

From Graduate Student to Professor: Reflection on the Transition and Tips for Those Who Follow

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In 2010, Berry¹ asked column readers, “How well do we know how to teach?” He discussed the need for more doctorally educated athletic trainers to fill faculty positions in athletic training programs, which supports the call by others for more PhDs in athletic training.^{2,3} Berry¹ also contemplated whether a doctoral degree signifies that an athletic training educator (ATE) understands pedagogy, just as Craig⁴ questioned whether master’s-level athletic trainers were prepared to excel as educators. Successful completion of the Board of Certification (BOC) examination verifies that an athletic trainer has the knowledge and skills associated with the entry-level practice of athletic training, but earning a terminal degree “does not mean that the person holding this degree necessarily understands how to design, implement, assess, or even instruct his/her content expertise.”^{1(p38)} Craig^{4(p28)} further supported this statement when she stated, “Not only do Athletic Training Programs (ATP) instructors need to be knowledge experts, they must also be able to effectively teach that knowledge.”

The question now is this: How do new faculty members in athletic training programs accomplish all that is required in their first few years in academia, especially when pedagogy was not part of their degree preparation? Through this column, we hope to provide practical advice to new, and soon to be new, faculty members in athletic training that is based on the current research and our own personal experiences. We also hope this column helps both new and experienced educators reflect on their current positions and teaching practices. Last, we call for experienced educators to reach out and mentor new faculty members in all three areas of academic life—teaching, scholarship, and service.

Preparation for the Faculty Role

Preparing future faculty members for the multiple roles they will play in higher education in general has been the subject of many scholarly publications throughout the last 60 years.^{5–8} Improving the undergraduate-education experience through better classroom instruction is currently a significant issue to many stakeholders in higher education and one being

constantly debated and explored.^{5–8} Athletic training is not immune to the discussion of and calls for improvement in teaching and learning. Educational reform is still under way in athletic training programs and, as recently as the February 2013 issue of the *NATA News*, there was a call for best practices in teaching athletic training. Ray⁹ discussed changes in athletic training education in his 2002 acceptance speech for the National Athletic Trainers' Association's (NATA) Sayers “Bud” Miller Distinguished Educator Award. Specific to the way ATEs teach, Ray⁹ addressed what curriculum expansion would mean to ATEs who need to help students learn more material in the same amount of class time as previously allocated. The ATEs must become more effective and efficient with their teaching in order to accomplish this change. Ray^{9(p3)} stated, “We [ATEs] are going to have to refine our teaching methods so that we can help students learn more and learn better in the fixed and rather small amount of time we spend with them every week. We will become organizers for our students’ learning instead of content deliverers.”

The questions we ask column readers today—How do new faculty members in athletic training programs accomplish all this, especially when pedagogy was not part of their degree preparation? How do new faculty members integrate all of the educational and foundational content that must be addressed in the classroom, psychomotor skills that should be practiced in the classroom and during organized clinical education experiences, along with everything else that is required of a tenure-track junior faculty member? We also cannot ignore all the requirements outside of teaching, including (1) attending the multitude of meetings and events required of faculty (eg, everything from department meetings to convocations and graduation), (2) advising undergraduate students, (3) participating in thesis and dissertation committees, (4) conducting research, (5) mentoring student research, (6) serving as either the program director or clinical education coordinator, and (7) everything else that falls under the category of “service to the profession, university, and the community.”^{10–12} Item number 4 deserves a little extra attention, because while a new faculty member is prepping 3 or 4 new courses a semester, attending countless meetings, and really just trying to stay one

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day ahead of the students, he or she is also supposed to begin establishing an independent line of research or scholarship in his or her spare time. Authors such as Knight and Ingersoll,¹³ Starkey and Ingersoll,¹⁴ Hertel et al.,² and Turocy¹⁵ have stressed in their publications the importance of scholarship in athletic training to help develop the profession. The NATA Research and Education Foundation has established a mentorship program for new researchers, but that is only one piece of the puzzle for new faculty members—all 3 areas (teaching, scholarship, and service) must be addressed for success in tenure-track faculty positions.

