

RENSSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
TROY, NEW YORK

December 12, 1944

Dear Fellow Member of the College Physical Education Association:

Recently our Dean of Students wrote me that the American Council on Education has recommended that returning veterans, who have completed basic military training, be given credit for physical education. He also wrote that the War Department has asked him whether the Institute intends to implement the recommendation. The Dean notified the War Department that the matter has not yet been considered by the Institute. The Dean suggested, "that we had better let the matter rest until we know more definitely where we stand."

Because the advance guard of veterans has already arrived in some colleges, including ours, the staff in the Physical Education Department at this Institute feels that now is the time to study and take action on this issue.

I am attaching a copy of our reply to the Dean's letter, giving several reasons why we do not believe veterans should be exempt from physical education. We also sent a copy to interested members of our faculty, as well as to some other members of the College Physical Education Association.

We cannot expect colleges to schedule physical education classes for veterans during their entire stay in college. We believe, however, that they should fulfill the requirements in physical education that is recommended for other students, as indicated in the attached letter.

Yours very sincerely,

Harry A. Van Velsor.

Harry A. Van Velsor,
Director of Physical Education.

RENSELAER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION
TROY, NEW YORK

December 12, 1944

Dr. Ray Palmer Baker
Dean of Students
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Troy, New York

Dear Dr. Baker:

You informed me in your letter of November 8 that, at a recent meeting, the American Council on Education went on record as recommending that veterans going to college, who have completed Army basic training, should be given credit for physical education. The Association of Colleges and Universities also gave its unanimous approval of this recommendation. You said that the members believe "that veterans who will be older than ordinary civilian students and who, in most cases, have exercised authority as commissioned officers, will resent the assumption that they are not competent to determine what exercise and recreation they should take. Since the transition will be difficult at best, the weight of opinion favors the removal of what appears to be a psychological obstacle that is likely to be unfortunate. It was recommended by these educational bodies that the recreation for veterans be placed on a purely voluntary basis."

The physical education staff at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has advanced the following reasons why veterans should not be exempt from physical education:

A RECREATIONAL PROGRAM IS BEST SUITED FOR VETERANS

It is not the intention of the physical education staff at this Institute to give veterans a repetition of the army or navy basic physical training course. The nature of the course for veterans would be entirely recreational and the activities elective. At this Institute, where we have a variety of recreational facilities, the veterans could elect either handball, swimming, bag punching, basketball, volleyball, badminton, tennis or softball. The only request made would be that they attend regularly and at a specified time.

If the reaction of the few present veterans now taking physical education is a criterion of the attitude of future veterans, we feel that none will take a positive stand against an interesting, beneficial, compulsory recreational program such as we are in a position to give. The few members of the advance guard of veterans who are now here enjoy their activities.

VOLUNTARY VS COMPULSORY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

If physical education were placed on a voluntary basis, those veterans who need physical recreation most would not take advantage of it. Also, many of the physically fit would exercise only irregularly. We must safeguard this latter group from a sudden let down in physical training and a resultant physical softening-up. Dr. Bilik, a physician and physiotherapist, with thirty years experience in physical education, now in charge of rehabilitation in a large Army hospital, has this to say - "Under normal circumstances very few men voluntarily participate in physical education. It almost appears that you have to be born with some sort of a hormone in the body that compels you to exercise. I have never been successful in inducing anyone to adhere to constant physical education."

LACK OF TRAINING IN PHYSICAL SKILLS

Those veterans who were in college before going into the service had a "skills" program there. The majority of veterans,

however, are going to college for the first time. Many of these have no athletic skills due to the poor physical facilities of the high school attended. While in the service they were taught few, if any, athletic skills which could now be used in college.

Physical training in the military camps is a toughening process. It consists principally of calisthenics and running over and under obstacles. The average college physical education program, on the other hand, offers such skills as basketball, hardball, volleyball, tennis, softball, swimming, etc. - skills that can be enjoyed not only during their undergraduate days but later in life.

This lack of athletic skills will deter many veterans from using the physical education department. Since people like to do the things they do well, these unskilled veterans will not enjoy the activities in which they are always beaten. In physical education we try and get our students out of the "dub" class in each sport before we put them on their own.

