

1-1-2012

Perceptions of the 2011-2012 CAATE site visitors for athletic training educational programs in Illinois

Tiffany Louise Green

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Kinesiology and Sports Studies](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Green, Tiffany Louise, "Perceptions of the 2011-2012 CAATE site visitors for athletic training educational programs in Illinois" (2012). *Masters Theses*. 974.
<http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/974>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

*******US Copyright Notice*******

No further reproduction or distribution of this copy is permitted by electronic transmission or any other means.

The user should review the copyright notice on the following scanned image(s) contained in the original work from which this electronic copy was made.

Section 108: United States Copyright Law

The copyright law of the United States [Title 17, United States Code] governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that use may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. No further reproduction and distribution of this copy is permitted by transmission or any other means.

THESIS MAINTENANCE AND REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

An important part of Booth Library at Eastern Illinois University's ongoing mission is to preserve and provide access to works of scholarship. In order to further this goal, Booth Library makes all theses produced at Eastern Illinois University available for personal study, research, and other not-for-profit educational purposes. Under 17 U.S.C. § 108, the library may reproduce and distribute a copy without infringing on copyright; however, professional courtesy dictates that permission be requested from the author before doing so.

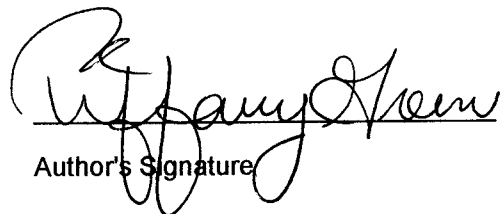
By signing this form:

- You confirm your authorship of the thesis.
- You retain the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the original research, creative activity, and intellectual or artistic content of the thesis.
- You certify your compliance with federal copyright law (Title 17 of the U.S. Code) and your right to authorize reproduction and distribution of all copyrighted material included in your thesis.
- You grant Booth Library the non-exclusive, perpetual right to make copies of your thesis, freely and publicly available without restriction, by means of any current or successive technology, including but not limited to photocopying, microfilm, digitization, or Internet.
- You acknowledge that by depositing your thesis with Booth Library, your work is available for viewing by the public and may be borrowed through the library's circulation and interlibrary department or accessed electronically.
- You waive the confidentiality provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) with respect to the contents of the thesis, including your name and status as a student at Eastern Illinois University.

Petition to Delay:

I respectfully petition that Booth Library delay maintenance and reproduction of my thesis until the date specified and for the reasons below. I understand that my degree will not be conferred until the thesis is available for maintenance and reproduction.

Date: 7-30-12Reasons:

_____

Author's Signature7-30-12

Date**This form must be submitted in duplicate.**

Perceptions of the 2011-2012 CAATE Site Visitors for

Athletic Training Educational Programs in Illinois

(TITLE)

BY

Tiffany Louise Green

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF


Master of Science in Kinesiology and Sports Studies

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2012

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

 7-30-12

THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR

DATE

 7-30-12

DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL CHAIR
OR CHAIR'S DESIGNEE

DATE

 7-30-12

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER

DATE

 7-30-12

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER

DATE

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER

DATE

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER

DATE

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze faculty, staff, and students' perception of the site visitors who were involved with the 2011-2012 Athletic Training Educational Program (ATEP) Site Visits in Illinois. The perceptions from multiple universities were compared to determine whether there was perceived site visitor subjectivity during each institution's site visit. The problem that arises is that verification of standards is a very subjective task. Most site visitors think that the program they are affiliated with is the best (Price, 2011); therefore, it is difficult to accurately state that personal bias is left at the door once a site visitor arrives on a campus for a site visit (Price, 2011).

In this field of research, there have been previous studies using qualitative methods, so this research study will also use a qualitative method. The information was collected with the use of an online survey from the faculty, staff, and students that were involved with the 2011-2012 CAATE Site Visits for the Athletic Training Educational Program's (ATEP) at selected universities in Illinois. The program directors were contacted by the researcher via phone and solicited to participate in the research study. If the program directors had the desire to participate, the researcher e-mailed the survey link from survey monkey to them and asked them to forward the link on to their students, faculty and staff. Two Athletic Training Educational Programs in Illinois gave consent to participant in this research study. To promote confidentiality, the pseudonym names "University Green" and "University Yellow" were given to the selected Illinois universities.

There were a total of 109 subjects recruited for this study and 83 participants completed and returned the research survey successfully (76% return rate). A qualitative method was used to analyze the data. The three major themes that arose included: site visitor knowledge, the interview process, and site visitor attitude. As well as the three major themes, subthemes also emerged from the additional comments that were provided from the two universities. The subthemes were knowledge of CAATE standards, knowledge of each ATEP program, questions, individual interviews, and the site visitors' time spent on campus. The themes emerged after labeling each key piece of information, assigning a label to capture its meaning, and coding the labels as emerging categories developed. Relationships between categories were evaluated and examined and collapsed together or separated when appropriate.

The results from this research study provides direction for further research which should include reinvestigation of CAATE's proposed changes to the site visitors once they have been implemented. Ten years have gone by between the 2005 Wimer study and this present study with minimal changes to CAATE site visitor training and performance. The perceptions of the faculty/staff and students from the two ATEP's in Illinois further show that CAATE needs to re-evaluate their site visitors based on their performance.

I would like to dedicate this to my wonderful husband Jonathan, without your constant prayer and support I would have never finished this, I love you. I also would like to dedicate this to my parents; you raised me to be the woman I am today and I am truly blessed to have you all in my life.

I would like to acknowledge my thesis committee: Dr. Lee Ann Price, Dr. Brian Pritschet, and Dr. John Storsved. Thank you all for your continual time and support on this thesis. I enjoyed working with all of you. Special thanks to Dr. Lee Ann Price, thank you for being such an inspirational person and mentor to me while I was at Eastern Illinois University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Chapter I: Introduction.....	8-16
Problem Statement	11-12
Purpose of the Study	12-13
Assumptions.....	13
Limitations and Delimitations.....	13
Definitions.....	14-15
Significance of the Study	15-16
Chapter II: Literature Review	17-41
Accreditation Overview.....	18-26
History of Institutional Accreditation	18-20
History of Programmatic Accreditation.....	20-21
Importance of Accreditation	21-23
Limitations of Accreditation	24-26
Athletic Training Accreditation Overview	26-40
Athletic Training Education History.....	26-29
CAATE Accreditation History	29-32
The Process of Accreditation by CAATE.....	32-36
Site Visitors.....	36-40
Conclusion	40-41
Chapter III: Method	42-46
Researcher Positionality	43

Data Collection	44-45
Preliminary Screening/recruitment	44
Instrumentation	44-45
Procedures	45
Data Analysis	45-46
Chapter IV: Results	47-67
University Green ATEP	47-49
Table 1	48
Students	48
Faculty/Staff	48-49
University Yellow ATEP	49-50
Table 2	49
Students	49-50
Faculty/Staff	50
Likert-Scaled Questions	50
Table 3	51
Themes	52-67
Students	52-61
Site Visitor Knowledge	52-54
Site Visitor Knowledge of CAATE Standards	53
Site Visitor Knowledge of each ATEP	53-54
Interview Quality and Preparation	54-57
Site Visitor Questions	55-56

Individual Interviews	56
Site Visitor Time Spent on Campus.....	56-57
Perceived Site Visitor Attitude	57-59
Faculty/Staff.....	60-65
Site Visitors Knowledge	60-61
Interview Quality and Preparation	61-63
Site Visitor Questions	61-62
Individual Interviews	62-63
Site Visitor Time Spent on Campus.....	63
Perceived Site Visitor Attitude	64-65
Additional Comments	65-66
Chapter V: Discussion	67-84
Demographic Information.....	67
Theme Comparison.....	68-82
Site Visitor Knowledge.....	68-72
Interview Quality and Preparation	72-76
Perceived Site Visitor Attitude	76-80
Additional Comments	80-81
Conclusion	82-83
Directions for Further Research.....	83
References.....	84-86
Appendix A.....	87-89

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), accreditation in the United States is a means to assure and improve higher education quality, assisting institutions and programs using a set of standards developed by peers (CHEA-The Value of Accreditation, 2010). Accreditation was established by the medical profession in the early 1900's and has since been adopted by most health related professions (Craig, 2003). Athletic training education accreditation was introduced in 1991 by the Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Athletic Training (JRC-AT) and was established to develop standards and guidelines to review accreditation of entry-level programs (Delforge & Behnke, 1999).

As the profession grew and changed, so did athletic training accreditation and on June 30, 2006, the JRC-AT dissolved and the Commission on the Accreditation of Allied Health Educational Programs (CAAHEP) changed its name to the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). CAATE is currently the agency responsible for the accreditation of 360 professional (entry-level) athletic training educational programs (CAATE, Overview of the Commission). As stated on their website, the mission of CAATE is to provide premier accreditation services to institutions that offer athletic training programs, verify that all CAATE accredited programs meet standards for professional athletic training education and support continuous improvement in the quality of athletic training education (CAATE, Overview of the Commission).

The Comprehensive Review for Athletic Training Educational programs involves

two components - the Self-Study Process and the On-Site Review (CAATE, 2006). The Self-Study Process involves a critical analysis of all aspects of an educational program using the 2005 Standards and documenting them into a Self-Study Report. CAATE states that, “It is the responsibility of the institution to demonstrate compliance with the 2005 CAATE Standards in order to obtain and maintain recognition as a CAATE-accredited Athletic Training Education Program” (CAATE, 2006). This “report” is to be used not only to identify compliance with the 2005 Standards but to discover the programmatic strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement, and potential opportunities to improve the effectiveness and quality of an educational program (CAATE, 2006). The second component of the Comprehensive Review includes an On-Site Visit. A site visitor review team that is selected by CAATE conducts the On-Site Visit. The team consists of two members who have not previously visited the institution and do not have any conflicts of interest with the school. Prior to the site visit, the Program Director of the institution seeking accreditation is notified, by letter, of the names and affiliations of the individuals assigned to the team. At that time, the Program Director may request replacement of either of the site visitors if there is a perceived conflict of interest (CAATE, 2006).

CAATE site visitors do have certain requirements that must be met to gain the title of “CAATE site visitor”. In the past, site visitor training occurred when interested candidates sent their curriculum vita and cover letter to CAATE. CAATE then screened top candidates and invited a pool of potential site visitors to a training session that typically coincided with an event such as the annual NATA Educators Conference or the annual NATA meeting and clinical symposium. During the training workshop various topics would be discussed with the candidates that included: the structure and function of

CAATE, review of the standards and guidelines, self-study documents, the on-site visit, the on-site visit report, scheduling and administrative procedures and conflict-of-interest scenarios. At the conclusion of the workshop a written evaluation was distributed (Wimer, 2005). CAATE has attempted to minimize site visitor influence by requiring that all site visitors complete a training program and serve as a silent observer prior to participating as an active member of a site visitation team. On March 3, 2008, CAATE extended an invitation for site visitor training to all athletic trainers who have been Board of Certification (BOC) certified for five or more years, regardless of practice setting (College Athletic Trainers Society, 2008). Currently CAATE is revamping their site visit process to include the 2012 Standards, which are scheduled to be released in summer 2012 and implemented for the 2013-2014 accreditation cycle (CAATE, 2012). In the 2012 winter newsletter, CAATE also announced that they would be changing qualifications for site visitors as well as conducting a more comprehensive training program (CAATE, 2012). CAATE is requiring updated site visitor training to be held at the NATA Annual Meeting in St. Louis in June 2012. A group of approximately 40 site visitors will be invited to this first training. Because the training will be using the 2005 Standards, the number of site visitors invited is being kept to a minimum. Future Site Visitor Training will use the 2012 Standards and annual and regular training updates and performance-based training will also be implemented for site visitors (CAATE, 2012).

The responsibilities of a CAATE site visitor are defined by CAATE as: “To review accreditation self-study materials as well as the validation of self-studies and actual activities of CAATE accredited programs for consistency with the Standards for the Accreditation of Entry Level Athletic Training Education Programs” (CAATE, 2006).

In order to verify compliance with CAATE standards site visitors must decide if a program is meeting each standard. CAATE will not dictate how each standard is met; the site visitors just confirm compliance with the standards. So if this is the case, then every site visit should be the same no matter who the site visitors are or which institution is being evaluated.

