

**Standards and Guidelines for Post-Certification Graduate
Athletic Training Education Programs
Jan 2002**

PREFACE

Since 1969, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Professional Education Committee provided assistance and guidance in curriculum development and officially approved both undergraduate and graduate athletic training education programs in colleges and universities throughout the United States. In 1997, the Graduate Education Committee of the NATA Education Council was charged with evaluating and revising the graduate standards and guidelines. Then, in 1998, the NATA Graduate Review Committee was organized and charged with the responsibility for evaluating and recommending accreditation status of post-certification graduate athletic training education programs to the NATA Board of Directors.

This manual has been prepared as a guide for college and university personnel interested in developing and/or maintaining an NATA accredited post-certification graduate athletic training education program.

This manual is subject to periodic revision by the Graduate Education Committee. While every effort will be made to inform appropriate institution personnel of significant revisions, it is the responsibility of the sponsoring institution to keep abreast of current standards and criteria that may affect accreditation of their program. Questions regarding Standards or Guidelines interpretation or other matters pertaining to development and implementation of an NATA accredited post-certification graduate athletic training education program should be directed to the Chair of the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee.

I. About this Document

- A. Information in this document is presented in 6 sections. The first 3 sections are philosophical in nature. They build the foundation upon which post-certification graduate athletic training education is based. Section IV contains all the standards and guidelines that programs must address. Accreditation policies and a glossary make up the last 2 sections.
 - 1. Section I, About this Document - overview of the entire document.
 - 2. Section II, Principles and Philosophy of Post-certification Graduate Athletic Training Education – statement of philosophy of post-certification graduate athletic training education programs with related goals and objectives.
 - 3. Section III, Program Development and Implementation – overview of developing
 - 4. Section IV, Program Standards and Guidelines – essential elements of NATA-accredited post-certification graduate athletic training education programs. All standards and guidelines are contained in this section.
 - 5. Section V, Accreditation - information necessary for submission of self-study materials, application fee, on-site visitation, approval and appeal processes.
 - 6. Section VI, Glossary – definition and interpretation of key terms used in this manual.

- B. An Advocacy Document

These Standards and Guidelines are aimed at encouraging thought and empowering institutions and program directors so they can develop programs around their unique strengths or points of distinctiveness. Thus it is expected that there will be much greater variety in program design, content, and foci amongst graduate programs than amongst undergraduate and entry-level graduate programs.

Institutions will have increased freedom to innovate, to experiment with new ideas and approaches, to venture into the unknown. Not every attempt at innovation will meet with the same level of success. As educators counsel together, successful innovations will be retained and shared with colleagues and will therefore lead to stronger graduate education programs, stronger graduates, and a stronger profession.

II. Principles and Philosophy of Post-Certification Graduate Athletic Training Education

- A. General Principles of Graduate Education

- 1. Mastery of subject matter. Graduate education facilitates mastery over the content and skills of the discipline at a level appropriate to the degree sought.

2. Critical thinking. Graduate education develops and refines critical thinking skills including a thorough knowledge of the assumptions of the discipline and an understanding of viable alternative assumptions.
3. Theoretical understanding. Graduate education provides an understanding of the theoretical bases of the field of study by grounding application and performance in theory.
4. Proficiency in research and/or creative activities. Graduate education develops proficiencies that advance the knowledge and activities of the discipline. These proficiencies include good writing skills as well as the ability to present original insights and creative expressions.
5. Service orientation. Graduate education instills responsibility to return the special benefits of graduate study to the larger community.
6. Diverse representation of perspectives. Graduate education provides for intellectually and culturally rich encounters within the discipline. Study and inquiry are conducted in a context sensitive to ethnic and cultural diversity.

B. Philosophy of Post-Certification Graduate Athletic Training Education Programs

Graduate Education Programs are different from entry-level programs in purpose, design and content. The mission of a post-certification graduate athletic training education program is to expand the depth and breadth of the applied, experiential, and propositional knowledge and skills of entry-level certified athletic trainers, expand the athletic training body of knowledge, and to disseminate new knowledge in the discipline. Graduate education is characterized by advanced systematic study and experience—advanced in knowledge, understanding, scholarly competence, inquiry, and discovery.

