

Tenure Track Athletic Training Educators: Are they being set up to fail?

Lori Dewald, EdD, ATC, CHES, F-AAHE*, Katie Walsh, EdD, ATC†

*Kaplan University, †East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

Issues faced by tenure track AT education faculty are addressed and suggestions for those who are considering appointments as AT faculty are given. Literature and research from other allied health professions are provided as insights to AT faculty. We also suggest future research ideas related to AT educators. Finally, we

Initially, athletic training education involved a single educator, called a program director (PD). They were athletic trainers, who while accruing the standard high volume of clinical hours in the athletic training facility, gradually turned towards academia. They began to teach, and in addition to their regularly assigned clinical duties, took on supplemental administrative and curricular responsibilities. Because the demands of AT education were minimal in the early years of accreditation (1970's and 1980's), their athletic responsibilities often did not decrease as their PD responsibilities increased.

Many early PDs were protected from the institution's tenure requirements because they were full-time employees in athletics departments. That is rarely the case today. In time, most institutions added additional educators to their athletic training education programs (ATEP's). These dual clinician/educators were the role models for today's PDs and educators. As such, today's educators spent their formative years in what are now called "clinical and didactic settings," learning by observation and example how to be an athletic trainer, and an educator.

Today's educators are housed in academic departments that follow university-wide tenure and promotion guidelines. With institutions of higher education focusing tenure acquisition on teaching, research, funded grants, and other scholarly activity, how are today's tenure-track athletic training faculty going to meet the demands of academia and still maintain ATEP accreditation? Given the evolution of athletic training education and tenure trends in today's universities, most current educators will be unsuccessful if they simply emulate their predecessors.

The primary purpose of this article, therefore, is to make current and future AT faculty aware of issues they may encounter on the traditional tenure track. A secondary purpose is to begin a public dialogue and trigger research on institutions, departments, and the personal demands

consider future developments in the movement of athletic training education programs (ATEPs) into departments/schools of allied health and its impact on tenured AT faculty.

Key words: Faculty issues, tenure, faculty expectations

on today's PDs and tenure track faculty. Two other problems facing AT education are that 1) many educators do not hold terminal degrees, and 2) some institutions hire newly graduated PhD's as PDs. These should be cause for concern for current PDs and university administration.

Expectations for Tenure

While institutional tenure expectations are often explained to candidates during the formal interview process, candidates would be better prepared if they researched the Carnegie classification and publishing record of the university and department offering employment beforehand.¹ By doing so, the candidate would be better prepared with the general expectations of tenure and whether an emphasis exists on teaching, research, or service because a candidate for tenure must have demonstrated upward and recognizable progress in each of these areas for advancement. During the interview process, it is also important to determine the importance the institution places on each of these three components. For example, it might be: teaching, research, service; research, service, teaching; service, teaching, research; or any other possible combination. Without doubt, these areas warrant discussion to shed light on the demands of gaining tenure by AT faculty.

Teaching

It is important for educators to be excellent teachers, as the future of their program depends on the success of its students. The PD must ensure that all currently published *Athletic Training Educational Competencies* are taught and evaluated in program-designated course(s), and are responsible for not only teaching classes, but also course sequence, design, and maintenance of a crosscheck system/matrix for the competencies. Often these responsibilities reach beyond the walls of the institution to affiliated sites where approved clinical instructors (ACIs) must be fully aware of the sequencing and skill sets expected of the student(s) assigned to them. Indeed, in a study involving clinical nursing students, they highly valued the role of the clinical nurse over the traditional didactic nurse educator as instrumental in their learning.² Since the PD is ultimately responsible for all students' learning within the

Dr. Dewald is on the faculty in the Department of Health Science at Kaplan University. She can be reached by email at: lori@dewald@yahoo.com

Dr. Walsh is the Athletic Training Education Program Director at East Carolina University.

program, the clinical setting is as important as the classroom in terms of teaching value and student-educator interactions.

