

## National Academy of Kinesiology Fellow Acceptance Speech

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This year has been one of myriad challenges, and “we” has replaced “I”. We certainly couldn’t have survived this year without the love and support of our families, friends and academic communities, and on behalf of our fellow inductees we are delighted to accept Fellow status in the National Academy of Kinesiology.

The 2020 class of 13 NAK Fellows is an incredible group spanning the wide diversity of the kinesiology disciplines from bench scientists to social scientists. We are focused on enhancing human health and performance with research interests in stress, bone health, metabolism, cancer, cardiovascular physiology, endocrinology, promoting physical activity and motor skills, locomotion and balance, lower extremity injury, biomechanics, sport pedagogy and the political and cultural landscape of sport. Our collective work tackles critical issues at all phases of the lifespan. On behalf of the new inductees, we are indeed privileged and honored to be entering such an accomplished group of NAK Fellows.

As we reflected on this year we thought of the Roman god Janus. Janus is the god with two faces that looks to both the past and the future. He is the god of beginnings, gates, passages and endings, and presides over periods of transition. This extraordinary year has certainly had many endings, beginnings and periods of transition that have impacted our personal and professional lives. In keeping with Janus, we will reflect on the past, and then look to our future in kinesiology and the role that NAK might play.

**PAST: COVID-19.** This past year COVID-19 has swept across the globe, leaving a trail of devastation in its wake, with countries battling to care for their citizens and support failing economies. The personal impact for so many has been significant, with people isolated from their loved ones, fear of the unknown, sharp increases in mental health issues, and many struggling to put a roof over their head and food on the table, let alone afford a college education. This has impacted our students; some are unable to return to higher education, and many are juggling numerous challenges. One example occurred when a non-traditional student was asked how he was holding up, after he failed to turn in an assignment. With tears in his eyes he noted that he was working 30+ hours a week to provide for his family, taking 15 credits and home schooling a 6- and 8-year-old. This story reminds us how we need to give our students and our colleagues a little “grace” as we partner with them in their educational journeys.

The challenges for us in academia have been equally impactful. We reeled as our labs and research were shut down, grant projects were unable to be completed, and data were lost. Somehow in the middle of the chaos we managed to put our courses online overnight and finish up the academic year. As we reflect on the spring semester we are struck by the grit and resiliency of our colleagues and students, and the attitude of care that encircled us all. There is a positive lesson in our forced curricular changes: we were afforded opportunities to critically examine our current curricula and consider the appropriate blend of online and in person course work that ensures student accessibility and success. Perhaps our biggest challenge was to connect with our students in meaningful ways through these online media. We are missing the before- and after- class interactions that result in an undergraduate student conducting research in our lab or learning of a personal challenge a student faces. Other impacts of COVID-19 have been reductions in department budgets, concern about our fiscal future and limits on scholarly travel, resulting in doing more with less resources and an “off duty” summer spent planning for the academic year.

**PAST: BLM Movement** A reflection on this past year would not be complete without recognition of the Black Lives Matter movement. We watched and listened in horror at the senseless murder of black lives. Out of these dark moments we have seen small rays of light. Many of our academic communities have come together to process these events and begin to have meaningful conversations around social injustice and systematic racism. These conversations are still in their infancy but white faculty are recognizing they need to take action as allies and co-conspirators to tackle these tough issues and enact meaningful change. Layered on top of the BLM movement is the #MeToo movement, a country in turmoil and political divisiveness separating people. What was notably absent during much of this time was the unifying mechanism of sport; however, recent events have shown our sports figures, professional and amateur, stepping forward together and taking a stand.

This past year has certainly been a “wild ride”, but as we look to our future we are heartened by the expertise and passion of our NAK Fellows and an organization with 90 years of history on which to leverage a new and better world.

**FUTURE: Social Justice.** At the forefront of our future is Social Justice - Martin Luther King Jr. said “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Kinesiology as a field has a responsibility to enact a social justice agenda, and this year’s NAK conference focus “Kinesiology's Social Justice Imperative” would have contributed to that mission. As an NAK community we need to address social injustices in the broader educational system and continue to educate ourselves and take a stand where we see injustice enacted. We see this from an ecological systems perspective attempting to enact change at multiple levels including the: NAK organizational level, institutional level, curricular and personal level.

**FUTURE: Current/Post COVID-19 Environment.** This past year has taught us that our world has changed and what we “know” is no more. While there are still many stressors and fears, we see opportunity in this situation. A dynamic systems perspective posits that when you “unlock the degrees of freedom” the system is free to assemble in a new and different form. We are optimistic that the NAK Fellows will rise to this challenge. We must find creative and engaging ways to connect with our students, re-envision our curricula, and find new ways of working that keep our faculty, staff and students safe but ensure their continued success. We need to be especially thoughtful about re-conceptualizing markers of success for promotion and tenure as we move forward, especially for those junior faculty who may have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 repercussions. We know that NAK as an organization will be a valuable partner in this journey.

In closing, we believe that the combined talent of the NAK Fellows and leaders will enable us all to navigate this time of transition in academia. We know that NAK will provide thoughtful leadership in how we move forward and provide guidance to institutions in a time of uncertainty. Most importantly we know that that NAK Fellows will help create caring academic communities and allow moments of grace as we navigate the future. After all, as Wilma Rudolph said: “the triumph cannot be had without the struggle”. On behalf of the new NAK Fellows we are honored to engage with the National Academy of Kinesiology moving forward.

*Delivered on September 25, 2020 at the Virtual Induction Ceremony*