C. Principles of Post-certification Graduate Athletic Training Education

Instruction in advanced skills and knowledges, the preparation of certified athletic trainers for leadership roles, and a research experience are considered to be the distinguishing characteristics of graduate education in athletic training. Advanced educational experiences designed to enhance the certified athletic trainer's ability to function in clinical, teaching, administrative, or research environments are considered to be essential components of the post-certification graduate athletic training education program. While minimal graduate courses and resource requirements are specified in this document, flexibility and innovation in curricular development are encouraged. However, the program must demonstrate its contribution to advanced education of athletic training practitioners.

The NATA Education Council has developed a comprehensive list of athletic training educational competencies and clinical proficiencies in order to provide guidance and direction in the professional preparation of entry-level athletic training students. Thus, they represent important guidelines for curriculum design, development of individual course content, and structuring of clinical experiences for the entry-level programs. Development of an effective post-certification graduate athletic training education program depends on a thorough assessment of those education experiences typically offered at the entry-level. Post-certification graduate athletic training education programs include new and advanced, in-depth educational experiences designed to enhance the athletic trainer's professional practice.

III. Program Development and Implementation

A. Appointment of Program Director

The program director is essential in the initial stages of planning and developing a post-certification graduate athletic training program. This appointment also provides a contact person or liaison between the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee and the sponsoring college or university. Criteria for the selection of a program director are outlined in Section IV.F.2. The program director should be involved in identifying other program faculty and staff.

B. Program Sponsorship

The administrative organization of the program must be compatible with the administrative structure of the department, school, or college in which it is housed. Locating the program in a Department of Athletic Training is desirable.

Although the program director manages the program, ultimate administrative responsibility lies with the head of the academic unit sponsoring the program. The administrative structure must be such that the program director fits within the reporting structure on par with other allied health or similar programs within the institution.

C. Mission, Goals, Objectives, and Points of Distinctiveness

Mission, goals and objectives guide the program, and should be consistent with the missions of the university, college, and department in which the program is housed. A program's mission, goals and objectives should also reflect the points of distinctiveness of the institution, its faculty, resources, or students. Thus, a wide variety in program design, content, and foci are expected between institutions.

D. Assessment of Available and Needed Resources

Appropriate personnel, classroom, laboratory space, and equipment are necessary components for the administrative, instructional, clinical, and research components of the program. A thorough assessment of these resources early in the process will allow time to rectify deficiencies, and ongoing assessment throughout development and implementation is necessary to keep the program viable.

E. Curriculum

The curriculum should be designed around the program's philosophy, mission, goals, and points of distinctiveness. The subject matter areas offered by the program should be based on faculty expertise and institutional resources, and should expand upon NATA entry level education.

1. Clinical experience is optional, but will be part of most graduate programs. Such experiences, if used, must be integrated into the curriculum so that students enhance their knowledge and refine their clinical skills.
2. A hands-on research experience, and the knowledge and skills necessary to complete such, are required curricular components. The experience should be designed so that students deepen their theoretical understanding of the profession, enhance their critical thinking ability, increase their writing & speaking skills, and advance the knowledge of the discipline.

F. Finances

Adequate financial support for development, ongoing operation, and improvement of the program must be provided by normal institutional budgeting processes.

G. Accreditation

Accreditation is a collegial process of self-review and peer review, involving three major activities:

1. A self-evaluation (self-study) by an institution or program using the Standards and Guidelines contained in this document and culminating in submission of a self study report to the NATA Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee.
2. A peer review of the self study and the institution during an on site visit to confirm the accuracy of the self study and gather additional evidence of quality.
3. A decision or judgment by the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee and the NATA Board of Directors to accredit, accredit with conditions, or not accredit the institution/program.

