

To: Standard Occupational Classification Policy Committee (SOCPC)

From: The National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA)

Date: August 8, 2024

Re: Statistical Policy Directive No. 10 SOC—Request for Comments on Possible Revision for 2028

Request: Include “Strength and Conditioning Coach” in the *Standard Occupational Classification Manual (SOC)*

The National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) is the worldwide authority on strength and conditioning. The NSCA empowers the public and professionals with evidence-based information, offers comprehensive certification, continuing education, peer-reviewed research, and philanthropic initiatives. Strength and conditioning coaches are a unique occupation that are currently not recognized in the SOC. The lack of inclusion in the SOC leads to confusion of strength and conditioning coaches with other occupations and a lack of accurate data from federal agencies.

On behalf of over 60,000 NSCA members and certified professionals, we respectfully request the SOCPC include “strength and conditioning coach” as a detailed occupation in the 2028 SOC.

Strength and Conditioning Coaches

What Strength and Conditioning Coaches Do

Strength and conditioning coaches specialize in training athletes and individuals to improve physical performance and minimize the risk of injury.

Strength and conditioning coaches are professionals who apply foundational knowledge in a practical setting to assess, motivate, educate, and train athletes for the primary goal of improving sport performance.¹ They conduct general physical and sport-specific testing sessions, design and implement safe and effective strength training and conditioning programs, and provide guidance for athletes and active individuals in injury prevention and nutrition.

Their area of expertise is separate and distinct from the medical, dietetic, athletic training, and sport coaching fields; strength and conditioning coaches consult with and refer athletes and active individuals to those adjacent occupations when appropriate.

Work Environment

Many strength and conditioning coaches work in educational settings, such as colleges, universities, and secondary schools. Strength and conditioning coaches also work with professional sports teams, the U.S.

military, first responders, and performing artists. Additional work settings include private sports performance facilities, athlete rehabilitation clinics, and recreation centers.

Strength and conditioning coaches often spend their time planning, leading, and managing training sessions in the weight room, in addition to overseeing facility and equipment maintenance to ensure safety.² It is common for strength and conditioning coaches to also participate in team sport practices and at games. This can include frequent work outdoors on sports fields and in other athletic settings.

Work Schedules

Most strength and conditioning coaches work full-time. Strength and conditioning coaches who work with teams around sporting events may work evenings or weekends and travel often.

How to Become a Strength and Conditioning Coach

Strength and conditioning coaches need at least a bachelor's degree, and master's degrees are common. Nearly all college and university, professional sports teams, and U.S. government strength and conditioning coach positions require a nationally accredited certification.

Education

Many degree programs related to strength and conditioning are distinguished and accredited by professional organizations that govern certification for strength and conditioning coaches. For example, the Council on Accreditation of Strength and Conditioning Education (CASCE) implements “an accreditation process for strength and conditioning education programs to ensure that Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialists are fully prepared to meet professional standards.”³

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

Several organizations offer certification. For example, NSCA certifies strength and conditioning coaches as Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialists (CSCS).⁴ The Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association (CSCCa)⁵ offers Strength and Conditioning Coach Certified (SCCC) and Master Strength and Conditioning Coach (MSCC) certification.

In addition to education and certification requirements, leading strength and conditioning associations provide standards of 300⁶ to 640⁷ hours of supervised internship or field experience for entering the occupation.

The NSCA demonstrates compliance with the NCCA Accreditation⁸ process on the US Registry of Exercise Professionals (USREPS).⁹

The NSCA maintains Professional Standards and Guidelines¹⁰ for strength and conditioning coaches that include scope of practice, legal duties and concepts, standards of practice, areas of liability, employment

settings, and employment qualifications. The NSCA also maintains a Professional Code of Ethics¹¹ and related policies to support self-governance.

Pay

According to a 2022 salary survey conducted by Employers Council, the average annual wage for strength and conditioning coaches was \$60,527—\$84,575.¹² Salaries vary according to the sport level, area of the field, and years of experience, with some strength and conditioning coaches in upper-level collegiate and professional sports earning \$250,000¹³—\$1,000,000¹⁴ annually.