New faculty members should know before going into higher education that there are 3 main tenets to a tenure-track faculty position, but for many this will be the first time putting all 3 together. Starkey and Ingersoll^{14(p156)} stated, “appointment in a tenure-track position carries with it a set of demands that are unique to the world of academia. No other work environment offers a concept similar to tenure, a lifetime contract.” During graduate school, the focus of many doctoral students is research related to their dissertation and potential publications rather than teaching and service to the university and the profession.^{5,7,16–18} For some future ATEs, their responsibilities during graduate school may focus on clinical athletic training¹⁰ with little emphasis on either teaching or research. A newly hired faculty member may have little to no experience actually teaching independently^{4,19,20} or may not understand what it takes to be an effective ATE¹¹ who can inspire and mentor academic excellence and leadership in his or her students.^{11,21,22} Gardner^{17(p162)} stated that this approach to preparing faculty is “sending mixed signals,” because the majority of PhD graduates will not end up working at research institutions like the ones they attended for their doctoral degrees.^{5,16,18} To some, teaching may be the most important aspect to the tenure and promotion process,¹² and to others it is the reason they became athletic training program directors.²³ These future faculty members are experiencing a singular, compartmentalized aspect of the role of a faculty member and not the entire spectrum of responsibilities that awaits them as professors at different types of institutions with much different expectations from their initial training. Whose responsibility is it then to prepare a future faculty member when the clear goal of going to graduate school is to teach—the graduate school he or she attended or the students enrolled in the first 12 credits taught by this newly ordained faculty member?

Research on Teaching and Learning in Athletic Training

If asked what I (D.C.B.) learned from my graduate studies, I would state, “I learned a little of everything, but really only the bare minimum to be an effective educator.” In fact, after 13 years of reflection I have come to realize that graduate school provided me with a basic foundation only. It was the time spent being mentored in and outside the classroom and additional postgraduate education that has helped me to be a good educator. If asked what I (E.K.P.) learned from my graduate studies and during my dissertation, I would simply state, “There is no ‘right’ way to teach.” One study that helps illustrate this point explored the impact of student-centered versus teacher-centered instruction on examination scores.²⁴ From their research the authors concluded, “Student-centered instruction, although effective in practical applications, is not as effective as teacher-centered instruction when the goal is to

teach theory and skill to pre-athletic training students.”^{24(p204)} They continued to discuss that student-centered instruction might be more effective later in the students’ academic careers or in laboratory-based classes.²⁴ This study by Livecchi et al.²⁴ drew attention to the importance of using both student-centered and teacher-centered instruction, depending on the material taught, the educational setting in which it was delivered, and the method of testing.

Monaco and Martin²⁵ also addressed the differences between instructors’ teaching styles and the learning preferences of “Millennial” students. The authors identified the characteristics of Millennial students and how these characteristics could influence teaching and learning. Monaco and Martin^{25(p46)} stated,

No longer is education given to the students for recitation through a text and lecture style model. This generation is a collaborative and social generation that has a focus on understanding and building their knowledge through various forms of medium to discover the answers.

New ATEs must consider the learning characteristics of this generation of students when designing courses and creating class activities. The instructional methods that were used when some educators were in school may not be the most effective ways to teach today’s athletic training students.^{11,26,27} Monaco and Martin’s²⁵ article provides ATEs with practical advice for designing syllabi, providing student feedback, and planning course assignments and activities and is a highly recommended read for all ATEs.