H. Self-Study

Self-study by a program is the cornerstone of the voluntary peer review system of accreditation. It is both a process and a product, performed, as a cooperative effort, by individuals with varied interests in program improvement (i.e., institutional administration, program faculty, students, clinical staff, and the employers or supervisors of program graduates). The process of self-study requires the detailed analysis of all aspects of the program, so should be an ongoing process. The self-study critically examines the program in structure and substance, judges the program's overall effectiveness

relative to its mission, identifies specific strengths and deficiencies, and indicates a plan for necessary modifications and improvements.

I. Initiating Accreditation Review

Pursuit of post-certification graduate athletic training education program accreditation represents a voluntary decision on the part of institution administrative personnel. NATA accreditation review and evaluation of a program (proposed or established) can be initiated only on written request by the chief academic officer (e.g., president, provost, academic vice president) of the institution submitting the proposal. Receipt of this written request and accreditation fee is considered to be official notice of the institution's intent to pursue NATA accreditation of its post-certification graduate athletic training education program.

J. Program Implementation

All aspects of the proposed program must be fully implemented and operational before accreditation can be granted. At least one student must complete the program prior to the site visit.

IV. Program Standards and Guidelines

A. Definitions of Accreditation Standards and Guidelines

1. Standards are mandatory components of the program and are denoted by the verb “**must.**”
2. Guidelines are recommended components of the program and are denoted by the verb “*should.*” *Should* is used to express obligation, allowing freedom to suggest an alternative for meeting the intent of the guideline. Written explanations are required if an alternative to a guideline is used, or if the program is unable to adhere to a guideline. Strategies used in attempting to meet the guideline must be part of the written explanation.
3. Verbs specific to Standards are **bolded** while verbs specific to Guidelines are *italicized*. Note: all Standards and Guidelines are continued in this section of the document. The uses of these verbs in other sections of the document do not constitute Standards or Guidelines.

B. Mission Statement

The programs written mission statement must be congruent with the missions of the university, college, and department in which the program is housed and consistent with the principles and philosophy outlined earlier in this document (see Section II).

C. Goals and Objectives

Programs will differ as they develop around unique institutional philosophies, resources, and faculty strengths. Programs **must**:

1. Identify specific points of distinctiveness related to the faculty; academic courses; and the program’s clinical, administrative, teaching, and/or research components.
2. State specific long and short-term goals and objectives related to the program’s points of distinctiveness or uniqueness. Goals and objectives **must** also address the following issues:
 - a. Increase students’ depth and breadth of understanding of athletic training subject matter areas and skills beyond those required of the entry-level certified athletic trainer, and/or develop areas new to athletic training. The following documents can be consulted to define the education and practice of an entry level athletic trainer.
 - (1) Athletic Training Educational Competencies
 - (2) Athletic Training Clinical Proficiencies
 - (3) NATA-BOC Role Delineation (see www.nataboc.org)
 - b. Enhance students’ critical thinking so that they have a thorough knowledge of the assumptions of the discipline and an understanding of viable alternative assumptions.
 - c. Develop student’s understanding of the theoretical bases of athletic training knowledge and skills.
 - d. Expand students’ ability to discover and develop new knowledge, and to enhance their desire to continue scholarly growth.

- e. Provide students' advanced knowledges and skills to prepare them for leadership roles in athletic training.
 - f. Instill responsibility within students to serve the profession and their communities.
3. Provide a plan for meeting program goals and objectives.
 4. Provide evidence that the programs stated goals and objectives have and/or are being met.

D. Degree Designation

Athletic training has a unique body of knowledge and, therefore, *should* be treated as a discipline. The institution is strongly encouraged to grant a Masters degree (e.g., MS, MA, MEd) in Athletic Training; however, degrees in related disciplines approved by the institution will be accepted.

E. Transcript Recognition

The name "Athletic Training" *should* appear on the transcript as the major, specialization, concentration, emphasis, or track.

F. Personnel

1. Administrative Personnel

- a. The dean and department/division head **must** accept the administrative responsibility of providing appropriate resources for the program.
- b. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the athletic training curriculum, there *should* be cooperation between the dean or department/division head and administrators in related academic units.

