exercise programs guided by personal trainers experienced up to an 80% dropout rate. Kravitz (2011) also reported that an estimated 50% of guided exercise program participants in the United States dropout of the program within six months. Unqualified trainers are largely the cause (Sforzo, et al., 2015; Abbot, 2013),

however an inability to overcome personal barriers was largely responsible as well (Kravitz, 2011). Conversely, in a study conducted by McClaren (2013), it was found that when working with properly certified personal trainers, 60% of clients moved up one stage of the transtheoretical model, and 13% moved up two stages in just six weeks. The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change is a model that suggests that people go through several stages before actual behavior change occurs. These stages are listed as Pre-Contemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, and Maintenance (Wilson, 2014). Although not cyclical, as individuals can move back and forth through the various stages, with stage appropriate targeted strategies, individuals are more likely to move to the next stage. The action stage is the most vulnerable to dropout occurring when the individual has been regularly engaging in the new behavior but for less than six months. Working with a properly trained exercise professional may facilitate their movement to the maintenance stage (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). This shows that adherence to exercise programs appears to increase when working with properly certified personal trainers. In a study by Sykes, Probst, Otto, and Wygand (2013), it was found that there was no difference in exercise adherence between in-home exercise with a personal trainer and exercising at a facility with a personal trainer. This shows that the setting where a personal trainer works with a client has no differential influence on adherence.

There are many ways to overcome the problem of exercise adherence and low motivation with clients. Many studies have suggested that personal trainers can be one of the most effective ways to increase both adherence and low motivation levels in clients. They do so through many different techniques and practices. One

huge aspect for improving exercise adherence is the social factor. When performing exercise with a personal trainer or small groups, clients are more likely to attend sessions because they are being accounted for by other individuals (Halvorson, 2015; Kravitz, 2011). Kravitz (2011) also lists many factors that can increase motivation and adherence in individuals. For instance, if a client is highly satisfied with their exercise facility they are more likely to adhere to an exercise program. This is the same is true of their satisfaction with their personal trainer's leadership style; the higher level of mastery the trainer demonstrates, the greater exercise adherence. Good personal trainers are also able to identify possible barriers and work on solutions on how to overcome the barriers, such as time, body image, lack of enjoyment, and lack of support, causing fewer missed exercise sessions. Personal trainers also use other methods such as positive reinforcement and social support in order to improve self-perception that helps initiate exercise (Kennedy-Armbruster, n.d.). Kravitz (2011) states, "The influence of exercise professionals in empowering clients to 'succeed with exercise' is vitally important for exercise compliance." These are all examples of circumstances where certified personal trainers are able to provide effective strategies to overcome barriers, increase motivation levels and decrease program dropout. , Certified personal trainers can effectively provide positive outcomes related to exercise safety, motivation, and adherence. With the predicted growth in the exercise field due to an increased life expectancy, increasing obesity rates, and an increase in discretionary incomes, exercise professionals are increasingly becoming more important (Archer, 2014). As such, the purpose of this paper is to provide information on current accredited personal trainer certifications

for individuals seeking to choose the most appropriate certification for their needs and career goals.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Information gathered from this study was found using various online resources. The agency websites for each organization provided a plethora of information about each certification, and much of the information was found using this method. Often, what information could not be found on one organization's website could be found on another when comparing and contrasting. Additional information was gathered from research articles found from academic search engine "SPORTDiscus with Full Text" using the keywords "personal training." This information was then sorted into categories in order to properly compare and contrast each certification.

Main criteria for each certification included educational requirements for taking the exam, the cost of the certification exam, time given to complete the exam from sign-up date, accreditation, training available from the organization prior to the exam, and average salary of trainers with each certification. When comparing personal training examinations, these are some of the most important factors. To avoid a bias in preference based on location, fitness employers were not contacted to determine which certifications were preferred in the hiring process. The information provided through research, as well as the certifying organizations' websites provide ample information to compare and contrast each certification.

Information from each certification was organized into two tables (Table 1 and Table 2) by organization, certification name, and the criteria listed before; educational requirements, cost, time given to complete the exam from registration,

available training, accreditation, and average salary of fitness professionals holding each certification. All comparing criteria were used in attempting to determine the superior and preferred personal training certification.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The information included in this chapter represents the results of the research conducted on the most common personal trainer and strength and conditioning certifications available for individuals seeking these credentials. Table 1 depicts basic information on their respective educational requirements, costs and accreditation status.