Schellhase^{28,29} examined teaching styles, the amount of formal coursework in ATEs’ education, and student evaluations of instructional outcomes. The amount of formal coursework was self-reported by the participants and included both graduate and undergraduate education-related courses. Schellhase^{28(p98)} stated that the research indicated “evidence to suggest that more educational coursework leads to improved teacher quality as perceived by students” Schellhase^{28,29} recommended additional research in the area of ATEs’ background and preparation to address the possible need for more formal preparation of athletic training education faculty. Schellhase’s²⁸ findings demonstrated a positive relationship between ATEs’ background in teaching coursework and teaching effectiveness. Thus, the findings support the need for more instruction for ATEs in teaching strategies and methods, which support the previous work of Craig.⁴

The results of my (E.K.P.) own research²⁶ on teaching in athletic training programs found that the selection of teaching methods by ATEs began with reflective practice and continued with a willingness to adapt their teaching methods. Reflections on teaching effectiveness by the ATEs was the cornerstone of their practice,^{26,30} as well as being a self-directed learner.¹ Through reflective teaching and willingness to adapt their teaching strategies, the ATEs in the study indicated they were able to address the needs of their students as they prepared them to be professional athletic trainers. It should be noted, though, that reflection on one’s teaching strategies does not, and should not occur, only after the conclusion of the course. Educators should reflect not only on action, but also in action as well.¹ If something is not working

Figure. Top 12 Tips for New Educators.

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| 1. Make sure you take time for yourself and family. |
| 2. Find a mentor at your institution and beyond. |
| 3. Learn who your students are. |
| 4. Model responsibility, accountability, and respect back to students. |
| 5. Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer. |
| 6. It is okay to say "no". |
| 7. Get to know ALL your colleagues in your department and college. |
| 8. Make sure to schedule time for research and writing. |
| 9. Relate theory to practice and give real life examples. ²⁵ |
| 10. Reflect on your teaching and learn from your mistakes. |
| 11. Know the tenure and promotion requirements/guideline at your institution. ^{3,10,12,23} |
| 12. If you are still in graduate school, consider adding a course on teaching methodology to your program of study and real life teaching experience. ^{3,4,29} |

in the classroom, one should not continue to plow through a concept using a failing teaching strategy. Students see through this and the ATE loses any respect he or she has gained. Stop, evaluate, and refocus on what is occurring, right there on the spot. Use it as a learning experience, get student feedback on the experience, and use this immediate feedback to your advantage.

Although ATE teaching methods have been found to vary, with no right way to teach, ATEs often reported using whatever strategy they believed was best for their students.²⁶ The ATEs in my (E.K.P.) study also identified mentoring as essential in their own development as educators. All of the participants discussed the influence different mentors had on their teaching practice over the course of their careers in academia.

Mentoring, in fact, is viewed by students as an essential quality that makes for an effective ATE.¹¹ Educators should be able to listen to their students to understand their perspectives on various topics and concepts within the athletic training profession.^{11,22,26,31} When educators demonstrate effective listening skills, there is often a respectful dialogue that naturally develops and leads to a strengthening of the student's education, and a positive mentoring relationship is fostered. For example, listening to a student's perspective on a new technique or difference in opinion between a preceptor and faculty member may result in new questions and thoughts on the part of the educator and preceptor that, in turn, triggers the desire to investigate the topic further via research. In this way, the educator develops a level of respect for the student, and a mentor-mentee relationship begins to form. It is when ATEs choose not to listen that issues begin to surface.

As the number of required competencies grow and the call for evidence-based practice (EBP) increases, there is a need for more research to investigate effective teaching in athletic training programs. As discussed by Ray,⁹ ATEs need to cover an ever-increasing content amount within the time frame of the current curriculum. The ATEs have a responsibility to meet the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) requirements, to prepare students for the BOC examination, and to help socialize students to the professional standards of the NATA.^{32,33} Currently there is no requirement from the CAATE that ATEs have training or experience in teaching methods.²⁹ The delivery and presenta-

tion of the required content to students is at the discretion of the individual academic programs and specific faculty members.³²

Improving the undergraduate educational experience through better classroom instruction is currently an important issue to many stakeholders in higher education.^{5-8,34-36} It is suggested that through effective teaching, learning can improve at the undergraduate level.⁶ Certified athletic trainers are currently using EBP in the clinical setting, and EBP is now part of the prescribed CAATE educational components; therefore, teaching in athletic training programs needs to be based on research.^{37,38} Weidner^{38(p117)} stated, "As our colleagues build a body of best evidence in medical education, so must athletic training educators recognize, and act upon, the obligation to incorporate these concepts into both our teaching and research."