2. Program Director

a. Position

- (1) The program director **must** be appointed at least 1 year prior to program implementation and 2 years prior to site visitation. Thus, the minimum time from hiring a program director to program accreditation is 2 ½ years for a 1 year program and 3 ½ years for a 2 year program.
- (2) The program director **must** be a full-time employee of the college or university sponsoring the post-certification graduate athletic training education program.
- (3) The program director **must** be a member of the graduate faculty as defined by institutional policy.
- (4) The program director *should* be in a tenure track position.

b. Responsibilities

- (1) The program director **must** oversee the day-to-day operation, coordination, supervision, and evaluation of all aspects of the program. Close cooperation between the program director and all associated personnel (e.g., faculty, athletic training staff, and research lab directors) will be necessary for effective planning and implementation of student clinical and research experiences.
- (2) The program director **must** insure that accurate, up-to-date records are kept and analyzed.
- (3) The program director's administrative and supervisory responsibilities **must** be recognized in terms of released/(re)assigned time from other departmental responsibilities. The amount of released/(re)assigned time *should* be consistent with departmental or institutional policy and appropriate for the administrative responsibilities of the program director.

c. Qualifications

- (1) The program director **must** possess a terminal degree (e.g., PhD, EdD) from an institution that the institution sponsoring the education program accepts credit from.
- (2) The program director **must** be a certified athletic trainer (NATABOC), with 3 years teaching and research experience as a full-time faculty member.
- (3) The program director **must** have a strong academic orientation, including a demonstrated interest in the professional preparation of students.

- (4) The program director **must** have an ongoing involvement in athletic training research as evidenced by scholarly publications/presentations and involvement in related professional organizations.
- (5) The Program director *should* have prior experience in the clinical practice of athletic training.
- (6) Experience in the clinical supervision of athletic training students by the program director is desirable.

3. Program Faculty

- a. The institution **must** provide appropriate faculty to deliver the program, comparable in number and preparation to other nationally accredited programs within the institution, and at other comparable institutions.
- b. Each faculty member **must** be qualified, through professional preparation and experience, in their respective academic areas.
- c. The majority of the program *should* be taught/directed by faculty who are NATABOC certified athletic trainers.
- d. All program faculty and adjunct personnel must be familiar with the goals and objectives of the program relevant to their respective instructional/clinical/ research areas, and *should* demonstrate a sincere interest in assisting students in attaining their personal and the programs goals.

4. Clerical Staff

There **must** be appropriate clerical staff to support the program director and other faculty in their instructional, clinical, administrative, and research responsibilities.

5. Graduate Assistants

Administration of graduate assistantships must be in compliance with institutional and Council for Graduation School (see www.cgsnet.org) policies.

G. Curriculum

1. The curriculum must be designed to accomplish the established goals and objectives of the program outlined in Section IV.C.2 of this document.
2. The subject matter areas offered by the program *should* be based on faculty expertise and institutional resources.
3. The majority of course work *should* relate to athletic training knowledge.
4. Specific courses and experiences that lead to, and involve, a research experience **must** be included.
 - a. The research experiences **must** be designed to expand the body of knowledge in athletic training through quantitative or qualitative research.
 - b. The athletic training faculty *should* be actively involved in student research to provide mentorship and to serve as role models.
 - c. Sufficient time and opportunity **must** be provided within the curriculum for students to complete a quality research experience that includes a hands-on experience with an established systematic method of inquiry (i.e., thesis, research projects, participation as a co-investigator in faculty research, or similar activity).
 - d. Course work and professional experiences *should* be scheduled so as to facilitate the research experience. For example, offer research methods and statistics courses early in the program so as to facilitate students' hands on research experience

H. Clinical Experience

1. Clinical experiences are a strongly recommended, but not required, part of the program. If the program elects to use clinical experiences, they must provide the opportunity to develop skills beyond entry-level competencies. The purpose of the clinical experience is educational and not just to provide a work force for the institution or affiliate sites.