In a 1996 study surveying 86% of the junior (non-tenured, tenure-track) faculty in America's Physical Therapy schools, 84% agreed or strongly agreed that they spent their research release time in lecture preparation.³ Furthermore, when asked if they gave a higher priority to scholarly activity than to teaching, 85% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Seventy percent also felt they were unable to balance the time spent on teaching so they could devote an adequate time to other scholarly activities.³ To give new tenure-track faculty time to establish their research agenda, many institutions typically assign them a smaller teaching load and/or graduate assistants their first few years. At lower Carnegie level institutions, however, it is common for the PD to oversee the program while teaching a full 12 to 15 credit hour load. If new faculty already feel constrained by teaching responsibilities (let alone research), and additional CAATE demands (Figure 1),⁴ how much more difficult is the tenure-track PD's job? Depending on the Carnegie classification and mission of the institution, teaching may be the most important aspect of tenure. In one study, 61% of respondents reported their university valued teaching at least equally, if not more so, than research⁵ as critical to their success.

Stories are surfacing, in casual conversations among AT educators, of athletic training PDs teaching 18-30 credit hours in new preparations during their first few years as a PD and never having been able to teach the same course twice. Since it is rare for faculty in other academic fields to have more than 24 credit hours of new course preparations in their first few years on the tenure track, this extreme burden of preparation places a significant strain on time. In fact, many faculty members don't experience that many new course preparations in their entire careers. This is an area that needs to be quantitatively researched.

Service

The service aspect of tenure usually falls into local, regional, and national categories. It can be as simple as serving on university and professional committees, presentations at professional meetings and to civic groups, involvement in community organizations, or volunteer service to athletics teams in and outside of the home institution. Unfortunately, some universities do not consider using special vocational skills (i.e. athletic training) as service, and instead place more value on professional development.

While many presentations made at international, national, and district symposia are scholarly in nature, it is not unusual for athletic trainers to find their work classified as service, while their traditional arts and sciences colleagues' research is unquestionably deemed academic by their home institution's tenure and promotion guidelines. Service for an athletic trainer can be teaching cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to a group, instructing emergency medical service personnel in when and how to remove a football helmet, working Olympic Games, covering local, national, and/or international sporting events, etc. Still, there is disparity in the service component of tenure, for in the athletic training profession, it is an honor to be named to the United States Olympic medical team, but to some academic colleagues, it ranks poorly when compared to attending a conference and serving on national committees. Furthermore, most AT educators easily outperform their campus colleagues in the overall

B1: Program Director

B1.1 Requirements of the Position

The program director must:

- B1.11 be a full time position of the sponsoring institution.
- B1.12 have full faculty status, rights, responsibilities, and privileges as defined by institution policy and be consistent with other similar positions at the institution.
- B1.13 have programmatic administrative and supervisory responsibility recognized as a department assignment consistent with other similar assignments at the institution, and
- B1.14 have an amount of released/reassigned workload that is necessary to meet the administrative responsibilities of this assignment. This released/reassigned workload must be consistent with similar assignments at the institution.

B1.2 Responsibilities of the Position

The program director must have input and assurance of the following program features:

- B1.21 organization and administration of all aspects of the educational program.
- B1.22 curricula planning and development.
- B1.23 fiscal and budgetary input and management as determined by the institution.
- B1.24 equitable distribution of educational opportunities at all clinical and classroom sites. This responsibility may be shared with a faculty member designated as a clinical coordinator; however, the Program Director has ultimate responsibility, and
- B1.25 recognizable institutional responsibility or oversight for the day-to-day operation, coordination, supervision, and evaluation of all components (academic and clinical education) of the ATEP.

B1.3 Qualifications

The program director must:

- B1.31 hold current national certification and be in good standing with the Board of Certification (BOC).
- B1.32 have a minimum of five years experiences as a BOC-certified athletic trainer.
- B1.33 possess a current state credential for those states that require professional credentialing for athletic trainers, and
- B1.34 demonstrate teaching, scholarship, and service consistent with institutional standards.