There are numerous studies addressing teaching and learning in the clinical setting, but little if any research has been conducted to examine effects of classroom teaching.¹⁵ Even today, one could argue that the research related to teaching athletic training is still lacking the "breadth and depth" discussed by Turocy.¹⁵ What research does exist often examines specific teaching strategies and is often limited to small convenience populations such that it may difficult to extrapolate the results to athletic training students in general.³⁹⁻⁴¹ For the new tenure-track faculty, examining the state of pedagogy in athletic training is a potentially wide-open area.

Top 12 Tips for New Educators

The following is a list of 12 tips for new educators to ponder (Figure). This list is by no means all-inclusive or in any particular order; rather, it should be viewed as a starting platform to help new and even seasoned educators to reflect one their current state of educational effectiveness and what they can do it improve this effectiveness.

1. It is OK to take time for yourself, really. Do not give up on the things you enjoy just to accomplish your to-do list each day. If you get everything done today, what are you going to do tomorrow? You need to remember the importance of balance in both your professional and personal lives.

Program directors may not feel they have the time to do everything that is required of them and are unsure how everything “fits in” with the overall priorities of the position. If left unsettled, this stressor could lead to job burnout and eventually more severe consequences, such as removing themselves from the athletic training profession completely.^{12(p39)}

The papers will still be there to grade tomorrow and students will get over not getting them back by the next class. I (E.K.P.) never really grasped this until another faculty member admitted to having papers from 3 weeks before that she had still not finished grading. After that discussion, I realized I do not need to be a superwoman and return every assignment the next class. However, from my perspective (D.C.B.), never hold work for 3 weeks. Have a life, but remember we expect students to meet our timelines; thus, we owe them the courtesy to be “timely” with their graded work, especially if it is foundational work for another project. It is not fair to students to grade them poorly on a second assignment when a similar first assignment was never graded and handed back. I (E.K.P.) agree, especially with assignments that build upon one another. Set realistic timelines that account for grading and inevitable “things that pop up,” and communicate this to your students.

2. Your new faculty orientation, if you have one, will not even scratch the surface of what you need to know. Find someone at the institution, in or out of your discipline (even both) to serve as a mentor. You will need someone to help answer all your questions and share with you what he or she has done in the past. For example, it is beneficial to start from a template with specific examples for your annual faculty activity report. It is also great to have someone to ask where to get a conference poster printed, what university events are really mandatory, and what will be the format of the first dissertation defense you are attending.

As discussed above, the NATA Research and Education Foundation has established a mentorship program for new researchers (see <http://www.natafoundation.org/research/mentor-program>), but new faculty members are on their own to reach out to other ATEs. Craig^{4(p36)} suggested, “Set up structured mentoring, including a formal relationship with a mentor and specific guidelines, goals, and expectations in advance.” These mentors can be in or out of your institution and the relationship can be established in graduate school or after.²⁶ The important part is finding mentors to help you through the transition from graduate school to being an ATE.

3. Learn who your students are, establish your expectations up front, and demonstrate to your students a modicum of compassion when earned. Earning your terminal degree at a large metropolitan university with a large research emphasis may be vastly different from working at a small regional or affiliated institution where teaching is the focus. Working with Millennial students versus Generation X students also must be considered. Millennial students, for example, have a reticent commitment to homework and become shocked when they do not receive an A or B in their college courses.²⁵ They also believe the workplace should learn to conform to them, rather than they learn to adapt and respect the needs of the

workplace or the individuals whom they work for and alongside. This has transcended to higher education, and educators sometimes feel the need to adapt to the students rather than expecting the students to adapt to them. Students need to understand the goals and expectations of an educator, and the educator needs to understand the students’ perspective and must clearly spell out expectations. Behaviors such as dedication, responsibility, accountability, and respect must be the driving force behind the development of successful, confident, achieving, and goal-oriented students. In fact, it is my firm belief (D.C.B.), based on my observation of higher education students, that those who demonstrate appropriate levels of respect, accountability, and responsibility will, by virtue of engaging in these behaviors, demonstrate a level of excellence necessary to succeed academically, professionally, and personally.¹¹ But this only comes when these behaviors of responsibility, accountability, and respect are modeled back to students.

