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Teacher Certification Among Athletic Training Students

Neil Curtis, EdD, ATC

ABSTRACT: Researchers have reported that athletic training students who earn teacher certification enhance their job marketability. The purpose of this study was to determine the number of athletic training students who pursue teacher certification. A survey was mailed to the directors of the 78 NATA undergraduate programs in 1992. Data from the returned surveys showed that 177 of the 703 expected graduates in 1992 and 148 of the 640 graduates in 1991 pursued teacher certification. The most common teacher certification subject area was Physical Education, followed by Health, and Science or Biology. These students should expect to take an additional

1.6 semesters (range 0 to 4) to complete teacher certification requirements. Program directors cited increased job opportunities as the main advantage, and increased time in school and financial burden as the main disadvantages of pursuing teacher certification. Although the potential for high school jobs seems enormous, there is little indication that high schools are increasingly hiring athletic trainers. Formal counseling and advising for athletic training students regarding teacher certification and job opportunities should occur in the first year of study. Additional research should assess the job market.

Athletic trainers are often in the position to advise student athletic trainers on a variety of topics, including how best to prepare for the job market. On numerous occasions, I have encountered upperclassmen and former students requesting information and advice on the merits of pursuing teacher certification. The students often display regret that they had not completed these requirements earlier in their undergraduate education. Various authors report that high school administrators prefer certified athletic trainers with teaching credentials in math, science, and physical education.^{1,11,14} Recently, the NATA stated that employment on the high school level is the key to the future for athletic training.⁶

The goal of this study was to provide information on the pursuit of teacher certification by athletic training students in approved curriculums. This information should assist athletic training educators and students in making decisions regarding educational preparation. The specific purposes were to:

1. Determine the number of students enrolled in NATA-approved undergraduate programs who pursue teacher certification.
2. Identify teacher certification subject areas pursued.
3. Determine the number of additional semesters in school needed to complete teacher certification requirements.
4. Solicit the program directors' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing teacher certification.

METHODS

A questionnaire was mailed to the directors of the 78 NATA undergraduate programs in the Spring of 1992. The survey was designed to objectively obtain information on the number of students seeking or gaining teacher certification, the discipline in which they were seeking teacher certification, and the additional length of time necessary to complete the require-

ments. The survey concluded with two open-ended questions seeking the program directors' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages for athletic training students pursuing teacher certification.

Each program director received a mailing containing a cover letter describing the purpose of the study, a survey instrument, and a prepaid self-addressed return envelope. After 21 days, a follow-up letter and survey were mailed to those not responding to the initial mailing. Descriptive statistics were computed using standard spreadsheet software. The open-ended questions were compiled and analyzed by hand using standard qualitative procedures to categorize the program directors' comments.⁴

RESULTS

A total of 72 questionnaires (92%) were returned. Program directors identified 387 of the 1966 students currently enrolled in NATA undergraduate programs (20%) as seeking teacher certification. Of the 703 students graduating in 1992, 177 (25%) pursued teacher certification. Of the 640 students graduating in 1991, 148 (23%) pursued teacher certification. Table 1 shows the teacher certification subject areas of the classes of 1991 and 1992.

The remaining results are based on questions regarding the 1343 students in the classes of 1991 and 1992. Programs varied greatly in the number of athletic training students (range 4 to 40, \bar{x} = 18.7), the number of these students seeking teacher certification (range 0 to 22, \bar{x} = 4.5), and the percentage of students seeking teacher certification (range 0% to 100%, \bar{x} = 21%). Nine program directors (12.5%) reported that none of the athletic training students in the classes of 1991 and 1992 pursued teacher certification. One program (1.4%) reported that all students (100%) pursued teacher certification. Program directors indicated that the following percentages of athletic training students sought teacher certification: 0% to 24% = 40 programs (5.5%), 25% to 49% = 22 (30.5%), 50% to 74% = 5 (7%), and 75% to 100% = 5 (7%). Athletic training students

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Table 1. Subject Areas of Athletic Training Students Pursuing Teacher Certification in 1991 and 1992

Subject	No of Students	% of All Students (n = 1343)	% of Teacher Certification Students (n = 325)
Physical Ed (PE)	206	15.3	63.4
Health	48	3.6	14.8
Science or Biology	25	1.9	7.7
PE and Health	17	1.3	5.2
PE and Biology*	12	.9	3.7
Science and Health	6	.5	1.9
History	5	.4	1.5
Math	3	.2	.9
Other	3	.2	.9
[All PE	235	17.5	72.3]
[All Health	71	5.3	21.3]
[All Science + Bio	43	3.2	13.2]

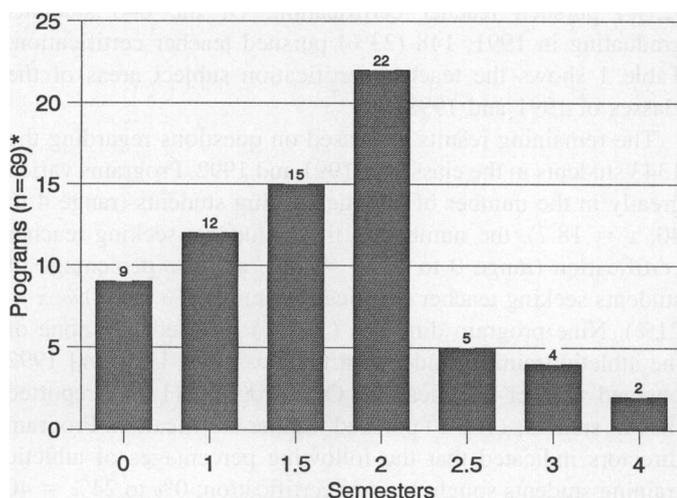
* All PE and Bio students were from one institution.

should expect to take an additional 1.6 semesters (range 0 to 4 semesters) to complete teacher certification requirements (see Figure).