Table 1

Basic Information on Educational Requirements, Cost and Accreditation Status of Agency Certifications.

Agency	Certification Name	Educational Requirements	Cost of Certification	NCCA Accreditation
National Strength and Conditioning Association	Certified Personal Trainer	18 years old CPR/AED	Member \$300 Non-member \$435	Yes
American College of Sports Medicine	Certified Personal Trainer	18 years old Diploma/GED CPR/AED	Member \$219 Non-member \$299	Yes
Aerobics and Fitness Association of America	Personal Fitness Trainer	18 years old CPR/AED	\$499	No
American Council on Exercise	Certified Personal Trainer	18 years old Diploma/GED CPR/AED	\$399	Yes
International Sports Science Association	Certified Personal trainer	18 years old Diploma/GED CPR/AED	\$499	No

National Academy of Sports Medicine	Certified Personal Trainer	18 years old CPR/AED	\$599	Yes
International Sports Science Association	Specialist in Sports Conditioning	18 years old Diploma/GED CPR/AED	\$499	No
National Strength and Conditioning Association	Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist	18 years old Bachelor's degree CPR/AED	Member \$340 Non-member \$475	Yes

Table 2 includes information on the specific certification exams as well as the average full-time salary of those holding each certification.

Table 2

Examination Specifics and Average Salaries of Certified Professionals

Certification	Time to Complete Certification	Training Available Prior to Certification Exam	Number of Questions	Average Salary of Trainer with Certification
NSCA CPT	120 days	Books, live clinics, practice tests, etc.	155 Multiple-Choice	\$49,000
ACSM CPT	12 months	Books, live clinics, practice tests, etc.	150 multiple-Choice	\$45,018
AFAA PFT	6 months	Video lectures, study guide, sample questions, book	120 Multiple-Choice	\$45,000
ACE CPT	6 months	Online courses, study guide, video classes, text, practice test, etc.	150 Multiple-Choice	\$52,537

ISSA CPT	4 months Open-Book Exam Submit-As- You-Go	Books, live clinics, practice tests, etc.	50 Multiple- Choice 50 True/False 60 Practical, illustrated multiple- choice and true/false 2 Case Studies 6 Essays	\$31,000
NASM CPT	6 months	Books, live clinics, practice tests, etc.	120 Multiple Choice	\$44,000
ISSA SSC	4 months Open-Book Exam Submit-As- You-Go	Books, live clinics, practice tests, etc.	100 Multiple Choice 100 True/False 6 Case Studies 4 Essays Training Video	\$39,000*
NSCA CSCS	120 days	Books, live clinics, practice tests, etc.	95 Multiple Choice 125 Practical Applied	\$49,000

*No information found. Average strength and conditioning coach salary used.

NSCA CPT and CSCS

Two National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) certifications were researched: Certified Personal Trainer and Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist. Both of these certifications are NCCA accredited certifications (“ICE,” 2016). The CPT certification qualifies an individual to “assess, motivate, educate, and train clients regarding their personal health and fitness needs,” (“NSCA-CPT,” 2016). The CSCS certification is listed by “CSCS” (2016) as a certification for

“professionals who apply scientific knowledge to train athletes with the primary goal of improving athletic performance.” Both are specialty certifications serving different purposes. The NSCA-CPT certification is used by health professionals who assess, educate, motivate, and train clients based on their personal health and fitness needs, while the NSCA-CSCS certification is used by professionals who train athletes for the primary goal of improving athletic performance. Both offered by the same organization, many study materials are available for purchase prior to taking the examination, however there is a charge for study materials. The paid study materials include live clinics, practice questions, practice exams, and various textbooks (“NSCA CPT”, 2016; “CSCS,” 2016). The cost of taking each exam differs, with the cost being significantly less for those that are members of the organization. Also, the average salaries for each certification differ, with the CSCS certification being the second highest paying certification researched, with an average salary of \$49,000 (“CSCS payscale,” 2016). The CSCS exam is given using a special test format, with 95 written question focused on nutrition and exercise science, and 125 questions given in a practical exam fashion, with questions about exercise technique, program design, organization and administration, and testing and evaluation (“CSCS,” 2016). The Certified Personal Trainer exam is also unique, in that it includes 155 questions covering client consultation/assessment, program planning, techniques of exercise, safety, emergency procedures, and legal issues, as well as questions on a video that is shown during the examination, covering exercise technique (“NSCA-CPT,” 2016). The CSCS certification is also unique in that it is the only certification discussed in this paper that requires a Bachelor’s Degree from an

accredited university. Both of these certifications are highly regarded, and serve their own purposes in the personal training and fitness industry.