Problem Statement

The purpose of an On-site Visit is to review compliance with the standards and to verify that what was written in the Self-Study Report is actually occurring (CAATE, 2006). How those standards are met is up to the individual institution. It was suggested from the findings of Price (2011) that the methods of minimizing subjectivity within a site visit need to be explored because this is a potential flaw in the process with how some site visitors are currently conducting site visits (Price, 2011). The problem that arises is that verification of standards is a very subjective task. Most site visitors think that the program they are affiliated with is the best (Price, 2011); therefore, it is difficult to accurately state that personal bias is left at the door once a site visitor arrives on a campus for a site visit (Price, 2011). If an ATEP fails to meet the CAATE standards they potentially could lose the academic program within one year. The impact and influence of the site visitor and the frequency of poor site visitor performances need to be more thoroughly investigated.

CAATE is aware of this problem based on the results of their 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey (CAATE, 2009). The summary from the Customer Satisfaction Survey section on Site Visitors stated, "The general concern among respondents is the lack of consistency assessing Standards among site visitors, the presence of personal

biases during site evaluation and lack of focus on overall program quality” (CAATE, 2009). Additionally in the 2012 Winter Newsletter CAATE publicly announced the revamping of the Site Visit procedures. This newsletter indicated that changes would be made to improve the quality of the site visit process, try to increase consistency between site visitors, increase the time spent on site at the institution to allow more time to spend with students, faculty, and administrators involved with the program, and a annual/regular comprehensive site visitor training (CAATE, 2012). However, CAATE did not provide specific information in regard to how these changes were going to be implemented and when this was going to occur. Also, CAATE did not indicate who was going to be responsible for deciding which individuals could become site visitors. The objective of this current research was to specifically investigate faculty, staff and students perceptions of the 2011-2012 CAATE re-accreditation site visitor performance.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze faculty, staff, and students’ perception of the site visitors who were involved with the 2011-2012 Athletic Training Educational Program (ATEP) Site Visits in Illinois. The perceptions from multiple universities were compared to determine whether there was perceived site visitor subjectivity during each institution’s site visit. Characteristics of the site visitors that were addressed include perceptions of the site visitor performance, emotional response to the site visitors, and open-ended questions about how the CAATE site visitors could improve as well as any additional comments the participants had about the site visitors. The multiple perspectives will provide additional insights about current site visitors and

offer information that will be useful in improving site visitor performance and future site visitor training. The following questions were addressed with this investigation.

1. Do the faculty, staff, and students perceive the CAATE site visitors as being consistent in their evaluation of the 2005 Standards while evaluating their Athletic Training Educational Program?
2. Are the site visitors perceived to be doing their jobs without bias?
3. What do the faculty, staff, and students think about the changes in the accreditation process occurring in the 2013-2014 year and do they believe these changes will make a positive difference?

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that every athletic training educational program that participates in the 2011-2012 CAATE accreditation visit will have faculty, staff, and students that had contact with the site visitors and will have perceptions on the 2011-2012 CAATE site visitors. This assumption is constructed with the knowledge that every accredited athletic training educational program in the United States that participates in a site visit requires the site visitors to interview faculty, staff, and students associated with the Athletic Training Educational Program.

Limitations

This research study was limited to only Athletic Training Educational Programs that are seeking re-accreditation from CAATE in Illinois during the 2011-2012 school year. This study is also limited to faculty, staff and students who had contact with the CAATE site visitors during the site visit.

Definitions

Accreditation. Accreditation is a validation statement by a group of persons who are, theoretically, impartial experts in higher education, that a give school, or department within a school, has been thoroughly investigated and found worthy of approval (Accreditation Guide, 1999). Accreditation is further defined from (Craig, 2003) as “a complex evaluative tool and voluntary enterprise that is self-regulatory which focuses on judging educational quality.” A more pointed definition of accreditation as it pertains to this research study is a system for recognizing educational institutions and professional programs affiliated with those institutions for a level for performance, integrity, and quality which entitles them to the confidence of educational community and the public they serve (Young, K., Chambers, C., and Kells, J., 1983).

Site Visitors. For this research study site visitors will be defined as the peer evaluators who validate the information and findings identified during the CAATE Self-Study Process. They are the people that confirm that an educational program meets all the standards that are expected of an accredited program (CAATE, 2006). The site visit team is selected by the CAATE and consists of a team chair and a team member. Prior to the site visit, the Program Director of the sponsoring institution is notified, by letter, of the names and affiliations of the individuals assigned to the team. At that time, the Program Director may request replacement of either of the site visitors if the Program Director perceives a conflict of interest. The CAATE decreases the likelihood of conflicts of interest by pooling the potential site visit, in advance of the selection, to avoid conflicts of interest (CAATE, 2006).

Perceptions. The word perception has several meanings. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary perception is defined as “Physical sensations interpreted in the light of an experience” (www.m-w.com/dictionary/perception) and in the AR Online Dictionary as “The quality, state or capability of being affected by something external; a sensation” (www.ardictionary.com/Perception). The definition of perception that will be utilized for this research is defined in the psychological development manual for personal development. It states “Perceptions vary from person to person. Different people perceive different things about the same situation. But more than that, we assign different meanings to what we perceive. The meanings might change for a certain person. One might change one’s perspective or simply make things mean something else” (<http://www.transworld.org>). The definitions of perceptions as identified above will provide a more concise application of the term and how it will be utilized throughout this research investigation.

Significance of Study

Accreditation is important to maintain high standards in higher education and health care; therefore, the benefits of exploring the perceptions from faculty, staff, and students on the 2011-2012 CAATE site visitors in Illinois will provide valuable insights about current site visitors and offer constructive information on improving CAATE site visitor performance. With the information that will be provided, CAATE will be able to address issues that may arise from this investigation and make continual improvements for future site visitors. This in turn will improve the consistency of the site visitors in future CAATE accreditation visits and will help to reinforce the importance of the continual improvement of professional/programmatic accreditation in higher education.

This thesis contributes to not only the field of athletic training but also other health professional programs by developing an awareness of how current professional programs perceive the people who have a significant impact on the outcomes of accreditation site visits.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze faculty, staff, and students' perception of the site visitors who were involved with the 2011-2012 Athletic Training Educational Program (ATEP) Site Visits in Illinois. The perceptions from multiple institutions were compared to determine whether there was perceived site visitor subjectivity during each institution's site visit. The multiple perspectives will provide additional insights about current site visitors and offer information that will be useful in improving site visitor performance and future site visitor training.

Accreditation in the United States is more than 100 years old, emerging from concerns "to protect public health and safety and to serve the public interest" (ACICS, History of Accreditation). The Council for Higher Education Accreditation or CHEA is currently the largest, private institutional higher education membership organization in the United States, which includes '61 recognized accrediting organizations, with more than 7,000 institutions and over 19,000 professional programs holding accreditation' (www.chea.org) which includes the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) as a recognized member (www.chea.org).

With accreditation being a key component to the history and continued evolution of the athletic training profession this literature review will discuss several aspects of accreditation in higher education. These include the history of accreditation in higher education, the importance of accreditation, and current issues with accreditation. In addition there will be an extensive assessment of the history of athletic training education as well as a discussion of the current accreditation process for athletic training

educational programs. Finally, potential problems with athletic training educational programs accreditation will be addressed.

Accreditation Overview

There are two major types of accreditation in higher education: institutional and programmatic. “Institutional accreditation focuses on the entire institution and its achievements in meeting the institution’s objectives. Programmatic accreditation is a type of accreditation status that is designated for specialized departments, programs, schools, or colleges within a college or university that has already been awarded institutional accreditation” (U.S. Department of Education). The aspects of accreditation that will be addressed include: Accreditation History both institutional and programmatic, the importance of accreditation, and then accreditation’s limitations.

History of Institutional Accreditation

The role of professional program accreditation has not always been such an integral component of higher education. In the 1890’s, there were already over 900 small institutions of higher education that averaged 160 students each. It was during this time the first accrediting associations were beginning to organize (Brittingham, 2009). Due to the rapid rise in the number and types of institutions, there was an increased interest in a means of identifying institutions of trustworthy educational quality (Brittingham, 2009). The first regional accrediting agencies were formed in response to focusing on educational standards and admissions procedures (ACICS, History of Accreditation). After the development of regional agencies in 1912, a group of 23 private career schools created the National Association of Accredited Commercial Schools (ACICS), which became one of the first national accrediting agencies for Higher Education. This

organization sought after providing minimum quality standards for higher education throughout the United States (ACICS, History of Accreditation). In 1918, the American Council on Education (ACE) was formed as a national association for higher education institutions interested in standardization, effectiveness and reducing duplication in the accreditation process (ACICS, History of Accreditation) and by the 1930's accreditation had become an established element of the higher education landscape (ACICS, History of Accreditation).

In 1944, the "GI Bill" authorized postsecondary education assistance that would ultimately send nearly eight million World War II veterans to college (U.S. Department of Education). It was during this time that institutions began to compete with each other at the national level and had to market individual professional programs of study to entice consumers to enroll in their school. Rather than develop its own system, the government turned to accreditation, providing a major incentive for accreditation to develop its own enterprise (Brittingham, 2009). In 1949, efforts were underway to deal with the rapid expansion, and the major national higher education associations came together to create a national association on institutional accreditation called the National Commission on Accreditation (NCA). The regional accrediting agencies also formed the National Committee of Regional Accrediting agencies (NRCAA), later to be renamed the Federation of Regional Accrediting Commissions of Higher Education (FRACHE) (ACICS, History of Accreditation).

The Veterans Readjustment Act was passed by Congress in 1952, which mandated the U.S. Secretary of Education (then Commissioner of Education) to "publish a list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies to affirm the quality of the institutions

that veterans used their grant aid” (Eaton, 2007) (ACICS, History of Accreditation). The federal government implicitly asserted that accrediting agencies were the most reliable source for determining the quality of education and training of institutions of higher education, and began relying on non-governmental accreditation (Brittingham, 2009).

By 1965, Congress passed the first Higher Education Act, which dramatically increased the availability of federal financial aid and there was a large influx of enrolled students in professional programs. This Act provided a stronger relationship between the federal government and the system of self-regulation and self-governance of institutions and accreditation (Brittingham, 2009 and Eaton, 2007). A re-authorization of the Higher Education Act in the 1970’s allowed students enrolled in non-profit institutions to participate in financial aid as well and again increased the number of students enrolled in professional programs of study (Brittingham, 2009). The Higher Education Act is periodically reviewed by Congress. Congress authorizes the U.S. Department of Education to develop rules implement the Higher Education Act. The Higher Education Act also gives the Department of Education authority to oversee the disbursement of Title IV funding (ACICS, History of Accreditation).

History of Programmatic Accreditation

Soon the self-regulating accrediting agencies sought to improve the process of accreditation and in 1975 the NCA and FRACHE merged to create a national organization with a wide membership base call the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA). Through COPA, accrediting agencies sought to provide a unified process of recognizing accrediting agencies through peer-review evaluation, and to improve quality assurance amongst member institutions in the United States (ACICS,

History of Accreditation). To be more effective in dealing with Higher Education challenges that arose in the late 1980's and early 1990's, COPA dispersed in 1993 and the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA) was founded in 1994 as a temporary regulatory body until the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) was formed in 1996. (Eaton, 2003). CHEA was founded to be a "National advocate and institutional voice for voluntary accreditation and quality assurance to the U.S. Congress and U.S. Department of Education" (Eaton, 2011). "CHEA is currently the largest, private institutional higher education membership organization in the United States, which includes 61 recognized accrediting organizations, with more than 7,000 institutions and over 19,000 professional programs holding accreditation" which includes the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) as a recognized member (www.chea.org).

Importance of Accreditation

Accreditation in the United States is a means to assure and improve higher education quality, assisting institutions and programs using a set of standards developed by peers (CHEA, The Value of Accreditation). "Accreditation has helped to provide the conditions necessary for the United States to develop diverse, flexible, robust, and often admired higher education" (CHEA, The Value of Accreditation). The minimum standards to be accredited are determined by the accrediting body as well as the profession. The programs must also complete an in-depth self-study process that measures the program's performance against the established standards (U.S. Department of Education). Then peers within the profession perform an on-site evaluation to verify that the standards are being met against the self-study report. If accreditation status is granted it is published for

the public and the program is constantly monitored to verify continual compliance with the established standards and the program is re-evaluated periodically to ascertain continuation of accreditation (U.S. Department of Education).