Time should be made available during school hours when these veterans may be given instruction in any chosen skill so they may become proficient enough to want to return to the physical education building as long as they are in the Institute.

COMMISSIONED OFFICERS' RESPONSE TO AUTHORITY

There will be very few officers coming to the Institute who have not fulfilled our requirement of two years of physical education. Many will be our own previous students and we know that they will not resent the authority of their "old" instructors. Those officers who were not former students of this Institute will not be "ordered around", as is necessary in a basic physical training course. All officers will be notified that they are to fulfill the physical education requirements by attending a recreational class on specified days, and at a certain hour, for elective activities.

AVAILABILITY OF ATHLETIC FACILITIES

If physical education were voluntary for veterans, many would take advantage of our athletic facilities. They would use our basketball and handball courts and swimming pool, but they would of necessity use these facilities after school. Unfortunately, at that time, especially from 5 to 6 P.M., all of our athletic facilities are strained.

At this Institute we have two years of compulsory physical education. This is supplemented by a comprehensive intramural program. One purpose of this program is to provide recreation for juniors and seniors. Freshmen and sophomores are also eligible for this competition. The result is that our facilities are overcrowded after school. If we add to our present load several hundred veterans who will occasionally use our facilities after school, it might be impossible to accommodate all groups. One solution is to stagger the load throughout the day.

INDIVIDUAL'S CHOICE OF AMOUNT AND KIND OF RECREATION

We believe that many individuals are not competent to determine what exercise and amount of recreation they should have. They will readily admit that exercise is good for them; that they feel better after competition; that it has psychological, social as well as physical values.

If physical education were made optional, many would put off taking exercise regularly and only a few would receive these recognized benefits. This statement is evidenced by an order issued by the Commanding Officer of a V-12 unit. He requested that all his officers and enlisted personnel under his command participate in some form of physical recreation three times a week. When some of these officers were interviewed by the writer, they acknowledged that

they were in need of exercise. Their reason for not taking it was because they got out of the habit.

By nature the human animal is lazy when it comes to taking exercise regularly. He just has to be ordered to take it.

REMEDIAL EXERCISES AND PHYSIOTHERAPY FOR VETERANS

It is expected that some veterans will need special body building exercises and physiotherapy. In this Institute, where we have the facilities for this work, the best time to give veterans special exercises, heat and massage would be during the period scheduled for their physical education.

It would be impossible for us to give attention to individual veterans or to small groups after school. At this time, Mr. Knight, our trainer, is working with injured athletes giving them heat treatments, diathermy, massage and bandaging.

TEMPORARY EXCUSES FOR VETERANS

As now evidenced, some veterans are finding it difficult to finish their daily assignments. Some have asked that their burden be reduced.

When students are excused from physical education temporarily, we have found it difficult to get some of them to return and also to make up their absences until pressure has been put upon them.

One purpose of physical education is to give young men a little regular exercise several times a week to keep them physically and mentally keen and healthy. If we excuse veterans temporarily and permit them to crowd their physical education into a short space of time just to fulfill the requirements, we are defeating this purpose.

CREDITS FOR ARMY COURSES

It is hoped that the American Council on Education has not singled out physical education as the only subject for veteran exemption. Many veterans going to college have taken other courses in the Army and Navy, some of which might parallel those in colleges. If veterans receive credit for these courses, we feel that the American Council on Education has a point in recommending that veterans be given credit for their physical training course in the service.

However, physical education is not a subject that can be learned once and dropped. It must be a continuing experience IF IT IS TO ACCOMPLISH ITS PURPOSE.

If it becomes imperative for a slow learning veteran to drop physical education for the benefit of his studies, it is hoped that he will make good use of this extra time and will not spend it in the Club House, playing pool, cards, listening to the radio, or having a bull session as some of our present students do.

The physical education staff at this Institute respectfully requests that the curriculum committee seriously consider the advisability of having all future veterans, unless excused by the college physician, report regularly for physical education which will be in the form of recreation.

Harry A. Van Velsor