ACSM CPT

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) is a very highly regarded organization that focuses largely on “advancing and integrating scientific research to provide educational and practical applications of exercise science and sports medicine,” (“ACSM certified personal trainer,” 2016). ACSM is also the largest sports medicine and exercise science organization in the world, with over 50,000 members. NCCA certified, the Certified Personal Training certification from this organization is thus an excellent choice for interested personal trainers (“ICE,” 2016). The certification exam ranges from \$219-\$279 depending on the examinee ACSM membership status, which is significantly lower than all other certification exams discussed in this paper. Also, at 12 months, the ACSM CPT exam offers a longer time period to take the exam after registration than any other certification, compared to 3-6 months for other exams (“ACSM certified personal trainer,” 2016). ACSM also offers many textbooks, webinars, workshops and reviews for purchase in order to prepare for the exam. The exam consists of 150 questions, with topics including initial client consultation and assessment, exercise programming and implementation, exercise leadership and client education, and legal professional business and marketing duties (“Job task analysis,” 2010). Also, while the average salary for an ACSM CPT is slightly below the median for the average American at \$46,481, it was reported that those that hold a bachelor’s degree or higher along with an ACSM certification make more starting out than those with the certification

alone (“Social,” 2015; Harris, 2013). The ACSM is another great choice of personal training certification.

AFAA CPT

The Aerobics and Fitness Association of America (AFAA) has been in existence since 1983, and has issued more than 350,000 total certifications in that time (“Personal,” 2016). Also, though the company has been around for a long time, certifying many individuals, it is not an NCCA accredited certification, and thus may not be as widely accepted as a choice for those desiring a personal trainer certification. The \$599 package offered by AFAA does include many different study materials along with the 120 question, multiple choice certification exam, including online video lectures, study guides, sample test questions, one year AFAA membership, and a subscription to American Fitness magazine (“Personal,” 2016). The AFAA Personal Fitness Trainer certification is an all-encompassing fitness certification with many learning tools, however, may not always be a good fit for trainers and industry organizations.

ACE CPT

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) is the largest nonprofit health and fitness certification organization in the world, with over 60,000 certified professionals (“ACE personal trainer,” 2016). An NCCA accredited organization, ACE has nearly 3,000 certified personal trainers in the industry (“ICE,” 2016; “ACE personal trainer,” 2016). The ACE CPT certification also boasts the highest average salary of all of the researched certifications at \$52,537 (“ACE Salary Report,” 2013). With multiple exam package options, the price of the exam ranges from \$399-\$699.

The exam itself prices at \$399, but other packages include more material. The standard package includes the exam, textbook, study guide, an online practice exam, and an online video review. Other packages include a retest voucher, study flashcards, additional textbooks, study guides, and additional online practice exams (“ACE personal trainer,” 2016). The ACE CPT exam definitely offers the most material for the cost of the exam, and this should definitely be taken into consideration when deciding on a certification. Exam format is consistent with other certification exams, including 150 multiple-choice questions consisting mostly of application and analysis questions (“ACE personal trainer,” 2016). The ACE Certified Personal Trainer certification is a highly regarded, accredited certification, and comes from a very highly regarded organization.

ISSA CPT and SSC

The International Sports Sciences Association (ISSA) is another organization, along with the National Strength and Conditioning Association, which offers both a personal training certification, along with a separate strength and conditioning certification. These are two common career paths of Exercise Science Strength and Conditioning majors. The ISSA organization and certifications are not accredited through the NCCA, but through the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), for multiple different reasons including recognition through the U.S. Department of Education, Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and U.S. Department of Defense, and because ISSA requires specific courses to be taken as prerequisites, which cannot be done under the NCCA (“ICE,” 2016; “ISSA personal trainer,” 2016; “ISSA strength and conditioning,” 2016). Both of the certifications

cost the same, listed at \$499, and include many ancillary materials to help study for the examination.