An important aspect that accreditation has had in higher education is that it has honored and advocated institutional and programmatic autonomy as well as allowing for peer assessment within each program or institution. This allows for the institution and programs to demonstrate their own standards of scholarship, creativity and tradition. “This permits each program and institution to be the best that it can be – in its own way – each having unique characteristics but falling within the scope of established standards” (Braskamp, Poston, & Wergin, 1997). “Program accreditations also allow for the professions to form alliances and network together to promote the profession and allow for uniformity of what is being taught. This enables all students who graduate from an accredited program to have the same basic entry-level skills and knowledge base. This however, does not restrict academic freedom of the institutions. As stated above, every institution has the freedom to determine how and when the knowledge and skills are taught within their accredited programs” (Price, 2011).

“Accreditation also assists the students in identifying acceptable institutions. Once an institution has been granted, “accredited status” a student can have confidence that a degree or credential has value from that school” (CHEA, The Value of Accreditation). “For students, accreditation also provides value related to not only judging quality, but also obtaining employment, receiving student aid and transferring credits” (CHEA, The Value of Accreditation).

Accreditation also provides eligible students to have access to federal financial aid if they attend institutions accredited by accreditors that are “recognized” or for quality by the U.S. Department of Education. “With the decrease in funding most public institutions have been facing, there is an increased need to entice additional students and external funding sources to campuses nationwide to offset funding deficits. In order to offset these deficits and meet the needs of today’s students, institutions of higher education need to have the professional programs that are accredited as part of their educational offerings. By doing so, institutions will draw more students to their campuses by providing quality programs for students. The increase in student enrollment can become an additional source of revenue for the schools. Those monies can be utilized to offset the costs of the professional programs and ensure quality education for students who enroll in those accredited programs. By upholding standards and having successful outcomes, professional programs can market their success; reach potential consumers, increase student enrollment and revenue without intruding upon the fundamental mission of the university” (Price 2011).

Accreditation is very important because it can verify that a program is meeting established standards, assist students in identifying acceptable institutions, and help identify programs for the investment of public and private funding (U.S. Department of Education). Although some believe that accreditation of professional programs has a positive impact on higher education, some believe that it has created a negative impact on higher education with accreditation limitations.

Accreditation's Limitations

Accreditation has been ongoing in the field of education for over 100 years. While the accreditation process has been seen to have numerous benefits, there have been several limitations or weakness described. The issues that surround the negative aspects of accreditation of professional programs include: (a) constantly changing accreditation standards, (b) power struggles between accreditors and institutions, (c) financial burdens of maintaining an accredited program, (d) subjective nature of the process, and (e) constantly playing catch-up to be in compliance immediately prior to the site visit and that accreditation is mandatory in many instances (regional accreditation & teacher education in some states). These issues were echoed by Pollock (2005), who identified less than positive perspectives on accreditation.

“The time required to complete the accreditation process; the cost of undergoing the accreditation; staff who are reluctant or have no need to compare themselves with their peers; the implied need to continuously keep pace with the rapid change that may or may not make sense for the agency and its clients; and the feeling of agency administrators and staff that the good service the agency provides speaks for itself and there is no need to get someone else’s approval” (Pollock, 2005).

“These are issues that should not be taken lightly and some professional program accreditation organizations address these issues more often than others – and that is why some of these concerns continue to plague accreditation and higher education today” (Price, 2011).

Accreditation is also synonymous with flaws that can negatively hinder the evaluation process of a program or institution. Negative pre-dispositions to accreditation

may be political, personal or administrative in nature and may damage the integrity of the program. “Political implications which are currently associated with decreases in funding have a ripple effect among accredited programs. Decreased resources available for teaching, increased student to faculty ratios, lack of teaching and lab spaces all negatively reflect upon a program or institution during accreditation site visits. This can portray the lack of commitment from a program or institution, and a decreased sense of sustaining a quality program that develops competent, entry-level professionals” (Price, 2011).

Among administrators many believe that “Evaluation policies, procedures and criteria tend to 1) emphasize technical rather than substantive aspects of teaching, 2) focus on process rather than outcomes (which contradicts current accreditation standards for athletic training), 3) lack strategic concern for the use of evaluation data within the institution and 4) are devoid of the very substance through which academics derive a sense of identity – their discipline” (Pratt, 1997). Additionally, “More often, than not, planning for change in higher education has become a euphemism for downsizing” (Harrison & Brodeth, 1999). These quotes reflect the implications of administrators that no longer revere the accreditation process, believe that accreditation has lost its significance in education or have lost the sense of fiscal responsibility to accredited programs due to the increased financial burdens associated with accreditation.

“Personal issues including resentment of time committed to accreditation, annoyance with continual change in standards and displeasure in preparing and participating in the accreditation process can all negatively reflect upon a program as well. The general sense of irritation and annoyance can be infectious and create a very unconstructive learning environment. This can influence the students within the program

and have a rippling effect as well; students will not be properly prepared, national pass rates could decrease and their potential for employment upon graduation could decline” (Price, 2011).

Both institutional and programmatic accreditation has adapted and changed throughout history to try and meet the needs of the public. This constant evolution in turn comes with many advantages, as well as disadvantages to the accreditation process. This investigation is looking at how the changes or lack of changes impose on an institution, more specific athletic training educational programs. The literature suggest that quality assurance through accreditation provides opportunity for improvements for academic programs, as well as assuring the community that students leaving the program are prepared to participate in their field of choice. This investigation

Athletic Training Accreditation Overview

Athletic Training Education History

Athletic training has evolved over the past 50 years from a relatively informal education process to a formalized curriculum process involving a structured clinical experience. Throughout the history of athletic training educational, movements toward accreditation of athletic training were being made; however, it was not until the AMA acknowledged and recognized athletic training as an allied health profession that accreditation by an outside entity was possible. The history of athletic training education provides a foundation for the evolution of athletic training educational and the development of the quality in athletic training educational programs.

Athletic training education as seen in higher education today is a relatively new professional program. In 1959, NATA introduced the first approved athletic training

curriculum model chaired by William “Pinky” Newell of Purdue University, who is considered the father of modern day athletic training (Ebel, 1999). The programs meeting the criteria at this time were then classified as NATA approved athletic training programs. Prior to 1959, professional training consisted of hands-on, on-the-job experiences with no true post-secondary coursework required to practice within the profession.

In 1969 the first Athletic Training Educational Programs began. The first four undergraduate athletic training curriculums that were approved by the NATA included: Indiana State University, Mankato State University, Lamar University and University of New Mexico. Also, in this year the NATA Professional Education Committee (PEC) and NATA Certification Committee were developed (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). In 1976 Athletic Training Education linked to the newly formed Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA), which eventually became the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (CAAHEP, 2005).

As the profession developed and flourished, it became increasingly apparent that to further development of the academic standards associated with athletic training was necessary for the profession (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). This further development was needed to better align the academic standards of athletic training education with other allied health care professionals. By 1980, NATA passed a resolution calling for “All NATA approved athletic training education programs to offer a major field of study in athletic training” (Delforge & Behnke, 1999) which was approved by the NATA Board of Directors. A revision to the original resolution occurred in 1983 to add the statement,

“or equivalent to a major” so those institutions who already had programs in place could comply.

This awareness heightened to a new level in 1990 when the American Medical Association recognized athletic training as an allied health care profession (Ebel, 1999). The profession responded and in 1991 the Joint Review Committee in Athletic Training (JRC-AT) was formed to oversee programmatic accreditation. In 1994, the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA) became the first external accreditation body to oversee programmatic accreditation of athletic training, which later would become the Commission on the Accreditation of Athletic Training Education Programs (CAAHEP).

As the profession continued to grow it further developed standards and guidelines to standardize the educational and professional development of the education programs (Ebel, 1999) and in 1996 The NATA Educational Task Force mandated that all educational athletic training programs must be accredited by the Commission on the Accreditation of Athletic Training Education Programs (CAAHEP) by 2004 (Ebel, 1999). In 1999, the fifty-year anniversary of the athletic training profession, new CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines were provided for athletic training education to standardize the educational and professional development of the athletic training profession. In addition it called for the phasing out of the internship route to certification by 2004 (Ebel, 1999). In 2006, CAAHEP and its review arm the JRC-AT dissolved and the Commission on the Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), which functions under CHEA, replaced CAAHEP (CAAHEP, 2005). The most current act of the NATA Education Council will require all accredited athletic training education programs to be their own

degree bearing major by 2014. This means that all transcripts and diplomas must be a bachelor's degree in Athletic Training or institutions will forfeit their accreditation status (www.caate.net).

A review of the major events associated with the history of athletic training education reveals a sequence of events that has contributed to the rapid growth of the profession. These events have elevated the recognition of the profession as a highly respected allied health care discipline, which in turn relies heavily on accreditation to continue to make strides forward. As we continue our review on Athletic Training Education it is imperative that we look at the process of how an educational program is accredited by CAATE.

CAATE Accreditation History

Accreditation specifically in the medical field was first established in the early 1900's and has since been adopted by most health related professions (Craig, 2003). In 1904, the American Medical Association (AMA) established its Council on Medical Education (CME) (CAAHEP, 2005). In 1905, the CME developed a rating system of medical schools, initiated the inspections, and classified the institutions by 1907 (CAAHEP, 2005). The AMA then collaborated with the Carnegie Foundation to conduct a study of the quality of medical education that resulted in the Flexner Report in 1910 (CAAHEP, 2005). This led to the development of specialized accreditation for the education of health professionals (CAAHEP, 2005).

By the 1930's, the American Medical Association (AMA) started to collaborate with other national associations in an 1976, the American Medical Association Council on Medical Education was the recognized agency (CAAHEP, 2005). In 1976 the CME

delegated to the newly formed Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA) the responsibility and authority for health sciences education accreditation (CAAHEP, 2005). effort to establish the accreditation of health sciences education programs (CAAHEP, 2005). From 1935 through

It was during this time frame the NATA-PEC began recognizing athletic training education programs in 1969, which marked the inception of the NATA curriculum evaluation and approval process (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). In 1969, four undergraduate athletic training education programs were approved by the NATA-PEC (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). By 1982 the number of approved athletic training education curriculums grew to 62 (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). During the 1970s, Sayers Miller, chair of the NATA-PEC began investigating the accreditation of athletic training education programs and after much discussion it was determined that seeking accreditation by an external agency was premature (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). During the late 1980's, a new interest in accreditation resulted the NATA to work towards recognition from the AMA that athletic training as an allied health profession, which occurred in 1990 (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1990). This step was critical because in order to become accredited by CAHEA, the AMA had to recognize athletic training as an allied health profession (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1990).

Athletic training education accreditation was introduced in 1991 by the Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Athletic Training (JRC-AT) and was established to develop standards and guidelines to review accreditation of entry-level programs (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). The *Guidelines for Development and Implementation of NATA Approved Undergraduate Athletic Training Education*

Programs served as the basis for developing the document, as well as the *Competencies in Athletic Training*, which served as a companion document (Delforge & Behnke, 1999). The JRC-AT, with cooperation from CAHEA, integrated the NATA Guidelines into standardized CAHEA format, which led to that approval of *Essentials and Guidelines for an Accredited Educational Programs for the Athletic Trainer* (NATA-PEC, 1991). After the *Essentials* were completed, the JRC-AT discontinued its approval process and CAHEA began accrediting entry-level athletic training education programs in February, 1994 (NATA, 1994). In July 1994, CAHEA was supplanted by CAAHEP (JRC-AT, 1998). By June 1998, CAAHEP Had accredited 82 entry-level programs, and by the fall 1998, the transition from NATA approval CAAHEP accreditation was complete (JRC-AT, 1998).

As the profession continued to grow and changed so did athletic training accreditation and in 2003, the JRC-AT suggested that the NATA Board of Directors move the accreditation process from CAAHEP to a process of self-accreditation (JRC-AT, 2003). The JRC-AT proposed this suggestion in an effort to improve the status of the profession and the educational recognition of future professionals (JRC-AT, 2003). In January 2005, the JRC-AT announced that they would break away from CAAHEP and on June 30, 2006, the JRC-AT dissolved and the Commission on the Accreditation of Allied Health Educational Programs (CAAHEP) changed its name to the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) (CAATE, Overview of the Commission).