2. If the institution elects to offer a clinical education component, the sponsoring institution **must** have a formal plan for organizing and structuring the clinical experiences that will insure effective learning opportunities for all students in the clinical aspect of the program.
3. Plans for clinical experiences *should* reflect provisions for progressive development of professional skills and knowledge and a system for evaluating and recording student achievement.
4. Advanced clinical experiences at the graduate level must allow for a level of responsibility compatible with the credentials and expertise possessed by the student, and do not necessitate daily, personal supervision. Students who, by virtue of their previous clinical experience, have progressed to an appropriate level of competence *should* be provided with opportunities to develop their administrative and decision-making skills during their clinical experience.
5. The number of work hours performed during clinical experiences and graduate assistantship experiences must be in compliance with institution, state, or federal laws and regulations.
6. The number of hours spent in clinical education experiences *should* not be so time intensive that they interfere with classroom and research experiences.
7. Clinical experiences *should* be enhanced through regularly scheduled in-service training sessions, staff meetings, injury evaluation clinics, and individual consultations.

I. Affiliated Settings

In certain instances, the college or university sponsoring the program may establish affiliation with other units within the institution or at other institutions, to provide instruction, research, clinical, or administrative experiences. If such affiliations are made:

1. There **must** be formal administrative arrangements for use of all affiliated settings. Written documentation of official approval by appropriate administrators in all cooperating institutions **must** be forwarded with other specified materials at the time the program proposal is submitted for NATA accreditation consideration.
2. Regular communication between the program director and all affiliated setting supervisors must be maintained with respect to scheduling of affiliated experiences, evaluation of student progress, and other matters affecting the student's learning experiences.

J. Student Recruitment and Selection

1. College or university materials disseminated for the purposes of program publication and/or student recruitment **must** accurately describe the post-certification athletic training education program.
2. Recruitment materials **must** not intentionally misrepresent the field of athletic training with respect to career opportunities, financial rewards or other benefits.
3. Full financial responsibilities and benefits (e.g., tuition and fees, tuition wavers, financial aid, graduate assistantships) must be provided to the student, in writing, prior to the student committing to attend the institution.
4. Criteria for acceptance of students into a program:
 - a. **must** have received appropriate institution administrative approval.
 - b. **must** be in written form.
 - c. *should* include specific prerequisites regarding academic background, previous experience, recommendations, or other appropriate factors.
 - d. **must** include NATABOC certification, eligibility for NATABOC certification or an equivalent athletic training credential (e.g., Canadian Certified Athletic Therapist).
 - e. **must** include at least a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college or university.
5. The total number of students accepted into the program, as well as the number enrolled in each class or laboratory, **must** be consistent with learning experiences at the sponsoring or peer institutions.

K. Facilities and Resources

1. Adequate resources must be provided so the program can meet its goals and objectives. These include:

- a. faculty and staff
- b. administrative support
- c. classroom and laboratory space
- d. research facilities and equipment
- e. finances
- f. clinical opportunities, facilities, and equipment
- g. medical and allied health personnel, where appropriate
- h. library materials, education materials and learning aids (computers, multimedia, etc.).
2. Appropriate line items for the development and ongoing operation of the program *should* be identified and discussed in the proposal stage. Provisions *should* be made for funding of any additional resources for program improvements necessary to meet current NATA accreditation requirements.
- L. Equal Opportunity (Diversity)
 1. Student, faculty recruitment, student admission, and faculty employment practices must be non-discriminatory with respect to race, color, creed, sex, age, disability, and national origin.
 2. Post-certification graduate athletic training education programs **must** assure equal opportunity for classroom instruction, clinical experience, and other educational activities for all students in the program.
- M. Program Evaluation
 1. The cornerstone of success for any education program is ongoing program evaluation. The educational unit in which the program is housed **must** have a formal plan for ongoing evaluation of all aspects of the program including:
 - a. attainment of program goals
 - b. Instructional curricular effectiveness
 - c. student achievement, and
 - d. all information required for the Annual Report to the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee.
 2. Instructional curricular effectiveness
 3. Examples of program and student effectiveness records include:
 - a. student learning
 - b. student performance in classes
 - c. student outcomes
 - d. graduation rates
 - e. publication of student works (e.g. abstracts, manuscripts)
 - f. presentations by students student, alumni, and employer surveys
 - g. accomplishments of program alumni
 - h. job placement report
 4. Results of these evaluations must be analyzed and used to revise and strengthen the program. A satisfactory system of evaluating student performance in both the classroom and other components, (e.g., teaching, administrative, clinical, and/or research), of the program **must** be established.
 5. Program evaluation **must** be completed on a regular, ongoing basis and results *should* be shared with students.