The Specialist in Sports Conditioning (ISSA SSC) certification includes a textbook and study questions in the price, while the Certified Personal Trainer (ISSA CPT) cost includes a textbook, study guide and workbook, marketing and business guide, practice examination, reference guide DVD, study examinations, online lab, and free website (“ISSA Personal Trainer,” 2016; “ISSA Strength and Conditioning,” 2016). The materials are very beneficial for exam preparation, and provide value when included in the total cost of the certification. It should also be noted that exact information regarding the salary of ISSA Specialists in Strength and Conditioning could not be found, and the average salary for Strength and Conditioning coaches was used in Table 2. The ISSA has been around since 1988 and has provided fitness education to over 200,000 individuals, speaking for the strength of the organization.

NASM CPT

The National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM) is another NCCA accredited organization that is highly regarded in the fitness industry (“ICE,” 2016). The base price of the exam is \$599, and excluding study materials; additional packages can be purchased that include a variety of study materials. These materials include textbooks, online flashcards, preparation courses, live workshops, practice questions, and practice examinations (“NASM,” 2016). The examination is 120 multiple-choice questions consisting of exercise assessment, technique and training instruction, program design, nutrition, behavioral coaching, and professional development, practice, and responsibility (“NASM Certification Candidate

Handbook,” 2011). For over 20 years, the National Academy of Sports Medicine has focused on making exercise a lifelong change, rather than a quick fix, and has implemented many different strategies into their philosophy (“NASM,” 2016).

CONTINUING EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

The final aspect to consider when choosing a certification is the recertification and continuing education requirements. To maintain certification each certifying agency requires continuing education and renewal of the certification. Table 3 depicts these continuing education (CEU) requirements.

Table 3

Continuing Education Requirements

Agency	Certification Name	Years to Recertification	CEU Requirements	Recertification Fee
National Strength and Conditioning Association	Certified Personal Trainer	3 years	10 + current CPR and AED	\$20 - \$75 depending on date received, and membership status
American College of Sports Medicine	Certified Personal Trainer	3 years	45 + current CPR and AED	\$45
Aerobics and Fitness Association of America	Personal Fitness Trainer	2 years	15 + current CPR and AED	\$99
American Council on Exercise	Certified Personal Trainer	2 years	2 + current CPR and AED	\$129

International Sports Science Association	Certified Personal trainer	2 years	20 + current CPR and AED	\$99
National Academy of Sports Medicine	Certified Personal Trainer	2 years	2 (20 hours) + current CPR and AED	\$99
International Sports Science Association	Specialist in Sports Conditioning	2 years	20 + current CPR and AED	\$99
National Strength and Conditioning Association	Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist	3 years	10 + current CPR and AED	\$20 - \$75 depending on date received, and membership status

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There are several different certifications that are accredited and highly regarded in the fitness industry, which may or may not be prerequisites for employment. In total there are 15 organizations with 24 certifications accredited by the NCCA, as well as many others that are accredited through other organizations ("ICE," 2016). I chose six of the most well-known, and sought out personal training and strength and conditioning certifications from employers and fitness professionals, excluding exercise physiologist and group exercise certifications in an attempt to simplify the process of choosing a personal training or strength and conditioning certification. This is not to say that the other organizations and certifications are not respectable, however accepted certifications differ from employer to employer, and separate research should be performed to find which certifications are accepted for the prospected position. Each certification possesses strength and weaknesses; therefore, there are many different options when considering which certifications best suits an individual's needs and career goals.

In this study, eight different personal training and strength and conditioning certifications were compared in various categories including prerequisites, cost, available training, time from registration that you have to take certification exam, accreditation, and average salary. The organizations had many similarities regarding the certifications, such as cost, prerequisites, and available training, but also differed in ways such as accreditation, and average salary. One example of this was the prerequisites to sit for the certification exam; only the NSCA Certified

Strength and Conditioning Specialist certification requires a Bachelor's degree, whereas NSCA personal trainer, NASM, and AFAA certifications do not require a high school diploma or equivalent, only an age requirements of 18 years of age or older ("CSCS," 2016; "Personal fitness trainer," 2016; "NSCA-CPT," 2016; "NASM how to," 2016). Salaries for the certifications cover a large range for full-time employees, from \$31,000 to \$52,537, with the ACE CPT certification having the highest average salary at \$52,537 ("ACE salary report," 2013). All of these factors should be considered when choosing which certification to acquire.