CAATE was established under the Council for Higher Educational Accreditation (CHEA) in 2007 and is currently is the agency responsible for the accreditation of 360

professional (entry-level) athletic training educational programs (CAATE, Overview of the Commission). As stated on their website, the mission of CAATE is to provide premier accreditation services to institutions that offer athletic training programs, verify that all CAATE accredited programs meet standards for professional athletic training education and support continuous improvement in the quality of athletic training education (CAATE, Overview of the Commission).

The Process of Accreditation by CAATE

The purpose of CAATE is to develop, maintain, and promote appropriate minimum standards of quality for educational programs in Athletic Training (CAATE, 2006). CAATE accreditation is a voluntary process and it is the responsibility of each institution to demonstrate compliance with these Standards in order to obtain and maintain recognition as a CAATE-accredited Athletic Training Educational Program (CAATE, 2006). Under the Commission for Athletic Training Education (CAATE), the accreditation process requires the submission of the Application for Accreditation Services document, followed by the submission of an acceptable self-study report, and a successful on-site review and required application fee (CAATE, 2006). When undergoing the self-study process, it is the job of the program director to analyze all aspects of the educational program; using the CAATE standards to critically review the program with the help of a self-study review committee that is possible made up of other institutional athletic trainers (CAATE, 2006). After the self-study report is submitted by the institution, the on-site visit occurs and is conducted by peer evaluators using the same standards and validating that the educational program meets all of the requirements that are expected of an accredited program (CAATE, 2006).

For an Athletic Training Educational Program to gain accreditation or reaccreditation, the process must be initiated by the sponsoring institution requesting those services via formal application from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dean, and Program Director and the institution has submitted the accreditation service fee of \$500 (CAATE, 2006). It is only after the application has been approved and the fee paid before a Comprehensive Review for Accreditation will be conducted for Athletic Training Educational Program.

This Comprehensive Review involves two components - the Self-Study Process and the On-Site Review (CAATE, 2006). The Self-Study Process involves a critical analysis of all aspects of an educational program using the 2005 Standards (2012 Standards for the 2013-2014 accreditation cycle, (CAATE, 2012)) and documenting them into a Self-Study Report. CAATE states that, "It is the responsibility of the institution to demonstrate compliance with the CAATE Standards in order to obtain and maintain recognition as a CAATE-accredited Athletic Training Education Program" (CAATE, 2006). This "report" is to be used not only to identify compliance with the Standards but also to discover the programmatic strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement, and potential opportunities to improve the effectiveness and quality of an educational program (CAATE, 2006). At this time the Athletic Trainers who will be involved in the academic portion of the program must then perform an in-depth self-study. This self-study process, "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." The self-study takes a minimum of 1 to 2 years to complete (CAATE, 2006).

The second component of the Comprehensive Review includes an On-Site Visit. A site visitor review team that is selected by CAATE conducts the On-Site Visit. The team consists of two members who have not previously visited the institution before and do not have any conflicts of interest with the school (CAATE, 2006). Prior to the site visit, the Program Director of the institution seeking accreditation is notified, by letter, of the names and affiliations of the individuals assigned to the team. At this time, the Program Director may request replacement of either of the site visitors if the Program Director perceived a conflict of interest (CAATE, 2006). Institutions are responsible for all expenses for a program's site visitor to occur which on average were about \$2,500 (CAATE, 2012). In the 2012 February newsletter, CAATE announced to provide better services to the institutions and to cover all of the site visit expenses, starting in 2013-2014, all programs scheduled to have an on-site visit will be charged a one-time fee of \$5,000 to cover all expenses (CAATE, 2012).

The site-visitation team visits the institution to assess the program's compliance with the CAATE Standards (CAATE, 2006). Site Visits usually are two to two and one-half days in length, but additional time may be required as determined by the site visit team (CAATE, 2006). CAATE also announced in their 2012 newsletter (CAATE, 2012), that in the 2012-2013 accreditation cycle site visits will be lengthened to three days so site visitors have ample time to complete the on-site visit. Prior to an exit conference, where a summation of the visit is presented, the site visit team will review its findings with the Program Director to notify him/her of any concerns and/or non-compliances to avoid any misunderstandings (CAATE, 2006). During the exit conference the site visit team will provide a description of programmatic strengths, areas of concern, and non-

compliance(s) with the Standards (CAATE, 2006).

Once the onsite visitation is completed, a final report is sent to the CAATE Executive Office where it will be forwarded to a CAATE Review Committee (CAATE, 2006). This report cites any discrepancies found between the program and the standards. Once the report is complete, the Site Visit Report is emailed to the Program Director and either the Chair or Dean. The program is then given time to adjust for any stated discrepancies with the standards. At this point the institution may choose to withdraw its application and re-apply at a later time (CAATE, 2006). If a continuing program chooses this route, it would be placed on Probation until the next site visit would occur or a one-year interval, whichever would occur first, and after which an involuntary withdrawal of accreditation would occur (CAATE, 2006). If the program decides to continue on with the accreditation process the next step would be to submit a rejoinder. The institution has until May 1st to submit the rejoinder regardless of the number of citations and no matter when the site visit occurred (CAATE, 2006).

The site visit report and the program's rejoinder are then evaluated by the CAATE at regularly scheduled semi-annual meetings (CAATE, 2006). The rejoinder must demonstrate how the institution plans to implement actions to become compliant with any non-compliance with the Standards issued during the site visit. CAATE then determines the accreditations status of the programs and notifies the sponsoring institution, in writing (CAATE, 2006). This letter identifies the length of accreditation that was granted and cites any remaining areas of non-compliance with the Standards, in which case a Progress Report will be requested to address any non-compliances (CAATE, 2006). Initial accreditation that is granted is a maximum of five years, and

institutions that are continuing accreditation have a maximum of ten years (CAATE, 2006). Once an institution is accredited by CAATE an annual fee will be due each year. The annual fee was \$1,050 per year since 1998, but since then CAATE has announced that the annual fee will be increasing to \$2,100 by 2014 (CAATE, 2012). After this process only then can an educational program then call itself CAATE accredited.

Site Visitors

The purpose of an On-site Visit according to CAATE, is to review compliance with the standards and to verify that what was written in the Self-Study Report is actually occurring (CAATE, 2006). Currently, CAATE site visitors do have certain requirements that must be met to gain the title of “CAATE site visitor”. In the past, site visitor training occurred when interested candidates sent their current curriculum vita, copy of current BOC, letter of interest in becoming a site visitor, one letter of recommendation and three additional references to CAATE. CAATE then would screen top candidates and invite them to participant in the site visitor training which involved a two step education and testing process. The first step of the process involved successful completion (>85%) of an on-line application (which was designed to evaluate the candidate’s understanding of CAATE standards). Upon successful completion of the on-line examination potential site visitor candidates were invited to participate in a site visitor training session that typically coincided with an event such as the annual NATA Educators Conference or the annual NATA meeting and clinical symposium. During the training workshop various topics would be discussed with the candidates that included the structure and function of CAATE, review of the standards and guidelines, self-study documents, the on-site visit, the on-site visit report, scheduling and administrative procedures and conflict-of-interest

scenarios. At the conclusion of the workshop a written evaluation is distributed (Wimer, 2005).

Responsibilities of a CAATE site visitor are defined by CAATE to: “Review accreditation self-study materials as well as the validation of self-studies and actual activities of CAATE accredited programs for consistency with the Standards for the Accreditation of Entry Level Athletic Training Education Programs” (CAATE, 2006). In order to verify compliance with CAATE standards, site visitors must decide if a program is meeting each standard. CAATE will not dictate how each standard is met; the site visitors just confirm compliance with the standards. If this is the case, then every site visit should be the same no matter who the site visitors are or what institution is being evaluated. In an attempt to minimize site visitor influence on a site visit, CAATE requires that all site visitors must complete a training program and serve as a silent observer prior to participating as an active member of a site visitation team. The site team consists of two members who have not previously visited the institution before and do not have any conflicts of interest with the school (CAATE, 2006).

Unfortunately, there is little research associated with the accreditation of athletic training education programs. Only a few publications were found to discuss this topic. An article that was discovered, explores a much different and more controversial aspect of athletic training accreditation. Wimer (2005) studied inter-rater reliability among athletic training accreditation site visitors. This topic sparked heated debates among athletic training educators with only anecdotal accounts of unpleasant site visits as evidence of wrong-doings. Wimer’s study, which utilized hypothetical site visit scenarios, found that

there was a poor inter-rater reliability among site visitor's judgments. According to Wimer, there are serious implications associated with this issue.

“Site visitors who misinterpret standards or apply personal values pose serious threats to the accreditation process because they may judge educational programs compliant when they are not and vice versa and that there may be a great deal of variability across academic programs in applying accreditation standards because of the low agreement among site visitors” (Wimer, 2005).

One other research publication also suggested that the methods of minimizing subjectivity within a site visit need to be explored because this is a potential flaw in the process with how some site visitors are currently conducting site visits (Price, 2011).

“The problem that arises is that verification of standards is a very subjective task. Every site visitor believes that the program they are affiliated with is the best, therefore, it is hard to accurately state that personal bias is left at the door once a site visitor arrives on a campus for a site visit” (Price, 2011). The impact and influence of the site visitor and the frequency of poor site visitor performances need to be more thoroughly investigated, which is the basis of this investigation.

CAATE is aware of this problem based on their results of the 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey (CAATE, 2009). Question six on the 2009 survey asked, “What are the key strategic issues for ATEP accreditation in the next 5-10 years?” (CAATE, 2009) Of the 61% of respondents who answered question six, 33% of those responses focused on site visit experiences (CAATE, 2009). The following excerpts are from the CAATE response survey results discussing site visitor issues:

The site visit examination is very subjective depending on the site visitors. A reduction in the use of subjective behavior would assist in better program administration (CAATE, 2009).

Site visitors should be trained to interpret the standards consistently across all programs (CAATE, 2009)

Are site visitors using the same evaluation criteria...are they all on the same page? (CAATE, 2009)

CAATE summarized these issues with this statement: “The general concern among respondents is the lack of consistency assessing Standards among site visitors, the presence of personal biases during site evaluation and lack of focus on overall program quality” (CAATE, 2009). Question seven of the 2009 survey asked for participants to “Provide additional comments regarding specific measures that CAATE could employ to improve services” (CAATE, 2009). The following comments were referenced regarding site visitors:

During the site visit, site visitors should not ask questions beyond the requirements of the Standards (CAATE, 2009).

Find a way to determine how well site visitors are really doing (CAATE, 2009).

Find a way to ensure consistent application of Standards by site visitors (CAATE, 2009).

CAATE’s response to these comments was similar to their response to question six: “Again, respondents would like well-trained objective site visitors” (CAATE, 2009). It seems that the concerns that were brought to light in the 2005 Wimer article were still resonating with program directors in 2009.

In response to this survey CAATE publicly announced the revamping of the site visit procedures in their 2012 Winter Newsletter. This newsletter indicated that changes would be made to improve the quality of the site visit process, increased consistency

between site visitors, increased time spent on site at the institution to allow more time to spend with students, faculty, and administrators involved with the program, and annual/regular comprehensive site visitor training (CAATE, 2012). However, CAATE did not provide any evidence on how these changes were going to be implemented and when this was going to occur. CAATE also announced that they would be changing qualifications for site visitors as well as conducting a more comprehensive training (CAATE, 2012). CAATE is requiring updated site visitor training to be held at the NATA Annual Meeting in St. Louis in June 2012. A group of approximately 40 site visitors were invited to this first training. Because the training will be using the 2005 Standards, the number of site visitors invited is being kept to a minimum. Currently CAATE is revamping their site visit process to include the 2012 Standards, which are scheduled to be released in summer 2012 and implemented for the 2013-2014 accreditation cycle (CAATE, 2012). Future site visitor training will use the 2012 Standards and annual and regular training updates and performance-based training will also be implemented for site visitors (CAATE, 2012). These revisions and updates may either improve or further compromise the consistency of interpretation of the accreditation standards amongst site visitors and will need further investigation.

Conclusion

Accreditation in the United States is an important means to assure and improve higher education quality, assisting institutions and programs using a set of standards developed by peers (CHEA, *The Value of Accreditation*). It has helped to provide the conditions necessary for the United States to develop diverse, flexible, robust, and often admired higher education (CHEA, *The Value of Accreditation*). The process of

accreditation has many advantages, as well as disadvantages, which provides reasons for investigating the site teams that review such standards.