4. Model responsibility, accountability, and respect back to students. For example, responsibility “is the ability of the student to demonstrate responsibility to self, peers, and the instructor by making moral decisions (concerned with correct conduct) while remaining reliable and dependable.”^{21(p92)} As an educator, if we are asking students to demonstrate a modicum of responsibility, shouldn’t we ATEs be responsible for the same? This is probably a debatable point for educators; however, asking and grading a student on the ability to reliably and competently complete a task suggests that an ATE should reciprocate in kind (eg, returning graded papers in a timely fashion).

Accountability “is the ability of the student to demonstrate to themselves, peers, and instructors the ability to be obliged to account for your own action(s) and/or lack of action(s).”^{21(p92)} As educators, we expect students to accept the consequences when they are at fault for items such as poor work or lackluster performances during clinical education experiences, rather than blaming others for their inaction(s). We also ask them to take a moment of time to reflect on events that lead to poor work or lackluster performance. Should an educator be held to a lower standard when engaging students? Again, another debatable point for some, but a point to reflect on when one wants to call himself or herself a “truly effective” educator.

Finally, *respect* or *respectfulness* is defined as the

ability of the student to demonstrate to themselves, peers, and instructors a minimal level of courteousness, feeling of friendship, level of being respected, sense of worth and dignity, and concern for one’s academic, professional, and personal well-being.^{21(p92)}

Respect is a two-way street. Respect is what helps to keep the classroom civilized and, honestly, helps keep students motivated, continuing to strive for academic and professional excellence. As an educator, demonstrating courtesy and concern for their well-being to the students goes a long way in terms of getting student to “buy into” the insane amount of work and the expectations educators thrust upon them during their stay in an athletic training program.