In conclusion, many different paths can lead to becoming a personal trainer. Most jobs require a nationally accredited certification, which are listed previously, however some jobs do not. Some jobs will require a Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science or a related field, while others may not require any type of certification. This study was meant to provide a centralized location for information from top tier personal training certifications to ease the search for personal trainer prospects. Nearly all fitness employers differ in their certification requirements, therefore it is best to research jobs in your field and area and see which certifications they prefer before choosing a certification.

This study has helped me immensely on choosing which certification to pursue in my professional career. Ultimately, I have decided to start my career off by taking the ACSM Certified Personal Trainer exam. My reasons for choosing this are based off of the cost of the exam, and more importantly, the curriculum that I have been taught from for the past four years while at The University of Akron. I found

the American College of Sports Medicine to be accepted nearly anywhere in my job searches, and my research backed the validity of the certification.

This project has also helped me to determine potential future certifications as well. If I do decide to pursue a career in strength and conditioning, I will work towards the NSCA Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist certification. This research has helped me to find more information than I could have ever thought of when determining a potential certification, and I hope that it will help other students/professionals find their path for success in the future.

REFERENCES

- Abbot, A (2013). Philosophy and standards part II. *ACSM's Health and Fitness Journal*, 18(1), 34-38. Retrieved from <http://resolver.ebscohost.com.lib.ezproxy.uakron.edu:2048/openurl?sid=EBSCO:rzh&genre=article&issn=10915397&ISBN=&volume=18&issue=1&date=20140101&spage=34&pages=34-38&title=ACSM%5C's%20Health%20&%20Fitness%20Journal&atitle=Philosophy%20%26%20Standards%20Part%20II.&aurlast=Abbott%2C%20Anthony%20A.&id=DOI:>
- About accreditation.* (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.caahep.org/Content.aspx?ID=1>
- ACE personal trainer certification.* (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.acefitness.org/fitness-certifications/personal-trainer-certification/default.aspx>
- ACE salary report for health and fitness professionals.* (2013). Retrieved from http://www.acefitness.org/salary/docs/ACE_SalarySurvey.pdf
- ACSM certified personal trainer.* (2016). Retrieved from <http://certification.acsm.org/acsm-certified-personal-trainer>
- ACSM certified personal trainer job task analysis.* (2010). Retrieved from http://certification.acsm.org/files/file/JTA_CPT_FINAL_2012.pdf
- ACSM | who we are.* (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.acsm.org/about-acsm/who-we-are>

- Archer, S. (2014). 10 benchmarks for elevating the personal training profession. *IDEA Fitness Journal*, 11(2), 40-48. Retrieved from <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.lib.ezproxy.uakron.edu:2048/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b8105f4a-0d9c-475a-9552-b41432c4f125@sessionmgr4004&vid=2&hid=4202>
- Ashmore, A. (2009). Biomechanic basics for safe, effective, efficient workouts. *IDEA Fitness Journal*, 6(10), 29-31. Retrieved from <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.lib.ezproxy.uakron.edu:2048/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=845ca51b-9fbf-4b6e-b99e-0488e495f522@sessionmgr4004&vid=2&hid=4202>
- Bracko, M. (2011). *Using a personal trainer*. Retrieved from <https://www.acsm.org/docs/default-source/brochures/using-a-personal-trainer.pdf?sfvrsn=4>
- CSCS® certification. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.nasca.com/Certification/CSCS/>
- Certified strength and conditioning specialist (CSCS) certification salary - average job salaries* (2016). Retrieved from [http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Certification=Certified_Strength_and_Conditioning_Specialist_\(CSCS\)/Salary](http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Certification=Certified_Strength_and_Conditioning_Specialist_(CSCS)/Salary)
- Cotton, R. (2013, August 21). *Personal trainers as professionals*. Retrieved from <http://certification.acsm.org/blog/2013/august/personal-trainers-as-professionals>