With CAATE's acknowledgement in their 2009 customer satisfaction survey regarding the need for support and improvement in the accreditation process is a concern for programs as well as their revamping of the site visit procedures in 2012, opens the door for research in athletic training accreditation. The benefits my research will provide include giving valuable insights about current site visitors and offer constructive information on improving CAATE site visitor performance. With the information that will be provided, CAATE will be able to address issues that may arise from this investigation and make continual improvements for future site visitors. This in turn will improve the consistency of the site visitors in future CAATE accreditation visits and will help to reinforce the importance of the continual improvement of professional/programmatic accreditation in higher education. Also research in this area will heighten athletic training's quest of providing quality education, to align itself with the other allied health professions, to better prepare for and to strengthen the profession's accreditation process. This thesis contributes to not only the field of athletic training but also other health professional programs by developing an awareness of how current professional programs perceive the people who have a significant impact on the outcomes of accreditation site visits.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

A qualitative research methodology was used to identify the perceptions from the faculty, staff and student of the CAATE site visitors involved with the 2011-2012 CAATE Site Visits for Athletic Training Educational Programs in Illinois. Unlike quantitative studies, which identify sets of variables and seek to determine their relationship, qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes (Glesne, 1999). In this field of research, there have also been previous studies examining the CAATE site visitors using qualitative methods. The information was collected with the use of an online survey from the faculty, staff, and students that were involved with the 2011-2012 CAATE Site Visits for the Athletic Training Educational Program's (ATEP) at selected universities in Illinois. The inclusion of Illinois universities that were selected for this study were dependent on participation in a CAATE site visit for reaccreditation and between November 2011 - February 2012. There were a total of 11 CAATE accredited Athletic Training Educational Programs in the state of Illinois. All participants involved in this research study were faculty, staff or current students in the Athletic Training Educational Program at each selected university. The participants in the Athletic Training Educational Program that were eligible for this study included: the Department Head or Department Chairs, ATEP Program Director, Faculty with core Athletic Training Educational Program classes, Athletic Training Clinical Instructors, and current Graduate Assistants. Students who were enrolled and actively participating in the Athletic Training Program as of August 2011 also met the qualifications for participation in this research study.

Prior to completing the surveys, the participants were required to give their voluntary, informed consent to participate in the study. The consent to participate in the survey was provided as the first question and did not require the subject to provide any identifiable information (Appendix A). The participant either choose “I give my consent” in which they continued to complete the survey or, “I do NOT give my consent,” which concluded their participation of the survey. All information was kept confidential and no records identifying the participant were maintained. Only the researcher and her thesis advisor were permitted to have access to the research records.

Researcher Positionality

As the researcher I believe I must identify my own positionality and how it reflects in the development of this research study. I am currently an Academic Graduate Assistant for an Athletic Training Education Program at a small Division IAA university in the Midwest. This university was seeking CAATE reaccreditation in the fiscal year 2011-2012. Additionally, during my senior year (2010) of undergraduate education at a NCAA Division II university in the Midwest, the university was preparing for their accreditation site visit for the following year (2011-2012). I was able to experience CAATE accreditation both from a student’s and a staff position prospective at two different universities. As a student I knew I was enrolled in an accredited program but otherwise had little knowledge on the issue. It was not until I became a graduate assistant that then I began to learn how important ATEP accreditation is and what standards universities with programs must meet to stay CAATE accredited. Based on my person experiences I began to learn about current problems arising in accreditation.

Data Collection

Preliminary screening/recruitment

Preliminary contact was made through current involvement of 2011-2012 CAATE Athletic Training Educational Program site visits in the state of Illinois. The method of recruitment was using connections to ATEP's program directors at the two of the eleven universities that had a CAATE-site visit during 2011-2012 in Illinois. This method of recruitment was chosen because only 16-20 CAATE ATEP programs nationally have site visits annually (CAATE, 2012). The ATEP program directors at the selected Illinois schools were contacted by the researcher via phone and solicited to participate in the research study. If the program directors agreed to participate, the researcher e-mailed the survey link from survey monkey to them and asked them to forward the link to their eligible students, faculty and staff. Two universities in Illinois gave consent to participant in this research study. To promote confidentiality, the pseudonyms, "University Green" and "University Yellow" were given to the selected universities.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument that was used for data collection was an online survey. Compared with a personal interview, using a survey permitted the results to be confidential and allow the respondents to feel more comfortable responding to questions according to their own perceptions without any judgment. A pilot study was conducted after an Illinois university's site visit in 2011. This pilot study used a preliminary survey and the survey used in this present study was modified from that preliminary survey. The questions on the survey used Likert Scale and open-ended responses about the 2011-2012

CAATE site visitors. This survey was divided down into four sections: demographic information, faculty/staff and student perceptions of site visitors from faculty, staff and students, emotional response to the site visitors, and open-ended questions about the CAATE site visitors performance, how CAATE site visitors could improve, and any additional comments the participants had about the site visitors as well as opinions about future proposed changes in accreditation.

Procedures

This research study was approved by Eastern Illinois University's IRB before the research conducted this study. University Green's and Yellow's program director was contacted by the researcher via phone and solicited to participate in the research study. The program directors then forwarded the survey link (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PKQDKN3>) to all of the qualified students, faculty and staff to complete the survey. Results of the survey were then collected from the password protected website by the primary investigator.

Data analysis

This research data analysis used a thematic approach. A thematic approach is when the key information will be identified as it relates to the purpose and research questions established in the beginning of this research study (Glesne, 1999). Each key piece of information was assigned a label to capture its meaning, and the labels were coded as emerging categories developed. Relationships between categories were evaluated and examined and collapsed together or separated when appropriate. All final themes were reviewed within the research team.

Trustworthiness was established by peer review and data source triangulation (Glesne, 1999). The first data source triangulation in this research study was the use of multiple data sources that were retrieved from two different universities. The second source of triangulation was the utilization of two techniques to gather data, which were Likert scale responses and open-ended questions. The final piece of the triangulation was the use of a peer review team. The peer review team was comprised of two Athletic Training educators from Eastern Illinois University with previous experience in qualitative methodologies. The peer review team evaluated the data and findings as interpreted by the researcher to determine credibility and accuracy with the data collection process and interpretations.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this investigation was to identify and analyze faculty, staff, and students' perception of the site visitors who were involved with the 2011-2012 Athletic Training Educational Program (ATEP) Site Visits in Illinois. The perceptions from different universities were compared to determine whether there was perceived site visitor subjectivity during each university's site visit. Athletic Training Educational Programs at two universities in Illinois gave consent to participant in this research study. To promote confidentiality, the pseudonyms names University Green and University Yellow were given to the selected universities. An online survey was distributed via email to the program directors through Survey Monkey on May 1st, 2012. The research survey was then closed on June 26th, 2012. There were a total of 109 subjects recruited for this study and 83 participants completed and returned the research survey successfully, for a return rate of 76%.

University Green ATEP

University Green had a total of 50 eligible participants targeted in this research survey. Of the 50 potential participants targeted 44 returned the survey and 43 successfully completed the survey (43/50 or 86% return rate). One survey was excluded from analysis due to an incompleteness of the survey. Of the 43 participants included in this research 21% were faculty/staff, and 79% were students who were actively involved with University Green's Athletic Training Program and were a part of the CAATE Site Visit. The descriptive data that was collected for the two groups is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. University Green Participant Demographic Information

	Total (n) (%)		Gender (n) (%)		Role in the ATEP	# of PPI	Years affiliated with ATEP
Faculty/Staff	9	21	6 (M)	67	Faculty	2	3.94
			3 (F)	33	Staff	7	
Student	34	79	20 (M)	59	Freshman	3	1.81
					Sophomore	17	
					Junior	13	
					Senior	1	

Students

A total of 34 students completed and returned the research survey. Three of the eligible students were freshman from University Green, 17 were sophomores, 13 were juniors, and only one was a senior. Two out of the 34 students indicated that they had been previously involved with a CAATE site visit. Both stated that University Green in 2011 was the location of the previous site visit they had experienced. None of the students had indicated that they had previously worked as an accreditation employee CAATE site visitor.

Faculty/Staff

This group contained the faculty and staff personal from University Green. Possible roles in the ATEP included: Dean of the College, Chair of the Department, Program Director, Faculty, Head Athletic Trainer, Assistant Athletic Trainer, and Graduate Assistants Athletic Trainers both academic and athletic. A total of nine of the 14 participants completed and returned the research survey. Of the nine, two were faculty members and the other seven were staff personal. Five of the nine indicated that they had previously been involved with another site visit with the locations as followed: Radord University (2009), COE College, Ohio State, Kansas State, Minnesota State (2008), and

Michigan State (2010); for a total of six different locations. One had indicated that they had been previously involved with other University Green site visits during the years of 1993 and 2005. Also none in this group had indicated that they had previously worked or were a CAATE site visitor.

University Yellow ATEP

University Yellow had a total of 59 eligible participants targeted in this research survey. Of the 59 potential participants, 39 returned the survey and 37 successfully completed the survey (39/59 or 63% return rate). Two surveys were excluded from analysis due to an incompleteness of the survey. Of the 37 participants included in this research only 5% were faculty/staff, and 95% were students who were actively involved with University Yellow's Athletic Training Program and were apart of the CAATE Site Visit. The descriptive data that was collected for the two groups is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. University Yellow Participant Demographic Information

	Total		Gender		Role in the	# of	Average #
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	ATEP	ppl	of Years involved
Faculty/Staff	2	5	2 (M)	100	Faculty	2	19 ± 2.83
			0 (F)	0	Staff	0	
Student	35	95	17 (M)	49	Freshman	0	1.44 ± 0.50
					Sophomore	19	
			18 (F)	51	Junior	16	
					Senior	0	

Students

A total of 35 students completed and returned the research survey. No eligible freshman students returned the research survey from University Yellow, 19 were

sophomores, 16 were juniors, and there were not any eligible seniors that returned the survey as well from University Yellow. Only one student out of the 34 indicated that they had been previously involved with a CAATE site visit. This student indicated that it was during the 2007-2008 school year; the student however did not indicate where this site visit was held. None of the students had indicated that they had previously worked or were a CAATE site visitor.

Faculty/Staff

This group contains the faculty and staff personal from University Yellow. Possible roles in the ATEP included: Dean of the College, Chair of the Department, Program Director, Professor, Head Athletic Trainer, Assistant Athletic Trainer, and Graduate Assistants both academic and athletic. A total of two participants completed and returned the research survey. Both participants were faculty members of University Yellow. Both indicated that they had previously been involved another University Yellow. One participant specified the years to be 1987, 1999, 2005, and 2012; the other participant stated that they only had participated in the 2005 and 2012 University Yellow site visits. Also in this group one participant had indicated that they had previously worked or were a CAATE site visitor, the other participant was not.

Likert-Scale Questions

Table 3 summarizes the results from the Likert Scale responses for each group from University Green and University Yellow. Answers to each question were recorded on a scale of 1-4: 1-Strong Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Agree, and 4-Strongly Agree. Table 3 reports the mean Likert score for each statement. The questions were presented to each participant in the same order.