Figure 1. Athletic Training Program Director Description

service component of tenure, but fail to earn adequate recognition by their peers and institution.

Research

According to Boyer's⁶ landmark paper, "Scholarship Reconsidered," the research component of tenure is the 'Johnny come lately' aspect of the tenure process, as the American institution of higher education was founded on education first. Service, and later in the early twentieth century research, were added as additional faculty expectations for promotion.⁶

The higher the institution's Carnegie classification, the greater the emphasis placed on peer-reviewed publications and grant activity in the tenure process. There is a trend for clinical faculty to increase scholarly activity, especially at doctoral granting universities.⁷ With that in mind, athletic training educators will likely see increasing pressure to produce a high volume of quality scholarly work while maintaining the ATEPs accreditation.

Successful research for tenure purposes often entails articles published in blind review journals, successful grant funding, and authoring books or chapters in texts. Within each category, there are additional criteria; for example, serving as a first author is typically valued higher than serving as a subsequent author and therefore it is viewed more favorably.⁷ However, in the science community, serving as the last author may be of the most significance. Scientists are typically listed last on experimental research papers if they are either the owner of the laboratory where the research was done, if their grant funded the project, or if they were mentoring a graduate student. They are titled the 'senior' author, indicating he/she was the most senior person listed in terms of responsibility for the work. Clearly, placement of authorship can be a contributing factor towards upward progress in the tenure pursuit. Internal grants funded within an institution demonstrate the ability to successfully write a small grant, but externally funded national grants are considered to be more desirable by higher-level Carnegie institutions. Textbook authorship may be advantageous at one university, but negligible (compared to grants or refereed publications) at another.⁷ Abstracts are typically not considered a publication. Institutional variances are vast and complex and some departments value only qualitative research.

Newly-hooded PDs are not experienced in seeking specific clarification regarding tenure at their particular institution. They may erroneously believe that following in the footsteps of their predecessors as good clinicians and teachers, and obtain/maintaining accreditation will make them successful. This ideology appears especially ingrained within allied health faculty,⁸ is atypical across other university disciplines, and has the potential to create misunderstandings about the athletic training profession.

Tenure of Health Professionals

A study involving 1,444 academic health faculty members indicated that these professionals tend to place less emphasis on scholarship than do traditional academicians.¹ There are some clinically based programs, such as dentistry, whose administrators recognize their faculty's enormous clinical and didactic teaching responsibilities and therefore strive to retain excellent and motivated clinical faculty regardless of their scholarly productivity.⁹ Nationally, there are some ATEPs that are beginning to rank faculty on a clinical track, but these are limited situations. On the other hand, nursing educators have been advised to limit their clinical responsibilities, as attempting to fulfill both didactic and clinical roles would spread them too thin.²

There are ATPDs confessing in the halls of the Athletic Training Educator's Conference, and the NATA National Symposium of universities terminating them (tenure-track PDs) for failure to uphold the

universities mission of scholarly activity.

Typically, authoring accreditation self studies, rejoinders, and annual reports are not acknowledged as scholarly activity by research institutions, even though they have involved hundreds and even thousands of pages of writing over 3-4 years. Some lower-level Carnegie institutions, however, have agreed to support such endeavors with credit towards intellectual pursuit in tenure.

Given the national focus for more experimental research and larger grants, there are many who feel the purpose of the university has been overlooked.⁶⁻⁸ Schools of Dentistry have pondered "whether we have evolved a too rigid single model of faculty achievement which overstates the importance of research and neglects teaching."⁸ This remains to be seen, but for now, the tenure-track athletic training PD appears to be caught between two generations of expectations of tenure and rising curricular and accreditation standards demanding tremendous time and energy.