The listed salary ranges for strength and conditioning coaches are higher than some other related professions listed in the SOC and BLS directory. For example, as of May 2023, median annual wages for “Fitness Trainers and Instructors” was \$46,480¹⁵ and “Coaches and Scouts” were listed at \$45,910.¹⁶

Job Outlook

As of December 31, 2023, 47,439 professionals held the NSCA Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) credential.¹⁷

Some universities extrapolate projections for the existing field data and suggest as much as 20% growth in strength and conditioning jobs by 2031.¹⁸

State and Area Data

Strength and conditioning coaches work in all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

Similar Occupations

Strength and conditioning coaches have easily distinguishable education and certification requirements from similar occupations. A fundamental difference is the focus of strength and conditioning coaches on athletic and physical performance outcomes.

While strength and conditioning coaches work in both the public and private sectors, strength and conditioning is generally considered a public sector job that is focused on the improvement of athletic and physical performance.¹⁹ Strength and conditioning coaches should not be confused with health and fitness professionals who work with general population clients, exercise physiologists who help people improve their health, and athletic trainers who provide medical treatments.

Adjacent professions include Athletic Trainers, Coaches and Scouts, Dietitians and Nutritionists, Exercise Physiologists, Fitness Trainers and Instructors, Physical Therapists, and Recreational Therapists.

Unique Nature of the Occupation

The work performed by strength and conditioning coaches, as well as the education and training needed to perform their work, is distinct from similar but different professions currently included in the SOC. Strength and conditioning coaches play a multi-faceted role that incorporates elements of coaching with elements of training and instructing. In some ways, they are more like coaches who work with teams of athletes. In other ways, they focus on optimizing the training of an individual athlete or professional.

- Coaches and scouts (27-2022). “Coaches teach amateur or professional athletes the skills they need to succeed at their sport. Scouts evaluate athletes as possible recruits.”²⁰ Although strength and conditioning coaches may contribute to athletic team coaching staffs, their objectives are specifically improving the strength and conditioning of athletes or other professionals whose performance depends on physical strength and overall conditioning. As examples of this differentiation, a head basketball coach or a football defensive coordinator may consult with strength and conditioning coaches, but their roles are different. The strength and conditioning coaches who work in those sports focus on improved performance metrics that contribute to the outcomes on the basketball court or football field related to strength and conditioning.
- Athletic trainers (29-9091) “specialize in preventing, diagnosing, and treating muscle and bone injuries and illnesses.”²¹ By contrast, strength and conditioning coaches motivate, educate, and train athletes, or other professionals with athletic components to their jobs, to improve physical performance. Athletic trainers are often the first responders to an injury during practice or an athletic competition, while strength and conditioning coaches work in the weight room and related facilities with athletes who have no injuries or have recovered from injuries sufficiently to resume strength and conditioning programs.
- Exercise physiologist (29-1128) is a related occupation, but its focus is more on individual and chronic health outcomes and less on athletic performance.²² Exercise physiologists are rightfully classified in the SOC under the broad occupation of therapists.²³ Strength and conditioning coaches focus on sport-specific testing sessions and develop programs to improve performance for both an individual athlete and their team. The work setting for exercise physiologists also differs greatly from strength and conditioning coaches because the former tends to work in hospital or clinical settings to improve a person’s overall health.²⁴
- Exercise trainers and group fitness instructors (39-9031) “lead, instruct, and motivate individuals or groups in exercise activities,”²⁵ meaning they focus more on exercise itself and less on achieving peak physical performance outcomes. Promoting and maintaining fitness among athletes is a vital piece of the work done by strength and conditioning coaches, but training/instructing is only one part of improving performance.
- Physical therapists (29-1123) “help injured or ill people improve movement and manage pain,”²⁶ while strength and conditioning coaches have a goal of helping athletes, military service members, first responders, and performing artists reach peak physical performance.

All the occupations listed above have their own distinct educational requirements and certification standards that require a foundational set of education, experience, knowledge, and skills, then continuing education throughout a professional’s career. The same is true for strength and conditioning coaches.

Requested Action and Collaboration

The NSCA respectfully requests the SOCPC include “Strength and Conditioning Coach” as a detailed occupation within the existing major group 29-0000 (Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations), minor group 29-9000, and broad occupation 29-9090. Strength and conditioning coaches are a unique technical occupation and should be distinct from other occupations due to the nature of the work performed, work environment, current employment size and expected growth, training and certification required to obtain employment, the tools and technologies used to perform the work, and the robust infrastructure around certification and self-governance by organizations like the NSCA.

