

INVITED COMMENTARY

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It is with great interest that I read the article titled “Tenure Track Athletic Training Educators: Are they being set up to fail?” and I believe the authors have explained many concerns that program directors and educators have about engaging in research and writing. There are additional strategies, however, that have been very successful at balancing the demands required by educational institutions. This invited commentary provides suggestions for educators to consider while successfully navigating the tenure process, particularly regarding scholarship.

The reality of the situation is undeniable: Tenure-track faculty who serve as Program Directors, as well as other associated program personnel (i.e. clinical coordinators), may encounter significant role strain. However, tenure-track faculty also serve as undergraduate or graduate program coordinators in a variety of other programs (e.g., exercise science, sports administration, biomechanics) and have similar demands. In all these cases, some work smart strategies to navigate the tenure process are essential.

Concerning teaching, as situations allow, the tenure-track faculty member should teach the same courses as often as possible. Not only does this reduce the number of new class preps, but it helps the faculty member develop more expertise in a given subject area, freeing the faculty member to actually teach and engage students rather than simply conveying content about which they may still feel somewhat uncertain. Of course, our athletic training students and entry-level professionals will be grateful for the improved teaching and instructor knowledge. New faculty members should also take advantage of teaching and learning workshops typically available on campuses. These can provide the new faculty member with fresh insights and can speed up the learning curve in developing solid teaching practices. When it comes to professional service, a new faculty member needs to select from those opportunities which can enhance professional growth and development (especially as a scholar). For instance, choosing committee work regarding review of free communication applications over registration duties at a state conference makes sense. An ATEP administrator can choose to implement simple (but still effective) ATEP policies and procedures, avoiding undue administrative headaches. A wise new hire understands that s/he must patiently and methodically develop more sophisticated procedures and policies over time. Well-developed programs were years in the making.

We can all bemoan the relentlessness of teaching, service, and administration, but new faculty members must make the commitment to steal away from that reality and work on

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scholarship. It is the faculty member’s intellectual inventory (grants, publications, presentations) which will carry their career, not clever teaching or ingenious ATEP administration. Deliberately carving out “scholarship time” each week is one strategy, e.g., 7-10 on Wednesday and Friday mornings, or whatever schedule works. Another scholarship strategy is to focus on one line of research, rather than several disconnected projects. Similar to developing content expertise for teaching, expertise developed in one research line makes for a more efficient, successful, and importantly, more enjoyable journey toward tenure.

AUTHOR’S RESPONSE

We appreciate the ideas shared in this invited commentary. The ideas added to our article and stimulated further thoughts.

As of October 21, 2009, the CAATE website¹ lists 361 different athletic training education programs. Of these 361 programs, 276 programs (76.4%) are found at colleges/universities with Carnegie classifications at Masters or Baccalaureate degree granting institutions; only 85 (23.5%) of the athletic training education programs are found at colleges/universities that have the Doctorate granting Carnegie classification. Release time for either research or program directing is uncommon at these masters and baccalaureate degree granting institutions.

Further investigation on the CAATE website¹ found that while 185 (51.25%) of the Athletic Training Program Directors (PDs) did have doctorates, there are 176 (48.75%) PDs whose highest degree was a masters degree. Although a master’s degree might be an appropriate degree for an employee at many baccalaureate only colleges, it may not help advance the athletic training profession in the area of research, especially education related research.

It is a worthy idea for AT faculty to develop a content area of expertise for teaching and research. However, some of the reasons why AT faculty are challenged with tenure may include: 1) many PDs still do not have doctorates; 2) those ATPDs with doctorates do not necessarily have them in athletic training and thus do not typically fit their content area into athletic training education.

Unfortunately, it is unrealistic for the AT educators at the Baccalaureate and Masters Carnegie levels to teach only 2 courses, because they are often required to teach up to 4 courses per semester while also serving as the PD. Some PD’s might also simultaneously be the clinical coordinator and assist with athletic training services in the athletic department; or, in some instances, the athletic training services personnel are the athletic training faculty. There are also still PDs who serve as the head athletic trainer.

Another point made in the guest commentary is that “well developed programs were years in the making.” Some universities can and have set aggressive time tables for the ATEP to be

accredited (2 years) and accepted students into a non-existent ATEPs with the promise that there will be an accredited ATEP by the time they are to graduate. The PDs with a doctorate are then faced with choosing between their own research or developing the ATEP.

A final potential weakness in AT education is that some PDs and AT faculty are on clinical faculty lines or non-tenure track faculty lines. These appointments might be viewed by some as lesser faculty appointments than the tenure track appointment in a research institution.

We must refute a point made by the guest commentary that other academic program directors have similar demands (exercise science, sports administration, and biomechanics).

Sports administration and biomechanics do not have program accreditation and exercise science is at its infancy with CAAHEP accreditation (this is currently an option) and does not have the same extensive initial or ongoing accreditation requirements as athletic training education.

We appreciate the issues raised in the invited commentary and hope athletic training education issues will continue to be vigorously discussed.

Reference:

1. Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education. Available at <http://caate.net>. Accessed 10/21/2009.