- Grice, A., Kingsbury, S. R., & Conaghan, P. G. (2013). Non-elite exercise-related injuries: participant reported frequency, management and perceptions of their consequences. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports* *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 24(2).
doi:10.1111/sms.12115
- Halvorson, R. (2015). 2015 personal training trend watch. *IDEA Fitness Journal*, 12(10), 28-38. Retrieved from
<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.lib.ezproxy.uakron.edu:2048/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b8105f4a-0d9c-475a-9552-b41432c4f125@sessionmgr4004&vid=5&hid=4202>
- Harris, J. (2013, March 25). *Still strong, still growing: job prospects for fitness professionals*. Retrieved from
<http://certification.acsm.org/blog/2013/march/current-job-and-salary-outlook-for-fitness-pros>
- ICE: accredited member organization*. (2016). Retrieved from
<http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=121>
- ISSA personal trainer certifications*. (2016). Retrieved from
<https://www.issaonline.edu/certification/personal-trainer-certification/>
- ISSA strength and conditioning certification*. (2016). Retrieved from
<https://www.issaonline.edu/certification/strength-and-conditioning-certification/>

- Implementing safe and effective training methods.* (2013). Retrieved from <http://blog.nasm.org/training-benefits/implementing-safe-and-effective-training-methods/>
- Janot, J. (2004, April 1). *Exercise safety*. Retrieved from <http://www.idealife.com/fitness-library/exercise-safety>
- Kennedy-Armbruster, C., Shipley, M., Yoke, M., & Calvert, H. (n.d.). *Personal training and fitness coaching: do they really work?* Retrieved from <https://www.acefitness.org/certifiednewsarticle/2136/personal-training-and-fitness-coaching-do-they>
- Kravitz, L. (2011). What motivates people to exercise? *IDEA Fitness Journal*, 8(1), 25-27. Retrieved from <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.lib.ezproxy.uakron.edu:2048/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=845ca51b-9fbf-4b6e-b99e-0488e495f522@sessionmgr4004&vid=9&hid=4202>
- McClaran, S. R. (2003). The effectiveness of personal training on changing attitudes towards physical activity. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 2(1), 10-14. doi:10.1097/00005768-200105001-01188
- NASM certification candidate handbook.* (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.nasm.org/docs/default-source/cpt-boc-and-recert-info/nasm-boc-certification-candidate-handbook.pdf>
- NASM how to become a personal trainer.* (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.nasm.org/how-to-become-a-personal-trainer>

- NSCA - certified personal trainer® (NSCA-CPT®)*. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.nasca.com/Certification/CPT/>
- Personal fitness trainer certification*. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.afa.com/courses/personal-fitness-trainer>
- Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1982). Transtheoretical therapy: Toward a more integrative model of change. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 19(3), 276.
- Sforzo, G. A., Moore, M. M., Scholtz, M. (2015). Delivering change that lasts: health and wellness coaching competencies for exercise professionals, *ACSM's Health and Fitness Journal*, 19(2), 20-26. Retrieved from <http://resolver.ebscohost.com.lib.ezproxy.uakron.edu:2048/openurl?sid=EBSCO%3arzh&genre=article&issn=10915397&ISBN=&volume=19&issue=2&date=20150301&spage=20&pages=20-26&title=ACSM%5c%27s+Health+&atitle=DELIVERING+CHANGE+THAT+LASTS.&aulast=Sforzo%2c+Gary+A.&id=DOI%3a&site=ftf-live>
- State of the health fitness industry*. (2015). Retrieved from <http://certification.acsm.org/state-of-the-industry>
- Social Security. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/AWI.html>
- Sykes, D., Probst, L., Otto, R., & Wygand, J. (2007). The effects of in-home versus facility personal training. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, 39, 349-350. doi:10.1249/01.mss.0000274368.34734.81
- The role of a personal trainer / resources*. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.nfpt.com/the-role-of-a-personal-trainer>

Thompson, W. R. (2015). Worldwide survey of fitness trends 2016. *ACSM's Health and Fitness Journal*, 19(6), 9-18.

Top ten reasons to hire a personal trainer. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.acefitness.org/updateable/update_display.aspx?pageID=575

Wilson, B. (2014). Transtheoretical model of behavior change. *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health*