

# FROM TACTICAL ATHLETE TO WEEKEND WARRIOR:

SPANNING ELITE HUMAN PERFORMANCE TO GENERAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS



 **ACSM** New England  
Chapter

**NEACSM 2026 SPRING  
CONFERENCE**  
FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2026  
5 ACSM CECs



## IN-PERSON FORMAT.....

### Student Center

Rogers Center, Merrimack College, Walsh Way, North Andover, Massachusetts, 01845

## DESCRIPTION.....

The New England Chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine invites you to attend the 2026 Spring Meeting on Friday, April 17, 2026 at Merrimack College. The conference will feature five presentations from human performance and sport science experts, culminating with a Q&A session between the audience and our invited speakers. Presentations will draw from an array of human performance, health and wellness topics among military personnel, veterans, and first responders.

### Key topics include:

- 1. Environmental physiology** with a focus on exercise performance at altitude
- 2. Exercise for mental health**, translating research to practice
- 3. Sex-based** performance differences in elite special operations soldiers
- 4. Improving** function, mobility, and cognition among older adults

In addition to our invited speakers, the conference will feature Student Abstract Presentations. These poster presentations will showcase student-led scholarly work: highlighting innovative findings and supporting young scholars by fostering engagement between our students and professional members. The top three abstracts will be featured in a rapid-fire oral presentation format.

## OTHER INFORMATION.....

### Student Abstracts

Get information about Student Abstract Submission criteria and access the submission form at <https://www.neacsm.org/spring>.

**Submission Deadline:** March 20, 2026

### Objectives

1. Understand what a tactical athlete is, and how they differ from traditional athletes.
2. Foster student-professional engagement and showcase student-led research.
3. Expose attendees to sports science research and clinical career paths that support health and performance of our military personnel, veterans, and first responders .
4. Learn applications of exercise for promoting mental health, function and mobility.
5. Explore cutting-edge research to understand and maximize performance in elite tactical athletes.

## DONATE NOW.....

The Camaione Student Endowment has supported student success for over twenty years. Your donation helps fund a variety of student scholarships and professional development opportunities.

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**ONLINE REGISTRATION OPENS ON  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2026**

# PROGRAM SCHEDULE

All times shown are ET

## IN-PERSON AT MERRIMACK COLLEGE'S ROGERS CENTER

8:00 - 8:50 a.m.	<b>Registration</b>
8:50 - 9:00 a.m.	<b>Welcome Address</b> <i>James Whitworth, PhD, FACSM   Past President NEACSM</i>
9:00 - 9:40 a.m.	<b>Performance Under Pressure: Lessons from Military and Tactical Research</b> <i>Tunde Szivak, PhD / Merrimack College</i>
9:40 - 10:25 a.m.	<b>Physiological and Psychological Attributes of the Elite Warfighter</b> <i>Holly McClung, MS / USARIEM</i>
10:25 - 10:35 a.m.	<b>Break</b>
10:35 - 11:20 a.m.	<b>Translating Exercise and Mental Health Research into Real-World Practice: Lessons from Women Veterans</b> <i>Michelle Pebole, PhD / VA Boston Healthcare System</i>
11:20 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	<b>Rapid-Fire Student Research Presentations</b>
12:00 - 12:50 p.m.	<b>Lunch - Provided</b>
12:50 - 1:35 p.m.	<b>Strategies to Improve Exercise Performance at High Altitude</b> <i>Roy Salgado, PhD / USARIEM</i>
1:35 - 2:10 p.m.	<b>Beyond Chronological Age: Mobility, Cognition, and Precision Exercise in Veterans</b> <i>Elisa Ogawa, PhD / VA Boston Healthcare System</i>
2:10 - 2:30 p.m.	<b>Panel Discussion with All Speakers</b>
2:30 p.m.	<b>Adjourn</b>

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS



## **Tunde K. Szivak, PhD, CSCS**

Associate Professor, School of Nursing and Health Sciences  
*Merrimack College*

### **Performance Under Pressure: Lessons from Military and Tactical Research** **9:00 - 9:40am**

Drawing on over 21 years of service as a U.S. Army officer, Dr. Tunde K. Szivak is an associate professor at Merrimack College whose work focuses on applied stress physiology and tactical human performance. Her research examines real-world training practices in police academies and is informed by prior work in military survival environments.



## **Holly McClung, MS, RDN, CCSD, LDN**

Nutritional Physiologist, Military Performance Division  
*US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine*

### **Physiological and Psychological Attributes of the Elite Warfighter** **9:40 - 10:25am**

Holly McClung is a principal investigator on the Military Performance Team, leading work in the female warfighter and special populations workspace. Her current work characterizes physiological, metabolic, and cognitive responses of elite warfighters going through the modern Army Ranger Training Course and Army Special Operations Forces qualification courses to determine if sex differences exist in support of preparation, selection, retention, and policy of future elite warfighters.

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## **Michelle Pebole, PhD**

Research Health Scientist & Assistant Director of Dissemination and Implementation  
The Translational Research Center for TBI and Stress Disorders  
*VA Boston Healthcare System*

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry  
*Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine*

### **Translating Exercise and Mental Health Research into Real-World Practice: Lessons from Women Veterans** **10:35-11:20am**

Dr. Michelle Pebole's research focuses on translating exercise and mental health research into real-world practice. She specializes in the development of trauma-informed exercise programs for people experiencing diverse trauma-related comorbidities like posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and depression/anxiety.

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FOR SPORTS INJURY PREVENTION

# SESSION DESCRIPTIONS



## **Roy Salgado, PhD**

Research Physiologist

*US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, Thermal & Mountain Medicine*

### **Strategies to Improve Exercise Performance at High Altitude**

**12:50 - 1:35pm**

Dr. Roy Salgado earned his PhD at the University of New Mexico, where he studied exercise science with a focus in high altitude physiology. He completed his post-doctoral fellowship at the US Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine. His current research focuses on acute and chronic responses to hypoxia to optimize health and performance at high altitude in military personnel.

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## **Elisa Ogawa, PhD**

Research Physiologist, New England Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center

*VA Boston Healthcare System*

Assistant Professor, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

*Harvard Medical School*

### **Beyond Chronological Age: Mobility, Cognition, and Precision Exercise in Veterans**

**1:35 - 2:10pm**

Dr. Elisa Ogawa's research focuses on the intersection of mobility and cognition, with an emphasis on the role of exercise. She aims to investigate and develop exercise treatment sequences to delay or prevent veterans from transitioning to dementia. She is a VA Rehabilitation Research Development and Translation Career Development Award awardee, where her work focuses on refining treatment strategies and testing the feasibility of precision exercise interventions for older veterans with motoric cognitive risk syndrome.

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## CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

Online registration opens on Wednesday, February 18, 2026 and closes on Friday, April 10, 2026. To register a group, email Anna Parr at [aparr@acsm.org](mailto:aparr@acsm.org). Complete group registration information must be received by March 27, 2026 to be processed.

Register at the NEACSM website: [www.neacsm.org/spring](http://www.neacsm.org/spring)  
(no registrations by mail or phone)

### REGISTRATION FEES:

	Through April 10	Onsite, April 17
Professional Member	\$75	\$85
Student Member	\$45	\$55

NEACSM membership required for rates listed above. To join or renew: Students \$15; Professionals \$35

**Full payment must accompany the registration.** Cancellation policy: All conference registration cancellations must be requested in writing. A 50% refund may be obtained up to ten business days prior to the event. No refunds will be granted within ten days of the conference. Substitutions are allowed. Send cancellation requests to [meeting@acsm.org](mailto:meeting@acsm.org).