

Role of the NATA Curriculum Director As Clinician and Educator*

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*****Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document**

Abstract:

The NATA curriculum director faces a unique challenge when occupying a position as both an educator and a clinician. The purpose of this paper was to determine the academic credentials, faculty rank, and clinical involvement of those athletic trainers directing NATA approved curriculums at either the undergraduate or graduate level. The implication of the academic tenure process on the curriculum director's role as educator and clinician was also explored.

Directors of all NATA approved curriculums were surveyed. Ninety-three percent of the curriculum directors responded. Over 80% of the directors were clinically active. Twenty percent (1 graduate, 13 undergraduate) of the directors were tenured, while 39% (4 graduate, 23 undergraduate) held tenure-track appointments. Fourteen percent of the directors had been denied tenure. In general, teaching, research, and publication surfaced as the most important criteria for promotion and tenure.

Clinical involvement of the curriculum director was predominant. However, the feasibility of working as both a traditional clinician and as an educator may be in question. Institutions that are committed to quality athletic training education should consider creatively structuring positions for curriculum directors and/or should weigh athletic training service heavily when making promotion and tenure decisions. Furthermore, athletic trainers seeking curriculum director positions should recognize the difficulty associated with the combined responsibilities of being an educator and a clinician.

Article:

INTRODUCTION

The professional preparation of athletic trainers has increased considerably in substance and sophistication in recent years. Presently 62 colleges and universities offer NATA approved undergraduate curriculums, while 10 institutions offer a program at the master's degree level.* At the undergraduate level, many institutions have already complied with the NATA mandate for development of an athletic training major by 1990 (2). Thirty programs have received NATA approval as academic majors at this time. Further, many institutions offer structured internship programs which include both clinical and didactic experiences.

* **EDITOR'S NOTE: In the Winter issue publication of this article a crucial sentence was omitted that made one of the more important points the authors were trying to convey uninterpretable. Due to this inadvertent omission and the resulting ambiguity, we have elected to republish the article in its entirety with our apologies to the authors. The corrected paragraph is printed in bold face under Tenure-Stream Positions.**

Program directors of NATA approved curriculums are required by undergraduate and/or graduate guidelines to have 1) current NATA recognition as a certified athletic trainer, and 2) a minimum of three years of full-time experience as an NATA certified athletic trainer including experience in the clinical supervision of student athletic trainers. Further, the program director must be a member of the institution's teaching faculty, while "demonstrated involvement in athletic training and sports medicine through publication, public speaking, research, and membership in related professional organizations is highly desirable" (5,6).

The combination of the NATA mandate for the athletic training major, the ever increasing demands placed upon a college or university tenure-stream faculty member, and the exhausting load assumed by most athletic training clinicians places an increasing burden on the program director. Further, it seems predictable that the development of major academic programs on the undergraduate level and the development of additional graduate curriculums will increase the number of tenure stream faculty athletic training positions.

The purpose of this paper was to determine the academic credential, faculty rank, and clinical involvement of the athletic trainers presently directing NATA approved curriculums. Further, program directors were surveyed relative to the implication of the academic tenure process on their roles as athletic training educators and clinicians.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT[†]

Program directors of all NATA approved undergraduate and graduate athletic training curriculums were surveyed (64 undergraduate, 10 graduate). While it was recognized that many strong and creatively structured internship programs existed, those athletic training educators were not surveyed due to the difficulty in identifying the institutions that offer such a program. Table 1 describes the questionnaire sent to each program director.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Ninety-three percent (59 undergraduate, 8 graduate) of the program directors responded to the survey. Seventy-nine percent (53) of the curriculums were housed in state universities, while 75% (51) were offered through a department of Health and Physical Education. Seventy-four percent (49) of the undergraduate program directors indicated their curriculum had received institutional recognition as a major, or major equivalent academic program.

The average length of professional experience as an athletic trainer was 13.6 years, while experience as an NATA approved curriculum director was 7.5 years. Twenty-nine percent (15 undergraduate, 5 graduate) of the program directors held a doctoral degree. Of those program directors not holding an advanced degree, 17% (11) were working toward either the Ph.D. or Ed.D.

Over 80% (53) of the program directors responding to the survey were clinically active athletic trainers. Clinical involvement ranged from working one intercollegiate sport, to assuming responsibilities as head athletic trainer, including football.