5. Don't EVER be afraid to say you don't know the answer—it is as simple as that. If you do not know the answer to a question, simply respond, "That is a great question. I am unsure of the best answer; let me do some research and get back to you next class." Better yet, throw the question back at them, give them the opportunity to reflect on it, make it a classroom discussion (be careful not to get to off topic, however). Also consider having the students look up the answer and/or incorporate a discussion about the question in your next class period. I (E.K.P.) felt like I earned the most respect from students by using this approach during my first year.
6. It's OK to say no. If you thought you were busy your last year of graduate school, your first year as full-time faculty will make that look like vacation. What you need to remember your first year is that it is OK to say no to (some) things. Saying yes to everything does 2 things. One—you will be burdened with assignments and activities you are not quite ready for or prepared to handle. Two—there is rarely enough time in the day to complete everything you say yes to. Beyond being a new full-time faculty member, odds are you have a life and you do not want to prioritize work over your personal life. I (D.C.B.) did that starting out and it was OK until I had my first child, but family, work, and service conflicts develop and work responsibilities often eventually suffer. Just as you teach the students to prioritize their time, as a new faculty you need to prioritize your yeses and nos. Use your mentor(s) to help decide what you can say no to at your institution. During your faculty orientation someone will tell you that serving at the midnight dinner before finals is important for all new faculty and looks really good on your faculty activity report—a publication looks better. You can also say no to students. Although you might want to have a very liberal open-door policy at your office, this might be counterproductive for getting your own work done. Do not be afraid to ask a student at your door to stop by during posted office hours or to schedule a meeting for another time. To quote one of my (E.K.P.) mentors, "Sometimes a quick question requires a long answer."
7. Get to know ALL your colleagues in your department and college. Make your own personal judgments about your peers, and do not be persuaded by a certain few folks in your department. Walk down your hallway, say "Hi," and introduce yourself to faculty at the other end of the hall. Colleagues are not just limited to fellow faculty—get to know the administrative staff and facility personnel. Honestly, the administrative staff and facility personnel are probably more important than fellow faculty. If they have been around long enough they know the workings of the campus and will help you navigate, but only if you demonstrate a little respect and treat them with dignity. This item was not on my (E.K.P.) original list, but once D.C.B. suggested it I could relate and saw the value in this tip. I needed this tip not too long ago. We suggest going into a new position with an open mind and friendliness toward everyone. Meet as many new colleagues and support staff as possible and form your own conclusions based on your own interactions. Be careful not to form alliances too soon, especially in a highly political department or college: How you align yourself early on could set the tone for a very long time.
8. Prepping and teaching can consume your schedule and that is OK, your department chair and dean expect that, but make sure to schedule time for research and writing into your week. Your dissertation is not going to publish itself. Anything you can get done in the scholarship category your first year will look very good. Posters, abstracts, work from graduate school—drag out your graduate school endeavors during the first year and then refocus on establishing your line of research in the summer when you have a chance to breathe. Use your mentor(s) and the colleagues you have met earlier and pair with them for in-class projects, scholarship, and grant writing. Finding a solid grant writer in nursing or occupational therapy and creating an interprofessional project can help to balance the craziness during the first couple of years.
9. Whenever possible, give real-life examples in the classroom. There is no better way to help students learn a theory than by relating it to their current or future clinical practice. They need concrete examples that are important, but more important, practical and relatable. With that advice comes a caveat: Give examples without storytelling. Yes, stories can be used to illustrate a point, but use them sparingly. Millennials crave examples that they can directly relate to and where they are the focus.²⁵
10. Take a few minutes after each class session and write down what went well and what can be improved the next time you teach that lesson or course. If you don't, when that next semester comes around, you will remember the highs and the lows, but you might not call to mind the everyday "stuff" that needs to be remembered. If you gave a great example or students asked specific questions, write them down as well. That way, when you prep the course next year, a lot of your work will already be done. Remember, one of the keys to successful teaching is reflective practice. Something as quick and easy as taking 5 minutes to reflect on that day's lesson can be the start of your reflective practice. One accomplished ATE, a participant in my (E.K.P.) study, admitted to keeping teaching journals for this very reason.
11. Know the tenure and promotion requirements/guidelines at your institution^{3,10,12,23} and use them to guide your priorities. Use your mentor's tenure file as a template (assuming he or she is tenured). Be prepared for expectations to change over time and for personal interpretations to cloud the process, especially when tenure and promotion requirements/guidelines are not always well articulated. Understand how scholarship differs from research and how service to the community may be different from service to the profession. Although your students should be your priority in the classroom, you also need to make sure your future is a priority to you. If you want to read an interesting

perspective on tenure and promotion specific to athletic training faculty, read Dewald and Walsh.¹⁰

12. If you are still in graduate school, consider adding a course on teaching methodology to your program of study.^{3,4,29} If a course is not offered in your department or college, look to the university's college of education or nursing program. Many universities with graduate nurse educator programs have courses in methodology and curriculum design that could be applicable to the ATE. With that, add real-life teaching experiences during graduate school as well. Volunteer as a teaching assistant in undergraduate athletic training courses if that is not already part of your graduate assistantship.

CONCLUSIONS

How do new faculty members in athletic training programs accomplish all that is required in the first few years in academia? Carefully—and by using their resources wisely. The more informed new faculty members are of what is expected of them, the better prepared they can be. Do not be afraid to ask questions and seek multiple points of advice. Do not rely on just one person to mentor you throughout your career and in all aspects. Reach out to experienced educators, both in your institution and outside, as mentors. And to experienced ATEs reading this column: Return the calls and e-mails from new faculty members looking for advice or help with a project. Think back to everyone who helped you get to where you are today. It is your turn to give back to the profession and mentor the next generation of ATEs. Dewald and Walsh¹⁰ questioned whether tenure-track ATEs are being set up to fail, but Rich³ discussed the headway that junior faculty are making in integrating athletic training into higher education. We must continue to move the profession of athletic training and the career path of athletic training education forward by preparing future ATEs to succeed.

If after reading this you have additional recommendations or tips for new educators, we would like you to share these with the column editor. We will compile these suggestions and disseminate them at another point in time.

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