The NSCA would welcome the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the SOCPC to discuss our request while you are reviewing public comments and forming your recommendations to the OMB.

Thank you for reviewing our input.



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- ¹ NSCA Strength and Conditioning Professional Standards and Guidelines. *Strength and Conditioning Journal* 39(6): p 1-24, December 2017. | DOI: 10.1519/SSC.0000000000000348.
- ² Haff, G., and Triplett, N.T. *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning*. Fourth edition. Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics, 2016. (Fifth edition currently in production with the publisher as of August 1, 2024)
- ³ CASCE Accreditation, <https://www.nsca.com/education/casce>.
- ⁴ Become a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS), <https://www.nsca.com/certification/cscs/>.
- ⁵ CSCCa Certification Process and Requirements, <https://www.csc.ca.org/certification>.
- ⁶ Council on Accreditation of Strength and Conditioning Education (CASCE). Professional Standards and Guidelines, 2022: <https://www.nsca.com/globalassets/casce/casce-documents/casce-professional-standards-guidelines.pdf>
- ⁷ CSCCa Certification Process and Requirements, <https://www.csc.ca.org/certification>.
- ⁸ NCCA Accreditation, <https://www.credentialingexcellence.org/Accreditation/Earn-Accreditation/NCCA>.
- ⁹ US Registry of Exercise Professionals, <https://usreps.org/>.
- ¹⁰ NSCA Strength and Conditioning Professional Standards and Guidelines, <https://www.nsca.com/education/articles/nsca-strength-and-conditioning-professional-standards-and-guidelines/>.
- ¹¹ Codes, Policies, and Procedures, <https://www.nsca.com/education/articles/nsca-strength-and-conditioning-professional-standards-and-guidelines/>.
- ¹² NSCA's Strength and Conditioning Coaches Salary Survey, Employers Council, 2022: <https://www.nsca.com/globalassets/tools/2022-nsca-strength-conditioning-coaches-salary-survey--final-report-v.2-webrez.pdf>
- ¹³ The Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association (CSCCa) 2023 Salary Survey, 4(1):1, 2024. <https://researchdirectx.com/index.php/strengthandperformance/article/view/106/80>
- ¹⁴ College Football Strength Coach Salaries, *USA Today*, <https://sports.usatoday.com/ncaa/salaries/football/strength>.
- ¹⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Fitness Trainers and Instructors, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/fitness-trainers-and-instructors.htm>.
- ¹⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Coaches and Scouts, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/entertainment-and-sports/coaches-and-scouts.htm>.
- ¹⁷ NSCA Certification Exams: A Year in Review (2023), <https://www.nsca.com/certification/certification-resources/nsca-exam-report/>
- ¹⁸ Master of Science in Strength and Conditioning, Logan University, <https://www.logan.edu/academics/master-of-science-in-strength-and-conditioning/#1687454832468-f8784df7-85c5>.
- ¹⁹ Altiner, B.M.L., Dixon, M.A., Nite, C., and Stock, M.S. Toward Professionalization of the Strength and Conditioning Field. *Strength and Conditioning Journal* 45(6): 733-744, December 2023. | DOI: 10.1519/SSC.0000000000000787 | https://journals.lww.com/nsca-scj/fulltext/2023/12000/toward_professionalization_of_the_strength_and.9.aspx
- ²⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Coaches and Scouts, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/entertainment-and-sports/coaches-and-scouts.htm>.
- ²¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Athletic Trainers, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/athletic-trainers.htm>.
- ²² Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Exercise Physiologists, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/exercise-physiologists.htm>.
- ²³ Office of Management and Budget, *Standard Occupational Classification Manual* (2018) at 102-103. https://www.bls.gov/soc/2018/soc_2018_manual.pdf.
- ²⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Exercise Physiologists, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/exercise-physiologists.htm#tab-3>.
- ²⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Fitness Trainers and Instructors, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/fitness-trainers-and-instructors.htm#tab-2>.
- ²⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Physical Therapists, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapists.htm>.