

## Building a career on making a difference

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*Editor's Note: This is the latest installment in our ongoing series featuring UNH faculty sharing their stories in their own words.*

**Karen Collins, chair and associate professor, sport studies, kinesiology**



KAREN COLLINS

" I'm one of eight; I have five sisters and two brothers. Both of my parents were in education — my dad was a school administrator; my mom was a physical education teacher — and many of my siblings and their spouses are also educators. I didn't grow up thinking I would be an educator, but it was part of the conversation.

My mom passed away when I was 10 years old. For most of my siblings' and my formative years, there was a lot of depending on each other and family. My dad had to be very structured and organized with eight of us. There was always something going on. My mom was actually one of my first soccer coaches, and I went on to play three sports in high school.

When it came time to look for colleges, I was a recruited athlete, primarily in field hockey. I had some really good female coaches throughout my career; I've seen my college lacrosse coach three times in the last three months. Probably about midway through my undergraduate studies at Princeton, I decided I wanted to coach. I had coached a lot of youth teams in high school and led camps in the summers. For me, it was about giving back and staying involved in a place where I could impact both athletic and personal development.

I had an opportunity to stay on at Princeton as an assistant coach. As a college athlete, you show up and need to perform. But from a coach's perspective, there is so much more. I thought it would make sense to get my master's degree, so I came back to New England. Family is very important to me, and coming to UNH for graduate school meant I could be close to them. I studied in the program I teach in now, though at the time my goal was becoming a head coach at the collegiate level. I had that opportunity presented to me, but I decided to go for a Ph.D. instead. I had been a pretty good teacher and pretty good coach, but I didn't love the business part of coaching. I recognized there were things I wanted to change, and I thought I could make an impact in the classroom.

I pursued my sport and exercise psychology doctorate at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. It is such a broad field; it's leadership, coach education and development, communication and many skills. It's helping get the right mindset for performance. Many of my mentors said to me, "Your first job isn't going to be at the place where will spend your whole career." It's 18 years later, and here I am. This was my very first academic job.

I love a college campus. I love the energy and each new class. So much growth happens between when students first arrive on a college campus and when they graduate. The best part of my day is hearing from former students about something they've seen or read that makes them think back to what they've learned: "Doc Collins, did you see this? This would be great for your class." That's when I feel like I really made a difference."

*A former coach at Princeton University, Dartmouth College and UNH, [Collins](#) is an expert in coach development and coaching education and philosophy.*

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