Fifty-four of the athletic training programs (75%) were offered through the Departments of Physical Education (n = 48) or Kinesiology (n = 6); however, no programs required students to complete teacher certification. The program directors' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages for athletic training students pursuing teacher certification are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively.

DISCUSSION

Athletic training curriculums evolved from physical education programs. The 1959 NATA-approved curriculum required physical education teacher certification. By 1970, the NATA curriculum guidelines no longer required teacher certification, but most of the courses required were traditional physical education courses such as exercise physiology, history, organization and administration of physical education, and 9 credits on coaching. In 1983, and again in 1988, the NATA Profes-



Additional time required to complete teacher certification *(three programs did not respond to this question).

Table 2. Program Directors' Response to the Question: What Do You Feel Are the Advantages for Undergraduate Athletic Training Students in Pursuing Teacher Certification?

Category	Number of Program Directors Listing This
Increased job marketability/opportunities	60
Improved teaching/communication skills	15
Increased pay/job security/conditions	12

Table 3. Program Directors' Response to the Question: What Do You Feel Are the Disadvantages for Undergraduate Athletic Training Students in Pursuing Teacher Certification?

Category	Program Directors Listing This
Increased time in college/financial burden	46
Decrease in high school jobs/increase in clinic jobs	14
TC requirements too restrictive for AT students to complete	11
Philosophically disagree with preparing students to work two full-time jobs	7
Others	6

sional Education Committee guidelines stated that programs should be designed to prepare qualified athletic trainers and teacher-trainers, strongly recommending the completion of a secondary teaching credential.^{8,9} Current CAAHEP guidelines make no direct reference to teacher certification.² Beginning with the 1980 NATA resolution requiring approved athletic training programs to become academic majors or major-equivalent (to be fully implemented by 1990), athletic training students were less likely to pursue teacher certification. In a program as majors or major-equivalents, students were required to complete an increased number of credits in athletic training subject matter and therefore increased the total number of credits and time to complete a teaching credential. Kauth³ presented a roundtable discussion that addressed the concern that the curricular changes may preclude students from gaining teacher certification.

High schools offer the possibility of between 10,000 and 20,000 jobs for graduates of athletic training programs.⁷ One 1994 study¹⁴ and two studies from the mid 1980s^{1,11} reported that high school administrators prefer certified athletic trainers with teaching credentials in math, science, or physical education. There is little debate that earning a teaching credential makes one more desirable for most high school athletic training positions.^{3,7} A 1994 survey of secondary school athletic trainers¹⁰ reported that 81% of the responding certified athletic trainers working exclusively in a high school had teacher certification, compared to 34% of certified athletic trainers working in a clinic/high school. A review of the most recent NATA placement vacancy notices showed that there are school districts across the nation searching for athletic trainers with teacher certification.

Earning teaching credentials does not necessarily make one a more competent athletic trainer. A 1986 study¹³ reported that 67% of undergraduate program directors and 54% of department chairpersons preferred not to require athletic training

students to earn a teaching certificate. High schools are hiring athletic trainers without teaching certificates.^{10,12} At the college and professional level and in the sports medicine clinics, teacher certification is generally not expected. Although the potential for high school jobs seems enormous, and high school administrators prefer athletic trainers with teaching credentials, there is little evidence to indicate that a momentous hiring initiative will occur. There are approximately 23,000 high schools in the United States. According to the NATA, 2157 certified athletic trainers were employed directly by high schools in July 1995, a 15% increase from the 1828 reported in February 1993. Another 2382 certified athletic trainers provide services to high schools through contracts with sports medicine clinics. In 1994, Sexton et al¹⁴ reported that only 9% of responding midwestern high school administrators found it financially feasible to hire an athletic trainer. Placement statistics of those students completing undergraduate approved programs in 1994 showed that 168 of the 312 graduates accepting athletic training jobs (54%) did so at a clinic, 54 at a high school (17%), and 46 at a college (15%).⁵ These percentages have been similar for the last 4 years.

Whether or not to pursue teacher certification is ultimately the student's decision. As educators, mentors, and advisors, we must be knowledgeable about the current and future athletic training employment opportunities. As Prentice and Mishler¹¹ asked in 1986, "Are our athletic training education programs . . . preparing students for the type of employment opportunities which will most likely exist following graduation?" To answer this, further research is needed to assess the job market at the high school and at the clinic level. When, if ever, will more high schools begin to hire full-time athletic trainers or teacher/athletic trainers? What more can we do as a profession to foster this? Will sports medicine clinics continue to be the place of employment for the largest percentage of entry-level athletic trainers? Will the clinics continue to provide athletic training services to high schools at an increasing rate? How long do entry-level athletic trainers remain in these clinic jobs and what do they do when they leave?

Formal counseling and advising for athletic training students regarding teacher certification and job opportunities should occur in the first year of study. At this time, students with an interest in high school athletic training should be encouraged to gain teacher certification. As reported in this study, physical education continues to be the most popular teacher certification subject area. This is likely due to the close relationship many athletic training programs have with physical education programs and the similar coursework in areas such as anatomy,

physiology, and exercise science. As suggested by other authors,^{1,11,14} athletic trainers may be more marketable with teacher certification in other areas, such as science and math. Students who expect to pursue opportunities where a teaching credential is not required need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of earning a teaching certificate while they are still undergraduates. The advantages are the availability and access of the appropriate courses, and the greater potential for job mobility in the future. The disadvantages are an extended and more costly undergraduate career, and possible lack of interest in teacher preparation requirements.

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