Figure 3. Results from Likert-scale questions from University Green and Yellow

	Questions	University Green		University Yellow	
		S	F/S	S	F/S
1	I thought the CAATE site visitors were enthusiastic about conducting the site visit.	2.8	2.9	2.5	3.0
2	I felt that the CAATE site visitors were passionate about what they were doing.	2.9	2.9	3.5	3.0
3	I felt that the CAATE site visitors were professional in their actions and demeanor.	3.1	3.1	3.8	3.0
4	I thought the CAATE site visitors were knowledgeable about the ATEP.	3.0	2.8	3.6	3.0
5	I thought the CAATE site visitors were knowledgeable about the current standards that need to be upheld for an ATEP according to CAATE.	2.9	2.9	3.6	3.0
6	I perceived that the CAATE site visitors wanted to help my university meet their goals with the ATEP.	2.6	3.0	3.5	3.0
7	I believed that the site visitors spent enough time in evaluating the various aspects of the program.	2.6	2.7	3.3	2.5
8	I felt that the CAATE site visitors assessed each standard fairly and without bias.	2.9	2.8	3.5	3.0
9	I felt that the CAATE site visitors asked questions beyond the requirements of the "Standards".	2.7	2.3	3.3	3.0
10	I felt the CAATE site visitors were very supportive of the program.	2.7	2.9	3.7	3.0
11	I felt the CAATE site visitors were trying to expose the faults of the ATEP.	2.5	2.1	2.2	2.5
12	I felt the CAATE site visitors were not all in agreement with one another.	2.2	2.1	1.9	1.5
13	I thought the site visitors were friendly.	3.1	3.3	3.6	3.5
14	I felt at ease around the CAATE site visitors.	2.7	3.2	3.3	3.5
15	I felt the atmosphere during the site visit to be pleasant.	2.8	3.0	3.4	3.5
16	I felt nervous around the CAATE site visitors.	2.5	1.8	2.2	1.0
17	I felt comfortable with the types of questions the CAATE site visitors were asking me.	2.9	3.3	3.4	3.0
18	I felt welcomed to participate by the CAATE site visitors.	2.9	3.2	2.4	3.0
19	I perceived the CAATE site visitors to be inattentive.	2.3	2.0	1.9	1.5

Likert-scale used: 1-Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Agree; 4-Strongly Agree

(S) = Students

(F/S) = Faculty/Staff

Themes

The students and faculty/staff at both of the universities at times had very similar responses to the 2011-2012 CAATE site visitors. The three major themes that arose included: site visitor knowledge, the interview process, and site visitor attitude. As well as the three major themes, subthemes also emerged from the additional comments that were provided from the two universities. The subthemes were knowledge of CAATE standards, knowledge of each ATEP program, questions, individual interviews, and the site visitors' time spent on campus. The themes emerged after labeling each key piece of information, assigning a label to capture its meaning, and coding the labels as emerging categories developed. Relationships between categories were evaluated and examined and collapsed together or separated when appropriate.

Students

Site Visitor Knowledge

The theme of site visitor knowledge was discovered at both universities, although the subthemes that emerged from each university were different. The site visitor knowledge theme becomes apparent from the responses from the open-ended questions the students answered and is strengthened by the results from the Likert-scale questions used in the research survey. The subthemes that emerged included: knowledge of the CAATE Standards, and knowledge of each ATEP program.

The theme of site visitor knowledge discovered that the current site visitors were not well-versed with the 2005 Standards and knowledgeable about the ATEP that they were conducting the site visit for. One student from University Green felt that the site visitors were, "*They were unprofessional, disinterested, and unknowledgeable.*"

University Green also felt that the site visitors did not know enough about their ATEP to make informed decisions about non-compliances.

Site Visitor Knowledge of CAATE Standards. The first subtheme that emerged under the site visitor knowledge was about their overall perceived knowledge of the CAATE standards. This subtheme was only apparent at University Green. Students added comments about what they had learned from issued non-compliances. Some of the specific comments from University Green students included:

“I was upset to hear that our general medical rotation would be eliminated and then found out it wasn’t on our final report. This took away a good experience from the seniors graduating in the fall.” - University Green Student

“I am really confused that they told us our hospital rotation was inadequate but it wasn’t listed on the final report.” - University Green Student

“They can be more helpful and not trying to trick the staff and then change the requirements that they said we had fulfilled.” - University Green Student

A survey question also strengthens the subtheme of site visitor knowledge about the CAATE standards. Question five was specifically about site visitor knowledge of the Standards. Question five stated, “I thought the CAATE site visitors were knowledgeable about the current standards that need to be upheld for an ATEP according to CAATE.” University Yellow students agreed with this statement and had mean answer of 3.6 on the Likert-scale question, the highest of all the groups. Meanwhile the University Green students disagreed with a mean answer of 2.9. The results were consistent with the provided comments from the universities.

Site Visitor Knowledge of each ATEP. Another subtheme that emerged only from University Green students was site visitor knowledge of the ATEP. Comments included:

“Site visitors should have a better idea of previous evaluations and should be given ideas of attentive clinical methods (ie. our use of a hospital for general

medical did not fit “their” structure). Basically, site visitors should be better educated on the standards/practice and CAATE should be more selective.” - University Green Student

“[I would like the site visitors to] be more involved with the students in the program and know our program better.” - University Green Student

Another survey question supports this topic. Question four stated, “I thought the CAATE site visitors were knowledgeable about the ATEP.” University Yellow agreed with this statement with a mean answer of 3.6, again the highest of all of the groups. University Green students agreed with this statement with a mean answer of 3.0.

Interview Quality and Preparation

The second major theme that emerged from this investigation was on the interview quality and site visitor preparation for the interviews. The theme becomes apparent from the provided responses from the students as well as the Likert-scale responses used in the research survey Both universities provided comments in each of the following subthemes that included: site visitor questions, and individual interviews. University Green only provided the last subtheme comments on the site visitors’ time spent on campus.

Criticism of the interview quality and site visitors’ preparations for conducting interviews was highly emphasized at both universities. Both universities felt that the site visitors need to prepare better questions before the interviews. As well as, “[*They need to] go more in depth with their questions and listen to what we told them,*” as stated from a University Green student. University Yellow also commented that, “[*They should] have a meeting with a smaller amount of students.*” University Green students concluded that the site visitors need to spend more time on campus to really “*to get a better view of ATS’ daily activity.*”

Site Visitor Questions. Student from University Green and University Yellow provided comments on how the site visitors need to improve their questions during the interview process. One major suggestion was noted was that the site visitors ask more in-depth questions about their ATEP. Comments from both Universities included:

“[They need to] go more in depth with their questions and listen to what we told them.” - University Green student

“I think they could try to make the questions more about the student experience.” - University Yellow Student

“They probably could have dug a little deeper into some of the issues to see where that certain issue might be getting exposed on an individual basis” - University Green Student

“They asked us questions as if they were clueless... obviously they know the answers to them, so why beat around the bush about it.” - University Yellow Student

Other students recommended that the site visitors should improve on the interview process itself with the comment:

“They can improve by making the meetings with the program’s students a bit more formalized and specify their questions.” - University Green student

“Ask us more questions. This could be accomplished by allowing more time for the ATS interview.” - University Green Student

“Allow students to voice their concerns without stating that is the way it is. Ex: number of clinical hours required by school...or set the Standards by CAATE of required clinical hours, understanding students work and have full time classes perhaps... 150 hours a semester required.” - University Yellow Student

Three survey question responses also pertained this subtheme. Question nine stated, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors asked questions beyond the requirements of the “Standards”. Interestingly, University Yellow students agreed with this statement (3.3) while University Green students disagreed (2.7). Question 17 also was pertained to this theme. It was stated as, “I felt comfortable with the types of questions the CAATE site

visitors were asking me.” University Green students trending towards disagreed with this statement (2.9), while University Yellow students agreed (3.4). Interestingly enough, the Likert scale responses contradict the answers received in the open-ended questions.

Individual Interviews. Another subtheme that emerged from the investigation that was unanticipated was desire of the students to have individual interviews. This subtheme was seen in both universities. A University Green student simply felt that the site visits needed, “*individual interviews.*” Students from University Green and Yellow stated:

“[The site visitors needed to] try and make the interview more comfortable.” - University Green Student

“[They should] have a meeting with a smaller amount of students.” - University Yellow Student

“Sit down one on one with more students rather than just the staff and GA’s.” - University Green Student

The only survey question that slightly addressed this was question 18 as stated, “I felt welcomed to participate by the CAATE site visitors.” University Green students disagreed with this statement with a mean answer of 2.9 as well as University Yellow students who also disagreed with this statement with a mean answer of 2.5.

Site Visitor Time Spent on Campus. The third subtheme that arose from the students’ comments again only from University Green was the theme of the use of site visitor time on campus. Most comments were about the site visitors being more involved with the ATEP and spending more time evaluating the program. Comments from University Green that were made pertaining to this topic included:

“They could spend time observing the interactions of our ATEP, such as sitting in on more classes, going to business meetings, and watching how our ATR’s run.” - University Green Student

“Maybe they should be in the ATR during clinical to get a better view of ATS’ daily activity.” - University Green Student

“[They need to] take more time to get to know the staff, faculty, and students. Visit felt short.” - University Green Student

Some survey questions also applied this subtheme. Question six stated, “I perceived that the CAATE site visitors wanted to help my university meet their goals with the ATEP.” University Green students responded with a mean answer of 2.6, “disagree”. University Yellow students on the other hand, “agree” with a mean answer of 3.5. Another question that supported this subtheme was question seven which stated, “I believed that the site visitors spent enough time in evaluating the various aspects of the program.” The University Green students disagreed with this statement (2.6) while; University Yellow students agreed with this statement (3.3). The final Likert-scaled question that addressed this topic was question eight which stated, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors assessed each standard fairly and without bias.” The University Green students gave a mean answer of 2.9 while; University Yellow students gave a mean answer of 3.5.

Perceived Site Visitor Attitude

The final major theme that emerged was perceived site visitor attitude. Overall, the consensus was negative from University Green but there were a few students who provided comments about the site visitors having a positive impact during the site visit. Students that replied from University Yellow on the other hand, responded with consensus indicating a positive experience with the CAATE site visitors. Of the students that provided comments a majority of them were under this theme. Some students from the University Green stated:

“I felt the visitors could be more enthusiastic. It just seemed very low and non-energetic.”

“[They can improve by] being more welcoming and personable.”

Others felt that the site visitors were “*very inattentive*” and that they should try to be “*less awkward and more social*.” Another student added that the site visitors could “*be more approachable, and make the conversation flow easier*.” More comments included:

“[The site visitors] seemed that they were looking down at us during the interview.” - University Green Student

“[The site visitors could] be more open and less judgmental seeming.” - University Green Student

“[They could] have more interest and positive attitude towards helping the program.” - University Green Student

“[They could] be more passionate and have more energy when asking questions about the program.” - University Green Student

One student commented very strongly that, “*They were unprofessional, disinterested, and unknowledgeable. It seemed like we were a bother to them.*” The survey questions that pertained to this topic were questions one, two, three and six. Question one stated, “I thought the CAATE site visitors were enthusiastic about conducting the site visit.” Interestingly enough, University Green student disagreed with this statement with a mean answer of 2.8 while; University Yellow students disagreed even more with a mean answer of 2.5. Question two also was geared towards this topic stating, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors were passionate about what they were doing.” University Green students “disagreed” (2.9) with this statement but, University Yellow students “agreed” (3.5). Question three stated, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors were professional in their actions and demeanor.” University Yellow had the highest mean answer of the group with 3.8 while; University Green had a mean answer of 3.1 with this statement.

Two more questions that pertained to supporting the ATEP were questions six and ten. Question six stated, “I perceived that the CAATE site visitors wanted to help my university meet their goals with the ATEP.” Question ten stated, “I felt the CAATE site visitors were very supportive of the program.” For both questions University Green students disagreed (2.6 and 2.7) and University Yellow students agreed (3.5 and 3.7).

On the other hand some students from both of the universities stated that they had a positive view on CAATE site visitors with comments that included:

“I felt that they provided a good atmosphere to discuss our ATEP program.” - University Green Student

“[They were] very professional.” - University Yellow Student

“I thought they did a good job.” - University Green Student & University Yellow Student

“I felt like they did a good job and I can’t think of anything that would help them improve.” - University Green Student

“[It was a] pleasure having them visit.” - University Yellow Student

“[I] thought they were nice and listened to students.” - University Yellow Student

The survey questions addressing this topic were questions 13, 14, and 15. Question 13 stated, “I thought the site visitors were friendly.” Both universities’ students agreed with this statement but University Green had a mean answer of 3.1 and University Yellow had a mean answer of 3.6. Question 14 stated, “I felt at ease around the CAATE site visitors.” With this question University Green students disagreed (2.7) while; University Yellow students agreed (3.3). The last question that pertained to this topic was question 15 which stated, “I felt the atmosphere during the site visit was pleasant.” Again University Green students disagreed (2.8) while; University Yellow students agreed (3.4).