[†] At the time of this survey, 64 undergraduate programs were approved by the NATA.

Twenty percent (13 undergraduate, 1 graduate) of the program directors were tenured at their university or college, while 39% (23 undergraduate, 4 graduate) held appointments within the tenure stream. Fifteen percent of the curriculum directors had been denied tenure by their institution. In contrast, 12 institutions made special provisions to facilitate the granting of tenure for the curriculum director. For example, several institutions recognized the master's degree as the terminal degree in athletic training.

Considerable variation existed in the ranking of criteria for promotion and tenure between institutions. In general, research and publication, teaching, and professional involvement surfaced as the most important criteria for promotion and tenure. For all institutions, teaching, research and publication were the two most important criteria, while athletic training service ranked sixth of the eight items. For the eight institutions offering an NATA approved master's degree program, research and publication surfaced as the most important criteria.

THE TENURE PROCESS

The advent of tenure as a fundamental factor of higher education occurred in 1940 when tenure was incorporated into the Declaration of Principles by the American Association of University Professors (4). Academic tenure systems presently operate on 85% of the nations campuses. All universities, nearly all four-year colleges, and approximately two-thirds of two-year colleges have some form of tenure policy (1). The purpose of tenure is to secure freedom of teaching, research, and extramural activities, and to provide enough economic security to attract professionals to careers in academia (4).

Tenure decisions typically reflect assessments of past and current performance, and judgements about future potential of a faculty member in the areas of teaching, scholarship and research, and service. During the tenure review process and depending on the institution, each of these three areas is accorded different weight. Institutions granting the Ph.D. typically weigh research most heavily, followed by teaching and then service. Excellence is usually required in one or two areas with evidence of consistently good performance required in the other area(s).

The tenure review process typically entails a sequence of deliberations and recommendations usually beginning with peer review at the program or department level. The process continues with a school or university promotion and tenure committee review, and then recommendation to a department chairperson and/or dean. Final recommendation is made to a provost, academic vice president or university president who offers a recommendation to a Board of Trustees.

The concept of tenure continues to be the focus of debate. The demands placed on a faculty member seeking tenure often force the professor to compromise his or her professional integrity. Young scholars in search of tenure are driven into a fierce seven-year "publish or perish syndrome" (3). They may write not because they have something to say, but because the decision of tenure is based primarily on the number of publications in refereed journals. The quality of classroom instruction may suffer, and time allocated to student advising is often compromised. The process is further complicated for the athletic training educator because of the excessive time commitment necessary to work as a clinically active athletic trainer.

THE DILEMMA

The professional attempting to occupy a position as an athletic training educator and clinician faces a dilemma which emanates from several sources. Concerns about student perceptions, faculty promotion and tenure committee awareness, and one's own interest in clinical athletic training each contribute to the dilemma.

From the student's perspective the classroom credibility of an athletic trainer may be questioned if the athletic trainer is not involved in performing the daily responsibilities of a clinician. Analogies may be made with professionals in related fields. A medical school clinical professor of orthopaedics would probably have difficulty "selling" the orthopaedic resident on the best approach to reconstruction of the ACL deficient knee without regularly performing surgery on such cases. Similarly, the graduate student in exercise physiology might question the value of a mentor's research idea if the advisor was never involved in the collection of laboratory data. Innovations in athletic training are developing at a rate that creates a challenge for even the full-time clinician.

On the other hand, several years of experience as an athletic training clinician may be adequate preparation to assume a full-time role in the classroom. In addition, the need to validate the daily practices of the athletic trainer and to explore the efficacy of alternative techniques through research is of paramount importance at this time. This need is most logically met by the graduate curriculum director by conducting one's own research and by directing the research activities of graduate students.

The dilemma presented by the institution is primarily the rigidity by which a promotion and tenure committee evaluates a faculty member's credential for tenure. Rarely are such committees comprised of faculty members having a strong clinical orientation. Furthermore, the typical college or university faculty member has no concept of the energy and time commitment required of a practicing athletic trainer. Thus, service responsibilities of the athletic training educator-clinician rarely are given ample weight in the interrelationship between research, teaching, and service.

