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## Comparing the Professional Degree in Athletic Training: Evaluating Emotional Intelligence and Preparedness in Professional Program Graduates

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**Objective:** The athletic training professional degree transition debate is a pressing topic in athletic training education. Preparedness and Emotional Intelligence (EI) have been identified as important aspects of clinical success. The purpose of this study was to evaluate preparedness and EI of athletic trainers (ATs) completing Entry-Level Masters (ELM) programs compared to Bachelor of Science (BSAT) programs.

**Design and Setting:** The study followed a quasi-experimental ex post facto design. An electronic instrument was developed using Survey Monkey to assess preparedness and EI of recent AT graduates. Fifty-six items were measured using a 4-point Likert scale (1 represented the lowest score; 4 represented the highest score). The instrument contained three sections: demographics, EI, and preparedness.

**Participants:** One hundred seventy-six participants (males=53, females=123; ELM=50, BSAT=125) who were presently employed as an AT, and practicing for three years or less volunteered.

**Intervention:** An online survey was distributed to recent ELM and BSAT graduates to determine the effect of preparedness and EI.

**Main Outcome Measurement:** Preparedness items were categorized in 1 of 5

domain outlined in the National Athletic Trainers' Association 6<sup>th</sup> Edition Role Delineation Study (40 questions). EI items were categorized using Daniel Goleman's EI matrix (16 questions). Independent t-tests were used to identify the relationship between degree route (ELM versus BSAT) and sex (male versus female) on preparedness and EI. Both EI and preparedness subscales were found reliable and valid. **Results:** Significant differences between ELM and BSAT programs on EI occurred in managing emotion:  $t_{97} = -3.664, p < .003$ ; adapting to change:  $t_{104} = -3.056, p < .003$ ; and understanding others' talents and skills:  $t_{91} = -3.942, p < .003$ . Significant differences between males and females on EI occurred in: self-confidence:  $t_{99} = 3.526, p < .003$ ; empathy:  $t_{89} = -3.237, p < .003$ ; and sensitivity to others:  $t_{87} = -3.406, p < .003$ . Additionally, significant differences between ELM and BSAT programs and the perception of transition of the professional degree:  $t_{136} = -6.894, p < .05$ . No significant differences in preparedness were discovered.

**Conclusions:** EI may provide appropriate evidence for the transition the professional degree. Future research efforts should continue to pursue EI as a means of comparison between programs and the effect on clinical outcomes.

**Key Words:** *entry-level masters, degree transition debate, athletic training education.*