An example of the challenges that tenure track faculty face at research focused institutions is illustrated by data from Penn State University, where in any given year, 100-180 faculty members enter provisional status at the University. Over a recent 9 year period, only 55% of new entrants received tenure. In general, males fared better than females at achieving tenure (47% for females and 59% for males) and minority faculty were lower than for non-minority faculty (51% for minority and 56% for non-minority).¹⁰ These data are similar to a comprehensive nationwide study that 58% of women held tenure versus 77% of men.¹¹ Similarly, 74% of White faculty, 57% of Black faculty, 56% of Hispanic faculty, and 59% of Asian faculty members held tenured positions.¹¹ The possible differences in the contract type (tenure, tenure track, non-tenure track) and the genders of athletic training PDs warrants research.

In a 1996 study, 51% of pre-tenured physical therapy faculty members were not experienced in publishing scholarly works prior to working at their current university, and only 47% felt they received timely messages regarding their progress towards tenure from the tenure committee.³

A common complaint of faculty members is the lack of time to engage in research.^{2,9,12,13} Release time for scholarly work is considered vital for successful promotion of family medicine faculty.¹⁴ Release time, however was not judiciously used for research in a study of tenure-track physical therapists.³ The incongruity of what academic administrators (department chairs) felt the newly tenured faculty members spent each week on research was 25%, compared to the time actually spent which was 15% of their time per week.¹⁴ Again, this research stresses the complaints of only faculty members, not PDs, and their daily load. There are no data on the demands of a tenure-track PD in any allied health or medical discipline.

Academic health professionals have a tendency to place more emphasis on educating students to be practitioners than on pursuing scholarly work.¹ Athletic trainers are not the only health care professionals with a large clinical component who are recently experiencing angst in tenure acquisition. Nursing, emergency medicine, family medicine, physical therapy, and dentistry have all lamented over achieving tenure in academic institutions when compared to purely academic

disciplines.^{3,9,13-17} If these tenure-track faculty are experiencing strife, how much more pressure is placed on the tenure-track PD who holds administrative responsibilities in addition to pursuing tenure?

The literature clearly indicates that the tenure process for university professors is a stressful pursuit. Smith⁹ observed that gifted and enthusiastic clinical faculty in dental schools were not meeting requirements for tenure and were terminated, and the school as a whole suffered from such an act. Smith⁹ contended that requiring all faculty to produce exemplary research is setting them up to fail, as the talent for writing simply does not exist among all dentists. Furthermore, the goal of dental education is to produce clinicians, not researchers.⁹ Is this goal not shared by practicing athletic trainers?

A study involving emergency medicine faculty attributed the lack of tenure on the lack of mentors and adequate research release time.¹⁵ Academicians on a tenure-track must have a clear understanding of the measures by which their progress will be judged.¹² "Tenure has become the academy's version of the abortion issue---a controversy marked by passion, polemics, and hardened convictions."¹⁸ While this statement seems harsh, there is also truth in it within athletic training education. The dirty little secret among tenure track AT educators and PDs, is that they have been prostituting themselves to universities across the United States.

Tenure-Track Athletic Training Educators

Those AT's who choose to follow post-certification AT education are educated in the ways of research, but these programs are few in number. By the time they are pursuing tenure, most AT's may have limited, if any publications, whereas the colleagues they are compared to, have many, due to having been in a research environment during their graduate education. In the past, many AT educators were tenured for being good teachers and good clinicians. Many attended graduate school (master's and/or doctorate) while serving as either part time or full time clinical employees. Most of their future academic colleagues funded their graduate degrees by working in laboratories, whereas ATs are working for athletics departments as medical staff.

Tenure track educators often are encouraged by both their academic and athletic departments to stay active as a practicing athletic trainer. This cross-departmental mentality reinforces that tenure may still be acquired by remaining active in the clinical setting, while not emphasizing research as much as their non-athletic training faculty colleagues.

In the last several years, universities have scrambled to hire athletic training educators with terminal degrees to start ATEPs, or to replace the revolving door leading to the PD's office or educators to replace those who failed to earn tenure or left for a different ATEP. Many of these universities have been self-serving in their quest for an accredited ATEP while not being concerned for the toll that curriculum development has on the tenure pursuit of the AT educators.

