

A New Era

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Although I have no authority whatsoever to make such a declaration, I am hereby identifying the 43rd volume of the *Journal of Athletic Training* as the first of a new era in athletic training research. The scholarship of a young profession, like a new business, follows an S-shaped growth curve. The first phase of the curve is a slow, systematic development period. The second is a steep growth period. The last is a plateau phase, when the profession becomes established and its scholarship continues at a steady pace. I am declaring, without permission, that we have completed the first phase of scholarly development and are entering the second—the steep growth period.

What is my evidence for making such a bold statement? First, the 43rd volume of the *Journal of Athletic Training* differs from the preceding 42 in that 6, instead of 4, issues will be included. Both the quality and number of manuscripts submitted to the *Journal* have risen exponentially in the last few years. Four issues per year are no longer enough to publish all the high-quality manuscripts needed to develop our professional knowledge base. The rise in quality manuscripts has, in fact, mirrored the growth curve I described previously.

However, the volume of quality papers submitted to the *Journal* alone does not characterize all the literature currently being developed by athletic training scholars. Athletic training scholars also are submitting quality manuscripts to other journals. The *Journal of Athletic Training*, even in a bimonthly format, cannot contain all of the knowledge being developed by our scholars. Another sign that a new era is upon us.

As many heard last summer, the *Journal* has been accepted for indexing by MEDLINE. This is the definitive database for medical literature. Being indexed by MEDLINE ensures that sports medicine and other medical professionals will be able to easily find our scholarly contributions. As such, we become more visible contributors to the larger medical knowledge base. New responsibilities, new era.

When I entered the academy in the late 1980s, only a handful of athletic trainers were regularly engaged in scholarship and publishing their work in peer-reviewed journals. Twenty years later, these individuals are our senior scholars and still relatively few in number, but the number of midcareer scholars has flourished. These midcareer scholars are extremely prolific and are responsible for a dramatic “raising of the bar” for our new scholars. New scholars in athletic training are entering the academy with expectations of publishing peer-reviewed papers and securing external grants at the same level as

members of the more mature disciplines. New expectations, new era.

Our scholarship is being recognized in the media. For example, recent media coverage of our special issue on data from the NCAA Injury Surveillance System and the Gessel et al “Concussions Among United States High School and Collegiate Athletes” paper has demonstrated that our scholarly contributions are valued by society. We are looked to as the experts by the public. New exposure, new era.

Finally, I came across the following statement in an issue of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association*: “Throughout its development, the profession of athletic training has generated a unique body of literature.”¹ From this seemingly innocuous statement, we can derive 2 important points. First, we have been identified as a profession by yet another outside group (athletic training was formally recognized as an allied health profession by the American Medical Association in 1991). In this case, it is medical librarians, the professionals who characterize and categorize the medical literature. Athletic trainers have struggled to find homes in the structure of the academy, but we are now in dozens of different departments, schools, and programs. Much of this variability in where we are housed comes from various opinions on whether we are our own profession, because athletic training is often categorized as a subspecialty of other areas. We certainly have contended for years that we are our own profession; now unbiased, external opinion supports our assertion. Second, we have been credited with generating a unique body of knowledge. This function is certainly critical in being identified as a profession but also in becoming a discipline. Professionals may or may not come from a discipline. A discipline has curricula or degree programs, licensing, a code of ethics, standardization, accreditation, and a unique body of knowledge. Having a unique body of knowledge is the core of a discipline and feeds the other components. Having established this core, we can now stake our claim to a discipline. Status as a discipline provides an argument for departmental status in the academy. New status, new era.

I, for one, couldn't be more excited to enter this new era of athletic training research. I've waited a long time for this. Surrounded by enthusiastic colleagues on this journey, I've fastened my seat belt and am ready for the ride. Are you?

REFERENCE

1. Delwiche FA, Hall EF. Mapping the literature of athletic training. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2007;95(2):195–201.