Finally, the educator faces a dilemma created primarily by himself. Love for athletics and concern for the health and welfare of the athlete are the typical forces driving one into the athletic training profession. Thus, to restrict or eliminate involvement in clinical athletic training may not be desirable, and may be a source of career frustration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We concede that the dilemmas discussed are not easily solved. However, we wish to present the following for consideration:

Tenure-Stream Positions

The athletic training curriculum director holding a faculty position within the institutional tenure stream must realistically limit involvement in the clinical setting. To practice athletic training on a daily and full-time basis would jeopardize one's chances for obtaining a favorable tenure decision. An alternative recommendation is to have athletic training clinical responsibilities for one high-injury incidence sport. Examples include soccer, wrestling, lacross, field hockey, and assistant for football. Such a one-sport clinical assignment would assure exposure to an adequate

injury caseload and would require the application of current athletic training techniques, yet would necessitate a significant clinical time commitment for only one sport season each year. Attention to research and writing could occur primarily during the sport's off-season.

If clinical athletic training is included in the job description of the tenure-stream curriculum director, the service component of the tenure criterion must be given ample weight. Education of the promotion and tenure committee relative to the time commitment and role of the clinical athletic trainer would seem to be critically important. Such education would be most effective if disseminated from a high administrative level.

We recognize that promotion and tenure standards of some institutions may make it impossible to have any athletic training clinical responsibilities. Further, some academic departments prefer appointments for athletic training educators completely exclusive of athletic units. In such instances it would seem advisable to incorporate the expertise of clinically active athletic trainers into the didactic component of the curriculum.

Non-Tenure Stream Positions

Some circumstances might necessitate appointment of the curriculum director outside of the tenure stream. For example, the curriculum director might not hold a terminal degree. While such positions may permit greater clinical involvement, administrators should recognize that the more time spent in the athletic training room, the less time devoted to the administrative and teaching responsibilities of a curriculum director. Thus, some release time from normal clinical responsibilities would still seem desirable and necessary.

In order to attract, high caliber individuals to non-tenure stream positions, institutions must address the job stability and longevity concerns of prospective curriculum directors. Creation of multiyear and renewable positions would seem to demonstrate an institutional commitment to athletic training generally, and to the curriculum director specifically.

Acknowledgment

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Table 1
Survey Instrument

Please check the nature of your academic appointment:

tenure track (39.1%)	clinical instructor (0%)
non-tenure track (37.9%)	instructor (20.6%)
presently tenured (20.3%)	adjunct instructor (3%) other (2.9%)
	assistant professor (28%)
	associate professor (25%)
	professor (13.2%)
	other (5.8%)

Please identify the highest degree you have obtained:

B.S. (0%)	M.Ed. (26.1%)
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B.A. (0%)	Ed.D. (14.3%)
M.A. (9.1%)	Ph.D. (11.3%)
M.S. (31.1%)	other (7.8%)

Are you currently working on an advanced degree? yes (16.7%) no (83.3%)
 If yes, what degree? (Ph.D.)

How many years have you worked as a program director of an NATA approved curriculum? (x= 7.5 years)

How many years have you worked as a certified athletic trainer? (x= 13.6 years)

Are you presently clinically active as an athletic trainer in the training room? yes (80%) no (20%)

If yes, what is the nature of your clinical work? (examples included head athletic head, assistant athletic trainer, one sport assignment, clinical supervision of students only)

If you are presently tenured, were you clinically active in the training room during the years preceding your being tenured? yes (87.1%) no (12.9%)

If you have a shared appointment with an academic unit and athletics, what is the percentage assignment to each? (average was 77.4% academic, 22.6% athletics)

Have you been denied promotion or tenure? yes (14%) no (86%)

Were any special provisions made for you relative to the tenure process at your institution? yes (19.7%) no (80.3%) (examples included considering the master's or physical therapy degree a terminal degree)

Number in order what you believe to be the most important criteria for tenure for you at your institution:

Undergraduate and Graduate Combined

1. teaching
2. research and publication
3. professional involvement
4. university committee work
5. advising
6. athletic training service
7. administration
8. community service

Graduate Only

1. research and publication
2. teaching
3. professional involvement
4. administration
5. athletic training service
6. university committee work
7. advising
8. community service

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