Many AT educators spend their first few years on the tenure track developing the infrastructure of the ATEP from the ground up. This program development has included writing new course proposals and guiding them through university processes, writing syllabi for these yet-to-be-taught classes because they are required for the new course proposal process, writing student recruitment brochures, creating or updating the ATEP website, developing educational and clinical

program manuals, assessment and evaluation documents, and writing accreditation materials. Rarely are these developments considered writing or publications in the tenure process or decision. On top of that, the never-ending comprehensive reports for the CAATE, establishing clinical sites and ACI and clinical instructor (CI) training sessions, and ATEP annual reports, self studies, and comprehensive review documents, all while on the tenure track. It is not uncommon for AT educators to produce hundreds and thousands of pages of writings associated with the educational program under their charge. While these AT educators spend hours generating program writings that are meaningless in the tenure decision, their tenure track colleagues in other academic areas spend that time conducting research studies, reporting the results, getting published, and getting tenured.

There are numerous examples of PDs and clinical coordinators not progressing on the tenure track, not achieving tenure, or leaving before their tenure application was denied. The institution then hires a new PD who enters into an accredited ATEP and does not face the same issue of developing the program from the ground up. The institution may have achieved an accredited ATEP, but that came at a professional cost to the athletic training educators. In the educational world of AT, young professionals equipped with a fresh doctoral degree are unprepared for the administrative intricacies of overseeing a program, let alone the politics of departments, acquisition of tenure, and importance of time management, among other non-tangibles of tenure. Educators, when interviewing for PD positions should determine if an institution would rather have the program accredited (program security) or have the PD publish research (personal security). It is difficult for both to occur. Mistakably, some believe securing CAATE accreditation will grant them job security. Tenure track AT educators also need to be concerned about department chairs and university deans retaliating against them when accreditation fails. Tenure track educators are extremely vulnerable to retaliatory actions in their annual evaluation. Instead of the annual evaluation recognizing the work in starting an ATEP from the ground up, maintaining or fixing an ATEP, the tenure track faculty PD can be chastised for the failed or probation status of accreditation and find themselves terminated.

Recommendations to address these straining issues include encouraging the PD to capitalize on resources for new faculty members at his/her institution, including: seminars and instruction on time management, computer usage, syllabi creation, and classroom management techniques. Additionally, PDs should actively seek mentors, both on their own campus as well as professional contacts through educator conferences, to assist them down the path through tenure. Professional mentors may be those who have published, presented, or been on committees, and who have enough savvy to successfully navigate the academy. PDs do not necessarily have to look for a sage mentor, or one similar to him/herself, as mentors may be of any age, race, or gender

Also of concern for athletic training education is the influences that non-academic programs, such as the athletic department, have in how a program is structured. No other allied health profession has given a non-academic department the voice, power, and control that some athletic training programs have given university athletic departments. For many years, athletic training education and athletic departments have relied heavily on one another. The education program needed clinical sites for

students, and athletics appreciated the additional workforce that students provided. Athletic departments are often in a position to exert some control over how the athletic training education program operates, and this can offer substantial challenges to newly hired faculty members. Thankfully, programs that have relied on the Athletics Department are yielding to a more healthy relationship within the academic unit that houses it, the relationship and control is slowly shifting back to the original purpose of the ATEP - education of students.

The Future

The future of tenure and promotion is of concern to administrators and faculty of major research universities, who have explored its redefinition, process, and policies.^{19,20} The Chronicle of Higher Education,²¹ has forecasted that by 2015, only 40% of full time faculty would be tenured compared to 50% in 2005. Furthermore, 59% of new hires in 2005 were not on tenure tracks, while an estimated 70% would not be by 2015. It appears that the majority of faculty will be part-time instructors who do not focus on scholarship in their subject specialties or on research at all.²¹ Another forecast proposes that a fundamental shift in promotion and tenure criteria is needed for today's universities to become learner-centered, especially at research institutions.²² Athletic training educators need to be involved in these national discussions on tenure.