Faculty/Staff

Site Visitor Knowledge

The theme of site visitor knowledge becomes apparent from the open-ended responses from the faculty/staff members at the University Green ATEP as well as the Likert-scale responses used in the research survey. It was discovered from examining the theme of site visitor knowledge that the current site visitors were not well versed with the 2005 Standards and knowledgeable about the ATEP that they were conducting the site visit for. University Green strongly felt that the CAATE site visitors needed to, “*become knowledgeable on the requirements*” specifically toward their ATEP. A faculty/staff participant answered the open-ended question, “Do you have any ideas how the CAATE site visitors can improve and if so how?” The participant’s answer included:

“Become knowledgeable on the requirements necessary to maintain CAATE Accreditation. (ie. Specific rotations that undergraduate students must complete such as clinic or high school).” - University Green faculty/staff member

The survey questions that applied to the theme of site visitor knowledge were questions five and four. Question five was specifically about site visitor knowledge of the Standards. Question five stated, “I thought the CAATE site visitors were knowledgeable about the current standards that need to be upheld for an ATEP according to CAATE.” University Green faculty/staff had the lowest score on this question with a mean of 2.9. These responses reflected the responses of University Green students. University Yellow faculty/staff on the other hand, felt the site visitors were knowledgeable with a mean answer of 3.0. Question four also reflects this theme as stated, “I thought the CAATE site visitors were knowledgeable about the ATEP.” University Green disagreed even more

with this statement (2.8) whereas; University Yellow agreed (3.0) that the site visitors were knowledgeable about their ATEP.

Interview Quality and Preparation

The second major theme that emerged from this investigation was on the interview quality and site visitor preparation for the interviews. The theme becomes evident from the open-ended responses from the faculty/staff and is strengthened by the responses from the Likert-scale questions used in the research survey. The three subthemes that emerged from this investigation include: site visitor questions, individual interviews, and site visitor time spent on campus.

Criticism of the interview quality and site visitors' preparations for conducting interviews was highly emphasized at both universities. Both universities felt that the site visitors need to prepare better questions before the interviews and "*ask more direct questions*" as stated from a University Green faculty/staff member. The universities also felt that, "*preparation is a key*" and that the site visitors seemed to lack it. A faculty/staff member agreed with the students that individual interviews would help the site visit. The final subtheme was the amount of time that was spent on campus, and it was not as heavily focused on by the faculty and staff of University Green but was addressed.

Site Visitor Questions. Most of the comments recorded from University Green faculty/staff hinted that the site visitors needed to simply "*ask more direct questions*" and that the site visitors needed to be prepared to ask questions. University Yellow also provided a comment regarding site visitor questions.

"[They need to] ask for more examples from each ACI. I don't feel like I was asked enough besides strengths and weaknesses of the program."-University Green faculty/staff member

“More rigour - I felt that they didn’t dig into the details enough to learn what was really happening in our program.” - University Yellow faculty/staff member

“I felt like they could have asked more questions and that they should ask more specific questions as they related to accreditation.” -University Green faculty/staff member

“[They] were not engaging during interviews [and there were] lots of awkwardness.” - University Green faculty/staff member

University Green faculty/staff members also added suggestive comments on preparation for the site visitors. Comments included:

“Preparation is a key. These particular site visitors did not seem to have questions in mind prior to meeting with certain groups.” - University Green faculty/staff member

“Prepare questions before the site visit. Only one site visitor was really asking any questions.” - University Green faculty/staff member

The two survey questions also concerned this subtheme. Question nine stated, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors asked questions beyond the requirements of the “Standards”. Interestingly, University Yellow faculty/staff agreed with this statement (3.0) while University Green faculty/staff disagreed (2.3). Question 17 also was pertained to this theme. It was stated as, “I felt comfortable with the types of questions the CAATE site visitors were asking me.” Both of the universities agreed with this statement (3.0) but University Green faculty/staff member agreed slightly more (3.3).

Individual Interviews. Another subtheme that emerged from the investigation was the conduction of individual interviews by the CAATE site visitors. In this subtheme only University Green provided any comments.

“I think individual interviews would help. People aren’t always comfortable talking in large groups while bringing up issues within the ATEP especially if the issues are pertaining to people within the group that they are set to meet the site visitors with.” -University Green faculty/staff member

The only survey question that somewhat addressed this was question 18 as stated, “I felt welcomed to participate by the CAATE site visitors.” Both of the universities faculty/staff agreed with this statement. University Green had a mean scaled response of 3.2 and University Yellow had a mean scaled response of 3.0.

Site Visitor Time Spent on Campus. The amount of time that was spent on campus was not as heavily focused on by the faculty and staff of University Green but was addressed. One staff member specifically commented about time spent on campus. The comment is noteworthy even though there were not any other faculty/staff comments regarding the site visitors needed to be on campus for a longer period of time. This concern was stated as:

“[Site visitors need to] spend more time observing the ATR and ACI/ATS interactions.” This participant also stated that, “I also feel a hard copy of their findings (though not official) would be beneficial.” - University Green faculty/staff member

Several survey questions also were relevant to this subtheme. Question six stated, “I perceived that the CAATE site visitors wanted to help my university meet their goals with the ATEP.” Both of the universities agreed with this statement with a mean answer of 3.0. Another question that supported this subtheme was question seven which stated, “I believed that the site visitors spent enough time in evaluating the various aspects of the program.” Both of the universities disagreed with this statement (2.7) but University Yellow faculty/staff member disagreed with this statement slightly more (2.5). The final likert-scaled question that addressed this topic was question eight which stated, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors assessed each standard fairly and without bias.” The University Green faculty/staff member gave a mean answer of disagree (2.8) while; University Yellow faculty/staff gave a mean answer of agree (3.0).

Perceived Site Visitor Attitude

The final major theme that emerged was perceived site visitor attitude. Overall, the consensus was negative from University Green. No comments were provided from University Yellow. The faculty/staff from University Green agreed with the students and stated that the site visitors should be:

“[They could] be more energetic!” - University Green faculty/staff member

“[I felt that] professionalism was lacking in one of the site visitors.” - University Green faculty/staff member

“[I thought that] professionalism was lacking in one of the site visitors.” - University Green faculty/staff member

“[I felt that a] personal bias was involved when evaluating a component of the program. [They] only took a look at one group’s comments and made judgments even though evidence showed otherwise.”-University Green faculty/staff member

Another faculty/staff member simply ended by stating, *“continue to strive for continuity among site visitors.”* The survey questions that pertained to this topic were questions one, two, three and six. Question one stated, “I thought the CAATE site visitors were enthusiastic about conducting the site visit.” University Green faculty/staff members disagreed with this statement with a mean answer of 2.9 while; University Yellow faculty/staff members agreed with a mean answer of 3.0. Question two also was geared towards this topic stating, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors were passionate about what they were doing.” University Green again “disagreed” (2.9) with this statement but University Yellow “agreed” with the statement (3.0). Question three stated, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors were professional in their actions and demeanor.” Both of the universities agreed with this statement (3.1 and 3.0).

Three more questions that concerned supporting the ATEP were questions six, ten, and eleven. Question six stated, "I perceived that the CAATE site visitors wanted to help my university meet their goals with the ATEP." Both universities agreed (3.0) with this statement. Question ten stated, "I felt the CAATE site visitors were very supportive of the program." University Green faculty/staff 'disagreed' (2.7) while University Yellow faculty/staff 'agreed' (3.0).

More survey questions pertaining to the topic of perceived site visitor attitude were questions 13, 14, and 15. Question 13 stated, "I thought the site visitors were friendly." Both universities' faculty/staff agreed with this statement. University Green faculty/staff agreed with a 3.3 and University Yellow faculty/staff agreed with a 3.5. Question 14 stated, "I felt at ease around the CAATE site visitors." With this question University Green faculty/staff agreed (3.2) while; University Yellow faculty/staff agreed more with a (3.5). The last question that pertained to this topic was question 15 which stated, "I felt the atmosphere during the site visit was pleasant." Again both universities agreed University Green (3.0); University Yellow (3.5).

Additional Comments

The faculty/staff from both of the responding universities were asked one additional question. This question pertained to comments or concerns about the proposed changes that CAATE announced to make to the site visits and site visitor training. Only two participants answered this question from University Green and one stated, "*I feel that the changes will benefit the program.*" The other participated answered, "*I am unfamiliar with the impending changes.*" The participant from University Yellow also commented

that the proposed changes that CAATE announced to make to site visits and site visitors
“will be positive”.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Research investigating reliability and consistency of the CAATE site visitors is extremely limited. This study sought out to provide insight about the current CAATE site visitors and to seek out useful information in improving site visitor performance while conducting site visits. Although this study was restricted to only the 2011-2012 CAATE site visits of two universities, the dissatisfactions of site visitors from this study were similar to those mentioned in the work of Price, the CAATE Customer Satisfaction Survey Summary 2009, and Wimer's study (Price, 2011; CAATE, 2009; Wimer, 2005).

Demographic Information

University Green had a total of 50 eligible participants targeted in this research survey. Of the 50 participants recruited 44 returned the survey and 43 successfully completed the survey. One survey was excluded due to incomplete responses. This gave University Green a survey return rate of 86%. Of the 43 participants included in this research 21% were faculty/staff, and 79% were students who were actively involved with University Green's Athletic Training Program and were a part of the CAATE Site Visit.

University Yellow had a total of 59 eligible participants targeted in this research survey. Of the 59 participants recruited 39 returned the survey and 37 successfully completed the survey. Two surveys were excluded due to incomplete responses This gave University Yellow a survey return rate of 63%. Of the 37 participants included in this research only 5% were faculty/staff, and 95% were students who were actively involved with University Yellow's Athletic Training Program and were apart of the CAATE Site Visit.

Theme Comparison

There were three themes that arose from the qualitative responses of the participants from both of the universities. The faculty/staff and students at both of the universities at times had very similar responses to the 2011-2012 CAATE site visitors. These themes emerged by evaluating the responses of the survey and open-ended questions. The responses were assigned a label to capture its meaning, and the labels were coded as emerging categories developed. Relationships between categories were evaluated and examined and collapsed together or separated when appropriate. The three major themes that arose included: site visitor knowledge, interview quality and process, and the attitude of the site visitors. As well as the three major themes, subthemes also emerged from the additional comments that were provided from the two universities.

Site Visitor Knowledge

Responsibilities of a CAATE site visitor are defined by CAATE to: “Review accreditation self-study materials as well as the validation of self-studies and actual activities of CAATE accredited programs for consistency with the Standards for the Accreditation of Entry Level Athletic Training Education Programs” (CAATE, 2006). In order to verify compliance with CAATE standards site visitors must decide if a program is meeting each standard (CAATE, 2006). This brings us to the conclusion that if site visitors are perceived to be unknowledgeable of the CAATE standards they are no longer qualified to make decisions on an ATEP’s compliance with the CAATE standards. This very scenario was discovered in my research with responses from University Green. One faculty/staff member felt that the site visitors needed to, “*become knowledgeable on the requirements necessary to maintain CAATE Accreditation.*” One University Green

student also agreed with the faculty/staff member and stated that the site visitors were, “*unprofessional, disinterested, and unknowledgeable.*” Having the title of a CAATE site visitor there should be no excuse not to know the current CAATE standards; it is their defined responsibility as stated from CAATE as a site visitor. This disturbing discovery questions CAATE’s overall proposed mission statement to “to transform the profession...through quality education”. How are they theoretically able to achieve their proposed mission statement “to ensure quality education” if they don’t even demand quality site visitors that verify the very standards in which the quality education is suppose to be grounded on (CAATE, 2012)?

The findings on the research survey continued to support this theme of site visitor knowledge. University Green disagreed with both statements (questions four and five) pertaining to the site visitors’ perceived knowledge while University Yellow agreed with both. The interesting thing is why did one university find the site visitors to be unknowledgeable and the other university find them to be relatively knowledgeable? CAATE site visitors should be competent with all of the current standards because they supposedly have gone through the same training that in the past involved a two-step education and testing process. The first step of the process involved successful completion (>85%) of an online application (which was designed to evaluate the candidate’s understanding of CAATE standards). Upon successful completion of the on-line examination potential site visitor candidates were invited to participate in a site visitor training session that typically coincides with an event such as the annual NATA Educators Conference or the annual NATA meeting and clinical symposium. Usually during this training workshop various topics would be discussed with the candidates that

included the structure and function of CAATE, review of the standards and guidelines, self-study documents, the on-site visit, the on-site visit report, scheduling and administrative procedures and conflict-of-interest scenarios. So if CAATE states that all of the site visitors have the same training, then why are some site visitors perceived to be more knowledgeable than others? Another study Wimer 2005, also discovered this weakness with site visitors and their training process. Wimer (2005) suggests:

“Perhaps a knowledge test of the current standards should be given to all site visitors. Continuing education units for site visitations or an appropriate per diem might also provide an impetus for quality improvement by raising the stakes and rewarding good performance” (Wimer, 2005).

