

Meet Our NEACSM Past President



NEACSM's 36th President: Peter Ronai, M.S., FACSM, RCEP, ACSM-CEP, ACSM-EP, EIM III, CSCS

Education: B.S. Health Sciences, Southern Connecticut State University; M.S. Exercise Science/ Human Performance, Southern Connecticut State University

Current or most recent affiliation: Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut

Honors & Awards: Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine, NEACSM Honor Award

Professional Interests: Clinical Exercise Physiology, Special Populations and Post Rehabilitation Exercise Programming

NEACSM Service

1. What first inspired you to enter the Exercise Science/Sports Medicine Field? What made you decide to pursue your advance degree and/or line of research/service?

I met an exercise physiologist during my senior year of high school and some of his colleagues and began working out at his facility. I learned so much from him and his colleagues about working out and exercising and got “bit” by the working out bug and wanted to know what they knew.

2. As a student, who were your mentors and what role did they play in your professional development?

I worked for the YMCA after I graduated and before I got my M.S. degree. I met Dr. Wayne Westcott, Ph.D., CSCS while he was conducting some strength training education seminars for YMCA professionals for the YMCA of USA and his YMCA in Quincy Massachusetts. He was such an avid researcher, practitioner and presenter on numerous strength training issues. His knowledge, accomplishments, enthusiasm and congeniality were contagious. He was on the cutting edge of resistance training and select populations and was impacting people's lives on a community level as he conducted his research. During my graduate studies at Southern Connecticut State University, Dr. Joan Finn DPE and Dr. Robert Axtell, Ph.D. were my professors and were the types of people whom I wanted to be like. They practiced everything that they preached, were big advocates for the American College of Sports Medicine, professional decorum and were consummate professionals themselves. I often asked myself many times, “What would Dr. Finn and Dr. Axtell think or say in this situation”?

3. As a professional, was there anyone who was also instrumental in your career development?

I would say that Mr. Dino Costanzo, MA, FACSM RCEP, our NEACSM Executive Director had a lot to do with a number of my professional choices. I met Dino when we were both young men and was impressed immediately by his deep knowledge, clinical insights, and commitment to our profession. He was in his early twenties and was running an integrated cardiac rehabilitation program and interfacing with physicians, nurses, and physical therapists and mentoring other staff. He was very active in something called the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) and the New England Chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine (NEACSM) which I would learn more about later on. Dino gave me some pointers and suggestions about professional development that were and are invaluable to this day. He also encouraged me to become active with the ACSM and later on, the NEACSM. He has been a fine example of unselfish professional and personal service to others and is the epitome of a true clinical exercise professional. He is not only a colleague and mentor to me but also a good friend. I have had lots of good times traveling to ACSM and NEACSM meetings with him and our processing coordinator Donna Murphy and trying out interesting things to eat like “Indian Food” at the ACSM Annual Meeting in San Francisco and family style pasta dishes in Indianapolis and Orlando. Dr. Wayne Westcott, a noted author, researcher and presenter and Dr. Brad Roy, Ph.D., CEP, FACSM Senior Executive Director of the Kalispell Regional Medical Center and Summit Medical Fitness Center and Senior Editor of *ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal*[®] have been influential, supportive and very encouraging as have been many other people. I would need an extra page to acknowledge all of them.

4. What is it about Exercise Science/Sports Medicine that still inspires you today?

I am surrounded by so many intelligent, productive, vibrant, and motivated professionals at my job and in the ACSM and NEACSM who are all working to advance our profession for us and for the public. The strength of our profession, the ACSM and our NEACSM chapter is in their “collective” “diversity”. As an example, the second edition of the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, our national physical activity blueprints and Exercise is Medicine® (EIM) initiatives were created by many of our colleagues and offer us all opportunities to contribute to a healthier more physically active society. There have been and still are so many great people working together to advance our body of knowledge and the ways in which we can apply it. We learn from each other. The other nice thing is that the pioneers in our profession and professional organization(s) will always be valuable resources and commodities to each of us and will never be irrelevant. We owe them so very much for the legacy they have left us and which continues to build and grow.