Ray²³ p²⁵⁴ states that "the program director position is no place for the inexperienced or faint-of-heart." He also reiterates those newly hooded faculties are not prepared for administrative roles or the political nature of academia. In a study on graduate-level athletic training education, program directors strongly agreed that adequate faculty, staff and administrative support contributed to the over all program quality.²⁴ The combination of lack of support, either from colleagues or administration, and demands on tenure track faculty (e.g. research, administration) set athletic training program educators up for failure. Without a firm infrastructure and support, these individuals carry the weight of the program on their shoulders. Traditionally, those in academic leadership roles have seasoning and experience on their side, but an editorial in 2005 held that the average PD in athletic training had but 7 years experience in that role.²³

Is it time for athletic training to leave departments of kinesiology and physical education and become housed with their health profession colleagues in departments, colleges, or schools of allied health, or medical schools? AT education faculty need to realize, however, that allied health departments/colleges/schools might have different tenure expectations or might not have tenure track faculty lines at all. Medical schools and colleges of allied health sciences often have a different expectation of their clinical faculty. They tend to have a clinical tenure of sorts that validates the role of the health care provider as different and in the same fashion, just as critical as the researcher in the development of students' education.

Athletic training educators also need to be involved in the allied health education discussion. Discussing these issues with allied health faculty that have walked down many of the roads that AT educators are now traversing would prove to be very beneficial. The AT education conferences should focus more on faculty issues, such as tenure before AT faculty leave to go into the actual academic field of their doctoral degree, since the vast majority of AT educators do not have doctorates

in athletic training. Such discussions would give direction to both departmental policy and to ATs considering entering academe.

Conclusions

In an editorial to the Archives of Internal Medicine, Racy, et al²⁵ lamented on the demands of new faculty members by stating universities should post their real motto: "WE EAT OUR YOUNG." How then does an athletic training PD on a tenure-track ensure he or she will not fail? They must become educated about the wants and needs of the department, research the Carnegie level of the institution, and survey recently tenured professors in their department and school.^{1,8,12,26} Those on tenure-track also need to appreciate that tenure is a moving target, and as you get close to the goal, expectations may increase.⁷

Unless tenure for PDs follows 75% of the nation's medical schools in having separate and distinct tracks for clinical faculty, they must pursue the traditional tenure track.¹⁶ If research is stressed at the institution, the PD must learn how to be more prolific by attending writing and grant symposiums and workshops, and by doing collaborative work.^{1,3} They need to ask their department chair or other athletic training colleagues for direction in beginning grant writing or engaging in research. Most universities have sponsored programs that assist new instructors in grant writing, acquisition, and funding. Tenure-track faculty members should pay attention to the faculty bulletins that cross their desk, for they are full of opportunities to learn more about the research and grant writing process.

It is clear that tenure-track ATs in research and doctoral institutions must protect their research time, and monitor their use of clinical time as well.^{7,12} Specific time should be designated for researching and establishing precise clinical/educational rotations.^{7,14} Above all, those on the tenure-track need to continue to be a good teacher, and never fail to stay abreast of new ideas, innovations, and techniques.⁵

One individual cannot change the entire system, but they can educate others about the demands on an AT educator. Ultimately, the responsibility of tenure falls on the individual. Athletic training education needs published research on the issues faced by today's athletic training faculty. Tenure-track ATs, especially in Carnegie research and doctoral institutions, need to have an active plan for obtaining tenure. In today's rush towards advancement of scholarly work and tenure, an educator must not necessarily follow those who went before them, but achieve a balance and move away from the traditionally heavy clinical assignments, particularly in the research and doctoral institutions. If they cannot, they may become the 'poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard of no more.'²⁷ p¹¹³³

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