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Perceived Understanding of Athletic Training Students' and Education Students' Field Experience by the Campus Community

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to compare the reactions Athletic Training Students (ATs) and Education Students receive about their clinical experiences.

BACKGROUND

Both Athletic Training Students and Education Students are required to have clinical experiences throughout each of their years in college. These clinical experiences often cause students to receive negative feedback from faculty, staff/administration, and peers. Field experiences call on students to be involved, take charge of their education, and learn as much as they can while out in the field. It has been proven that clinical education is a foundational stepping stone for Athletic Training as it allows students to experience what it truly means to be an athletic trainer.¹ One article describes clinical experiences as "experiential learning that gives students the opportunity to apply athletic training knowledge, skills and clinical abilities on patients."² (pg 220) The Committee on Accreditation for Athletic Training Education (CAATE) requires clinical experience so that the ATs can be prepared to succeed in any clinical environment.¹ In the clinic, ATs learn how to conduct themselves in a professional setting, this is done through observational learning from their preceptor.³ Through clinical experience, students learn and perfect the skills required of a certified athletic trainer (ATC).⁴ Clinical experience is essential to ATs' education due to its ability to let students work one-on-one with athletes. ATs can immerse themselves fully into the role of an athletic trainer through diverse and demanding clinical settings. Field work has been used in teacher preparation programs

since the 1970s and was reformed in 1980.⁵ For potential teachers, field work allows them to develop their own teaching styles.⁵ Just like in the clinical settings, education students learn how to conduct themselves in the classroom and see first-hand how topics discussed in class relate to the real world.⁶ Specifically it gives students the chance to build community, learn how to interact with different types of students, and to enhance their professional knowledge.⁵ It has been previously stated that teacher preparation and the medical profession are comparable.⁶ Both experiences allow potential professionals to see an authentic view of their future careers.^{3,6}

DESIGN and SETTING

This study used a survey research design. It was conducted at a Division III college in Ohio. The independent variable was the ATs and Education Students and their class standing. The dependent variable were the reactions that ATs and Education Students have received.

PARTICIPANTS

The survey was distributed in a convenience sample to 126 (n=126) students. The return rate was 100% (n=126). Academic major was composed of 60% (n=75) Athletic Training Students and 40% (n=51) Education Students. Year in school was composed of 41% (n=52) Freshmen, 17% (n=21) Sophomores, 21% (n=27) Juniors, 21 (n=26) Seniors.

INTERVENTION

The research was approved by the College Institutional Review Board through exempted review. Content validity was established through the Table of Specifications. Face

Student Abstract

validity was established through a panel of experts. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage counts) were used for all applicable items. Chi Square test was used with major as the grouping value. A Kruskal Wallis test was used with class standing as the grouping value. The alpha level was set at $p=0.05$ *a priori*. SPSS 24.0 was used to analyze the data.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

The survey consisted of 16 questions. Questions 1-4 and 6-12 used a 5-point Likert Scale. (Strongly Agree(5), Agree(4), Neutral(3), Disagree(2), Strongly Disagree(1)) Questions 5 and 13 used a 4-point Likert Scale. (Agree(4), Neutral(3), Disagree(2), Not Applicable(1)) Question 14 was an open-ended question and was thematically coded. Questions 15-16 were demographic questions.

RESULTS

Some interesting responses included 7.8% (n=10) people agreeing that faculty had given them an ultimatum to choose between clinical experiences and faculty requirements. 90% (n=9) of those who agreed to being given an ultimatum were Athletic Training Students, where only 10% (n=1) were Education Students. Only Athletic Training Students agreed when asked if their campus employer questioned why they had to attend clinical experiences, although only 3% (n=4) agreed. When academic majors were compared, 3 areas were statistically significant. 3.8% (n=2) of Education Students Strongly Agree or Agree that their peers make them feel guilty for attending clinical experiences, while 20% (n=15) of Athletic Training Students either Strongly Agree or Agree ($\chi^2=13.126$, $df=4$, $p=0.011$). 0% (n=0) Education Students Disagree that coaches understand the importance of clinical experiences, however, 13.3% (n=10) of Athletic Training Students Disagree ($\chi^2=7.951$, $df=3$, $p=.047$). 0% (n=0) of Education Students Disagree or Strongly Disagree about faculty understanding the