V. Accreditation

- A. The accreditation process is established by the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee, based on the principles, philosophy, policies, standards, and guidelines outlined in this document.
- B. Accreditation is voluntary and is granted:
 1. to programs that are in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines outlined in Section IV of this document.

2. following an extensive review of the program by the institution seeking accreditation (self study) and by peer representatives of the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee (including an on site visit).
 3. by the NATA Board of Directors upon the recommendation of the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee
- C. The maximum duration of accreditation will be 5 years.
 - D. Decisions of the Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee may be appealed if an institution feels due process was violated or if there is a question concerning the interpretation of the Standards and Guidelines contained in this document. Appeals will be heard by the Graduate Education Committee.
 - E. The Graduate Education Committee will be the arbitrator of all Standards and Guidelines interpretations.

VI. Glossary

- **Accrediting Body:** The NATA for post-certification graduate athletic training educational programs and CAAHEA for entry level athletic training educational programs.
- **Adjunct Personnel:** This term refers to persons who teach in the program but who are not university faculty (e.g. physicians, allied health personnel, and certified athletic trainers from clinics and hospitals).
- **Desirable:** A term used to designate aspects of a post-certification graduate athletic training program that are not absolutely essential but are considered to be very significant.
- **Entry Level Athletic Training Graduate Education Program :** a program whose goal is to prepare students for taking the NATA-BOC Certification examination. These programs are accredited by the Commission on the Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEA).
- **Essential:** A term that equates with indispensable. It identifies an absolute requirement.
- **Guidelines:** recommended components of the program and are denoted by the verb “*should.*” *Should* is used to express obligation, allowing freedom to suggest an alternative for meeting the intent of the guideline. Written explanations are required if an alternative to a guideline is used, or if the program is unable to adhere to a guideline. Strategies used in attempting to meet the guideline must be part of the written explanation.
- **Knowledge, Applied :** Application of existing knowledge gleaned from the literature or other sources.
- **Knowledge, Experiential:** Knowledge gained from doing.
- **Knowledge, Propositional:** New knowledge gained from research and expanding scholarship in the discipline.
- **Must:** Term used to indicate that something is required, compelled, mandatory or should be done without fail. It connotes an absolute requirement. A Standard.
- **NATA:** The National Athletic Trainers Association (see www.nata.org)
- **NATA Board of Certification (NATA-BOC):** The body that certifies athletic trainers and identifies for the public, quality healthcare professionals through a system of certification, adjudication, standards of practice and continuing competency programs. The NATA-BOC is Accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.(See <http://www.nataboc.org>)
- **Post-certification Graduate Athletic Training Education Program:** a program whose goal is to expand the depth and breath of knowledge and skills beyond those required of entry level athletic trainers. Students admitted to these programs must have passed, or be eligible to take, the NATA-BOC examination or hold an equivalent certification. These programs are accreditation by the NATA.
- **Post-Professional Graduate Review Committee:** A standing committee of the NATA Education Council, charged with reviewing post-certification graduate athletic training education programs and making accreditation recommendations to the NATA Board of Directors.
- **The Program:** This term refers to post-certification graduate athletic training education program.
- **Should:** A term used to designate requirements that are so important that their absence must be justified. A program or institution is at risk if it is not in compliance with a "should". A guideline
- **Standard:** Mandatory components of the program. Denoted by the verb “*must.*”