

DISCONTINUANCE OF THE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ATHLETIC TRAINING

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors discontinue the Master of Science in Athletic Training, effective fall term 2024.

Background

In 2017, Assistant Dean Dr. Nate McCaughtry was invited by the former Provost to consider launching an Athletic Training program for the university. Recent conversations she had with the WSU Athletic Director Robert Fournier served as the impetus for the invitation. Dr. McCaughtry consulted with peers at other institutions to learn the dynamics of Athletic Training programs and the resources required to operate them effectively. As a result, four full-time faculty lines (3 Assistant Professors – Teaching and 1 tenure-track) were dedicated to launch and staff a new Athletic Training program, and financial resources were earmarked to renovate relevant labs and offices. The first cohort of students in the M.S. in Athletic Training program began during the spring/summer of 2018. Since that time, three cohorts have completed, one is mid-way through their program, and one has just started during the 2022 spring/summer semester.

Unfortunately, as all of this was taking place, the Athletic Training national accrediting organization, the Commission on the Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), was in the process of transitioning to an entirely new and vastly expanded set of professional standards, and corresponding accreditation requirements. One change that was underway was moving away from allowing Athletic Training students to be educated at the Bachelor's or Post Bachelor level. Instead, Athletic Training programs were required to operate only at the Master's level. Keeping the impending expansion of the Athletic Training standards and accreditation requirements in mind, the Athletic Training faculty developed a 56-credit M.S. in Athletic Training degree program culminating in student eligibility to take the Board of Certification licensure exam, which if passed, would obtain student licensure to work as Athletic Trainers in Michigan.

It is widely recognized in the field of Athletic Training, both locally, state-wide, and nationally, that the new standards and accreditation requirements instituted by CAATE had a profound impact on both universities conducting Athletic Training programs and the number of students seeking the degree. For example, the number of universities offering Athletic Training programs in Michigan has decreased from 16 to 9 over the past four years. All remaining programs but one admit cohorts of eight students or less. At the inception of our program, our five-year benchmark for program viability was the recruitment of cohorts of at least 15 students. However, despite obtaining a glowing accreditation report, undertaking vast program marketing efforts, and having the program added as an application option on the national Athletic Training Centralized Application System (ATCAS), the program has received far fewer applicants than expected, admitted far fewer potential students than desired, and had even fewer admitted students actually enroll in and start the program. The result has been that the program has had cohorts of 5, 4, 7, 4 and 4 students. Unfortunately, there is little reason to believe that student interest will increase given the lengthy and costly nature of the program, combined with the rather low average salaries earned by practitioners in the field, especially starting salaries for newly licensed Athletic Trainers, and compounded further with the difficult work schedules that junior professionals often are required to work as new Athletic Trainers. The decline in individuals seeking to enter Master's

programs in Athletic Training has decreased significantly throughout Michigan and nation-wide, and Athletic Training practitioners and higher education faculty all attribute the decline to the radical changes in program and accreditation requirements dictated by the CAATE. Moreover, CAATE has given no indications that those escalated program and accreditation requirements will be reduced in the interest of maintaining viable higher education programs or attracting more students into training programs.

A program that consistently attracts such few students into their cohorts inevitably has financial implications. For example, during the fiscal year 2022, the cost of faculty salaries, fringe benefits, and a variety of expensive program costs (e.g., lab consumables, teaching aids, a cadaver, cadaver maintenance, accreditation fees, a data management system, a Medical Director, etc.) far outstripped the revenue generated by tuition and course material fees generated by the two active cohorts, each with four students. Compounding the situation further is the number of course releases the program is required to give the Athletic Training faculty to maintain accreditation. According to the most recent workload agreement, across the spring/summer, fall and winter semesters, the three faculty who operate the program taught a total of 63 credit hours of regular course instruction, but also received 24 total hours of course releases to serve in their various capacities as Program Director, Clinical Coordinator, and Coordinator of Student Services. No other program in the College gives all of the faculty in any program this volume of courses releases. Between the volume of students in the Athletic Training courses, combined with the number of course releases given to the faculty, issues regarding faculty workload equity across the various programs in the college must also be considered.

A moratorium is currently in effect preventing new admissions to the M.S. in Athletic Training program. We recommend discontinuance of the program as soon as the students in both active cohorts have graduated (May 2024). We have contacted the accrediting agency about the current moratorium and intention to close the program permanently, and they have agreed to assist the program in any way necessary so the remaining students can graduate and pass the licensure exam, even if that requires modifying certain requirements as necessary given the unique course of the program.

Program Description

The M.S. in Athletic Training is a 56-credit hour, cohort-based program in which students matriculate over six consecutive semesters. Upon graduation, students are qualified to take the Board of Certification exam to become a licensed Athletic Trainer in the State of Michigan.

Approvals

This recommendation was approved by the faculty of the Division of Kinesiology, Health and Sport Science, the Dean of the College of Education, the Graduate School, and the Provost.