importance of clinical experience and 5.4% (n=4) of Athletic Training Students Disagree or Strongly Disagree ($\chi^2=9.863$, $df=3$, $p=0.020$). There were 8 areas that were statistically significant when comparing year in school. 0% (n=0) of Freshmen Strongly Disagree or Disagree that their peers understand the importance of clinical experience, 14.2% (n=3) of Sophomores Strongly Disagree or Disagree, 14.8% (n=4) of Juniors Strongly Disagree or Disagree, 3.8% (n=1) of Seniors Strongly Disagree or Disagree ($H=17.205$, $df=3$, $p=.001$). 0% (n=0) of Freshmen Strongly Agree or Agree that their peers make them feel guilty for attending clinical experiences, 14.2% (n=3) of Sophomores Strongly Agree or Agree, 36.6% (n=15) of Juniors Strongly Agree or Agree, and 14.8% (n=4) Seniors Strongly Agree or Agree ($H=16.486$, $df=3$, $p=.001$). 0% (n=0) of Freshmen Strongly Disagree or Disagree that faculty understand the importance of clinical experiences, 4.7% (n=1) of Sophomores Strongly Disagree or Disagree, 3.7% (n=1) of Juniors Strongly Disagree or Disagree, 7.6% (n=2) of Seniors Strongly Disagree or Disagree ($H=8.439$, $df=3$, $p=.038$). 0% (n=0) of Freshmen Strongly Agree or Agree that faculty make them feel guilty for attending clinical experiences, 9.5% (n=3) of Sophomores Strongly Agree or Agree, 18.5% (n=5) of Juniors Strongly Agree or Agree, and 7.6% (n=2) of Seniors Strongly Agree or Agree ($H=14.051$, $df=3$, $p=0.003$). All questions that dealt with staff and administration were statistically significant. 0% (n=0) of Freshmen Strongly Disagree or Disagree that staff and administration understand the importance of clinical experiences, 9.5% (n=2) of Sophomores Strongly Disagree or Disagree, 0% (n=0) Juniors Strongly Disagree or Disagree, and 7.4% (n=2) of Seniors Strongly Disagree or Disagree ($H=9.588$, $df=3$, $p=.022$). 1.9% (n=1) of Freshmen Strongly Agree or Agree that staff and administration question them about attending clinical experiences, 4.7% (n=1) of Sophomores Strongly Agree or Agree, 11.1% (n=3) of Juniors Strongly Agree

Student Abstract

or Agree, 15.3% (n=4) of Seniors Strongly Agree or Agree ($H=8.574$, $df=3$, $p=.036$). 3.8% (n=2) of Freshmen Strongly Agree or Agree that staff and administration made them feel guilty for attending clinical experiences, 9.5% (n=2) of Sophomores Strongly Agree or Agree, 3.7% (n=1) of Juniors Strongly Agree or Agree, 23% (n=6) of Seniors Strongly Agree or Agree ($H=8.035$, $df=3$, $p=.045$). 3.8% (n=2) of Freshmen had an impactful negative reaction, 14.2% (n=3) of Sophomores had an impactful negative reaction, 18.5% (n=5) of Juniors had an impactful negative reaction, and 34.6% (n=9) of Seniors had an impactful negative reaction ($H=11.633$, $df=3$, $p=.009$). Some negative reactions reported include: "My friends and family often ask me to reschedule or 'call off' clinicals... they don't respect my education." "Many professors (non AT) have made comments on how their classes must not be important to me due to having to miss a few classes due to clinical experience." "I won't be able to hire AT majors in the future. ATs can't have a job here because of your clinical hours."

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of this study, we see that Athletic Training Students do receive more negative reactions than Education Students do. This is significant because it shows a misunderstanding of the Athletic Training profession and the education required to

become an athletic trainer. If people are better educated about what Athletic Trainers do and why clinical experience is beneficial and necessary, then students would not deal with negativity as often. In all medical professions, students must complete clinical requirements in order to gain experience. This study is limited by surveying only one institution. Further research should include multiple institutions.

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