5. Why and how did you decide to get involved with NEACSM? How did your service help you grow as a professional?

I think that I would need a few more pages to answer this question because both the ACSM and the NEACSM provided me with invaluable opportunities to learn from the best while serving with the best in both national ACSM and regional (NEACSM) capacities. I, again, have to thank Dino Costanzo for his gentle encouragement to “try getting involved”. When State Representative and Member at Large positions became available, I volunteered and ran for election. I did not win the first time. I had attended NEACSM Fall and spring meetings, enjoyed them very much and noticed the comradery that the chapter leadership shared. I wanted to make an impact and contribute positively and meet new people. When my turn finally came, it was one of the best things to ever happen.

6. What are your most memorable moments from your service to NEACSM?

I think hearing, “thank you for inviting me to speak at your chapter meetings, I would love to do it” from professional industry giants was a highlight for me and having dinner with our invited speakers and Executive Committee leadership were very memorable. I was amazed at how each of these professional industry leaders was so gracious and genuinely responded as if they had never been invited as featured presenters anywhere. Priscilla Clarkson had given the Wolffe Lecture a few months earlier and was excited about giving the keynote at our meeting. Of course, she was excellent! Over the years I met many professional leaders like this and have been impressed most by their humility, generosity, kindness and congeniality. Giving lectures and talks at the Fall conferences has been really fun to do because they have given me the opportunity to interact with groups of chapter members and contribute something to the meetings.

7. What were some of the main issues confronting NEACSM at the time of your presidency?

I believe that we were at a point where we wanted to increase the involvement of students and faculty in our meetings while also trying to address the needs and interests of clinicians and practitioners. Another priority established by many of our chapter leaders was to increase and incentivize student research. We have had some strong champions for student research throughout our chapter’s history.

8. What do you think are your most meaningful contributions to NEACSM?

The development and growth of the NEACSM College Bowl has been a thrill for me. It has been a nice way for students and faculty to take an active part in a large regional chapter event. Growth in student and faculty participation has increased steadily since the inception of the College Bowl in 2004. Thanks to the generosity of Dr. David Camaione and our chapter, winners of the NEACSM College Bowl are sent to the ACSM Annual meeting to represent the NEACSM chapter in the National ACSM Student Bowl. They compete against the winners of other ACSM Regional Chapter College Bowl competitions and the NEACSM chapter pays for their travel and hotel expenses while the National ACSM pays for their annual meeting registration. My ultimate goal was to make the College Bowl a National event and I was able with some help from friends to do this. Since 2007, it has grown steadily and is a highlighted event at the ACSM annual meeting.

9. What do you think are your most meaningful contributions to the field of Exercise Science/Sports Medicine?

Compared to other people I have served with, I cannot think of anything unique or different that I have contributed. Maybe contributing to the creation of the ACSM National Student Bowl and my work as a journal column author and Associate Editor for the ACSM and the NSCA. I have enjoyed imparting my passion upon my students and watching them become fine practitioners and clinicians. It's been an honor and a pleasure.

10. What advice would you have for future leaders of NEACSM?

I think that you can't learn if you are not involved. Seek opportunities to participate on a professional organization/committee like the NEACSM or ACSM and do not be intimidated by the professional leaders that you will meet and serve with. They are just like you. Befriend them, take on a project with them and make your good performance on them a major priority. Embrace invitations to serve from other professionals as an honor, graciously accept and make doing it a labor of love.

11. What advice would you give to students who are looking to pursue a career in Exercise Science/Sports Medicine?

Try to network with professionals at the NEACSM/regional chapter meetings and shadow professionals in different exercise science and sports medicine settings so that you have first-hand experience before making a decision. I would also encourage students to join and participate in chapter and national ACSM student interest group meetings and events (professional and social) and to introduce speakers and presenters at conferences and meetings. Students should also seek a faculty mentor or mentors early in their academic program so they can receive some guidance and motivation.