

Meet Our NEACSM Past President



Name: Jaci L. VanHeest, Ph.D.

Education: BA, Physical Education, Hope College, Holland Michigan; MS, Exercise Physiology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan; Ph.D., Exercise Endocrinology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan; NIH Post Doctoral Fellowship, Physiology and Biophysics, University of Cincinnati; NIH Post Doctoral Fellowship, Bioenergetics and Pediatrics, University of Colorado

Current or most recent affiliation: University of Connecticut

Honors & Awards: University Teaching Fellow, University of Connecticut, NEACSM Honor Award

Professional Interests: Bioenergetics and Reproductive Endocrinology of Women and Children

NEACSM Service: Member-at-Large; Free Communications Chair; President; MAX! Editor; Various Ad Hoc committees

NEACSM Service

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

I have always been fascinated with how the body functions. Being a collegiate athlete, my interest in joining these two passions seemed logical. I was encouraged to pursue an advanced degree by my father, who always felt that I would be successful at this career.

2. As a student, who were your mentors and what role did they play in your professional development? As a professional, was there anyone who was also instrumental in your career development?

My father was my professional role model. He was the ultimate professional and an exceptional model for how to interact with others, how to develop a work ethic and how to be true to your passion. During my graduate years, Dr. Bill Heusner and Dr. Carol Rodgers were my mentors. They both provided guidance and encouragement throughout my graduate years.

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

My undergraduate students inspire me every day. The insights, questions, challenges and excitement that they share helps to keep the field interesting.

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

I joined NEACSM when I became a faculty member at UCONN. Stella Volpe and Dino Costanzo consistently encouraged me to become more involved in the chapter activities. Dino asked me to run for the EC Board a million times and for president a million more before I felt ready to take on those challenges. My work with the chapter has been life changing.

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

I enjoyed every minute working with Donna Murphy. She challenged me with her dedication and professionalism. In addition, developing relationships with so many colleagues in the New England chapter are memories that I will always cherish.

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

During my presidency, we were faced with significant growth in student activities. Although this may seem like a good 'problem', it was something that needed much thought and planning. We were able to develop additional opportunities for students.

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

During my tenure, we decided to move forward on two naming efforts. First, we were able to name the Lawrence E. Armstrong Minority Scholarship. I distinctly remember speaking with Larry about our desire to name the scholarship in his honor. The impact of his reaction is something that I will never forget. I realized that we needed to seriously consider moving forward with additional naming opportunities. Second, I have the good fortune to work on naming the Priscilla Clarkson Keynote Lecture. The process was thorough and intense. We worked to be transparent, fair and forward thinking. I had the opportunity to take Priscilla to lunch in Amherst, with the goal of discussing this naming opportunity. The moments with Priscilla were moving. The ability to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the chapter are my most meaningful contributions.

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

The answer is very simple – my students. My students have and continue to change the world. It has been an honor to work with each of them.

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

I believe that future leaders should set goals for themselves. They should examine their strengths and apply those strengths to one or two projects. Never let yourself become a 'watcher', become an 'actor'!

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

Students should work to gain as many experiences as they can. Never be afraid to try new things and meet new people. Life is not a straight line; be willing to take a detour and learn something new about yourself.