In correspondence of the Wimer study (2005) the JRC-AT now CAATE rebuked this statement and stated that a new training in 2005 would require all current and new site visitors to pass an examination before becoming eligible to participate in a “live” site visitor training session (Turocy, 2006). The correspondence then continues to state that the outcomes of the examination would be used to determine whether a site visitor is qualified to represent the accrediting body on a site visit (Turocy, 2006). One thing to note about this study is the year it was completed: 2005. Research lacks to show that this is actually happening in 2012. Another thing to note is that Wimer actually collected his data in 2003, which is almost ten years ago today and my findings show that it is still a problem whether CAATE is actually doing what they stated or not!

Currently, CAATE had proposed a revamping of their site visit process. The revamping would include implementing the new 2012 Standards, which are scheduled to be released in Summer 2012 and implemented for the 2013-2014 accreditation cycle

(CAATE, 2012). CAATE also announced in the 2012 winter newsletter, that they would be changing qualifications for site visitors as well as conducting a more comprehensive training (CAATE, 2012). CAATE is requiring updated site visitor training to be held at the NATA Annual Meeting in St. Louis in June 2012. A group of approximately 40 site visitors will be invited to this first training. Because the training will be using the 2005 Standards, the number of site visitors invited is being kept to a minimum. Future Site Visitor Training will use the 2012 Standards and annual and regular training updates and performance-based training will also be implemented for site visitors (CAATE, 2012). CAATE never stated that they would required any retraining of old site visitors, so how would this help the next accreditation cycle with site visitors who are already perceived to be unknowledgeable?

Another aspect of site visitor knowledge that emerged from the responses of the two universities was the knowledge of the ATEP that the site visitor was conducting the site visit for. Interestingly, only University Green again did not feel the site visitors were knowledgeable of their program. A University Green student stated, "*Site visitors should have a better idea of previous evaluations and should be given ideas of attentive clinical methods (ie. our use of a hospital for general medical did not fit "their" structure).* Basically, site visitors should be better educated on the standards/practice and CAATE should be more selective." CAATE states that, "It is the responsibility of the institution to demonstrate compliance with the CAATE Standards in order to obtain and maintain recognition as a CAATE-accredited Athletic Training Education Program" (CAATE, 2006). So to demonstrate compliance, each ATEP that decides to apply for accreditation must complete a self-study of their ATEP as part of the comprehensive review for the

accreditation process (CAATE, 2006). This “report” is to be used not only to identify compliance with the Standards but also to discover the programmatic strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement, and potential opportunities to improve the effectiveness and quality of an educational program (CAATE, 2006). The interesting thing is that the purpose of the site visit via the site visitors is to validate the information and findings identified during the self-study process (CAATE, 2006). The self-study document is sent to CAATE 6-8 months prior to the scheduled site visit, so the site visitors should have a fairly decent idea how the ATEP is going before ever stepping on campus (CAATE, 2006).

Interview Quality and Preparation

Another finding of this research study showed that both universities included criticism of the interview quality and site visitors’ preparations. They felt that the site visitors needed to prepare better questions before the interviews and “*ask more direct questions*” as stated from a University Green faculty/staff member. This was unexpected because it is already assumed that the site visitors are asking the appropriate questions. It is the site visitors’ job to verify the ATEP’s compliance with CAATE standards. How can the site visitors decide if a program is meeting each standard if they are not even asking the appropriate questions? A faculty/staff member from University Yellow stated, “[*I felt that the CAATE site visitors need] more rigour - I felt that they didn’t dig into the details enough to learn what was really happening in our program.*” This discovery is alarming because the purpose of a site visit is not only to validate the self-study report and evaluate the program’s compliance with the standards, but it includes an evaluation of the “*correlation between the didactic and clinical aspects of the program*”

(CAATE, 2006). It is their job to “dig into the details” of an ATEP. As well as not asking questions, faculty/staff felt that the interview process itself was the lack of preparation from the site visitors. A faculty/staff member from University Green stated, *“Preparation is a key. These particular site visitors did not seem to have questions in mind prior to meeting with certain groups.”* My research shows that CAATE needs to revisit how the site visitors are actually conducting the site visits.

Another concern that was found mainly from both of the universities’ students was the suggestion of *“individual interviews”*. A University Yellow student stated, *“[Site visitors should] ask questions to smaller groups, I feel they would get better input that way.”* My research further solidifies this with survey question 18 which was stated as, “I felt welcomed to participate by the CAATE site visitors.” Both universities disagreed with this statement. University Green students mean answer of 2.9 where as University Yellow students disagreed more and had a mean answer of 2.5. On the CAATE website under forms there is a document called Site Visitor Interview Requirements. This document points out every person/group that the site visitors are required to interview during the site visit. Under these requirements it specifically states, “Athletic Training Students (ATS) - individually or in small enough groups to facilitate enough conversation where all ATS are free to express themselves” (CAATE, Overview of the Accreditation Process). Clearly the site visitors did not use good judgment with interviewing the student groups at both universities. Also CAATE’s current mission statement is: “To provide *premier* accreditation services to institutions that offer Athletic Training programs, verify that all CAATE accredited programs meet Standards for professional athletic training education and support continuous improvement in the quality of athletic training

education” (CAATE, Overview of the Commission). My research further shows that CAATE is not currently meeting their mission statement with not providing *premier* accreditation services.

These concerns may have become an issue because currently site visits usually are two to two and one-half days in length, but additional time may be required as determined by the site visit team (CAATE, 2006). Which brings us to another aspect of the site visit that the universities’ felt was lacking: the site visitors’ amount of time spent on campus. According to the Overview of the Accreditation Process, additional time may be required but it is up to the site visit team to make that call (CAATE, 2006). One student from University Green commented, *“They could spend time observing the interactions of our ATEP, such as sitting in on more classes, going to business meetings, and watching how our ATR’s run.”* The amount of time that was spent on campus was not as heavily focused on by the faculty and staff of University Green but was addressed. Question seven on the research survey supported this finding. It was stated as, “I believed that the site visitors spent enough time in evaluating the various aspects of the program.” Both universities faculty/staff ‘disagreed’ with this statement. The students from both universities had a split response with the University Green students slightly disagreeing with this statement (2.6) while; the University Yellow students were the only group to agree with this statement (3.3).

Interestingly enough CAATE announced in their 2012 newsletter (CAATE, 2012), that in the 2012-2013 accreditation cycle site visits will be lengthened to three days so site visitors have ample time to complete the on-site visit. They stated, “Increased time spent on site at the institution to allow more time to spend with students, faculty, and

administrators involved with the program” (CAATE, 2012). As you can see this is a much needed proposed change, but this may have come about because of the proposed fee increases, not because CAATE felt like the site visitors needed “more time”. The results from this study show that “more time at the university evaluating” would be useful, but currently CAATE has not implemented this and has not stated what the site visitors will exactly be doing with the increased site visit length.

Currently institutions are responsible for all expenses for a programs site visitor to occur which on average were about \$2,500 (CAATE, 2012). In the 2012 February newsletter, CAATE announced to provide better services to the institutions and to cover all of the site visit expenses, starting in 2013-2014, all programs scheduled to have an on-site visits will be charged a one-time fee of \$5,000 to cover all expenses (CAATE, 2012). This increased fee will be extremely difficult on many universities in the current economic state. CAATE justifies the fee increase with:

“We have instituted additional training for all site visitors and extended the length of each site visit to afford the site visit team ample opportunity to assess a program’s compliance with each standard as well as provide the programs with sufficient time to present the necessary evidence and outcome data to establish compliance” (CAATE, 2012).

Again, CAATE states that the fee increase will allow extended time at the site visit, which could provide ample opportunity to assess the ATEP compliance, but they have not stated how they were going to implement this “opportunity” to actually happen. CAATE continues to justify the annual fee increase with:

“The tradition of athletic training education accreditation has been grounded solely on volunteers since the inception of athletic training accreditation. That process cannot continue in this age of accountability, transparency, outcome assessment and oversight. If we demand consistency and quality in our site visit process, we are required to invest in our selection and training of our site visitors and make them accountable by providing a stipend commensurate with the amount and quality of work expected” (CAATE, 2012).

With the fee increase CAATE wants to pay the site visitors for their “quality” work. The largest complaint about the site visitors from the 2009 Customer Satisfaction Survey was, “the lack of consistency assessing standards among site visitors, the presence of personal biases during site evaluation and lack of focus on overall program quality” (CAATE, 2009). How will paying the site visitors any of the current complaints with personal bias, knowledge, and lack of focus? Will institutions get a refund of their site visit fee if they declare “non-quality” site visitors? If the site visitors are going to be paid how will CAATE quantify how the site visitors are actually doing? Example: compare programmatic accreditation to a house inspection. If the homeowner perceives the house inspector to be unknowledgeable, holding a personal bias, or lacking overall focus on their job they could complaint and the house inspector could potentially lose their license. Will CAATE provide the same service to the institutions if they perceived “non-quality” site visitors and allow the institution to have a second opinion?

Perceived Site Visitor Attitude

The final finding of my research study showed a major concern with perceived site visitor attitude during the site visit. University Green students felt that the site visitors

were “*very inattentive*” and that they should try to be “*less awkward and more social*.” Not only did University Green students’ feel this way but also the faculty/staff from University Green stated that the site visitors should “*be more energetic!*” One faculty/staff member felt that, “*professionalism was lacking in one of the site visitors*.”

University Yellow on the other hand, stated an overall consensus with a positive experience with the CAATE site visitors with comments like, “[*They were*] *very professional,*” or “[*I*] *thought they were nice and listened to students.*” Three questions from the research survey corresponded with the overall open-ended response. Question two stated, “I felt that the CAATE site visitors were passionate about what they were doing.” University Green slightly “disagreed” (2.9) with this statement but, University Yellow faculty/staff agreed (3.0) and the students almost strongly “agreed” (3.5). Two more questions that pertained to supporting the ATEP were questions six and ten. Question six stated, “I perceived that the CAATE site visitors wanted to help my university meet their goals with the ATEP.” Question ten stated, “I felt the CAATE site visitors were very supportive of the program.” For both questions University Green students “disagreed” (2.6 and 2.7) and University Yellow students leaned toward “strongly agree” (3.5 and 3.7).

Currently, CAATE site visitors do have certain requirements that they must meet to gain the title of “CAATE site visitor”. In the past, site visitor training occurred when interested candidates sent their curriculum vita and cover letter to CAATE. CAATE then screened top candidates and invited a pool of potential site visitors to a training session that typically coincided with an event such as the annual NATA Educators Conference or the annual NATA meeting and clinical symposium. If CAATE is so “*selective*” why did

the University Green participants feel so strongly that their site visitors were unprofessional? Currently, most of the site visitors are representatives of other universities and representing CAATE as well as the profession of Athletic Training. As an Athletic Trainer it is embarrassing that the students perceived the site visitors to be unprofessional because a majority of them are also ATEP educators at other universities. Shame on them, for coming in and so poorly representing the profession!

My research also discovered a problem with personal bias in the perceived attitude of the site visitors. One University Green faculty/staff member stated, "*[I felt] that personal bias was involved when evaluating a component of the program. [They] only took a look at one group's comments and made judgments even though evidence showed otherwise.*" Another University Green member concluded by stating, "*continue to strive for continuity among site visitors.*" My research further solidifies this with question eight on the research survey that stated, "I felt that the CAATE site visitors assessed each standard fairly and without bias." The University Green faculty/staff and students slightly disagreed (2.8/2.9) while; on the other hand University Yellow faculty/staff and students agreed (3.0) with the students leaning toward strongly agree (3.5).

Personal bias has been reoccurring theme with CAATE site visitors in the past with other research. In comparison to other studies, Dr. Lee Ann Price (2011) found in her dissertation that there were glaring differences regarding site visitor subjectivity between two universities in the perceived education of the site visitors and viewing accreditation as a positive experience. Dr. Price suggests that,

“CAATE needs to re-evaluate their site visitor training and education program, evaluate site visitor performance on a regular basis and discontinue utilizing site visitors that abuse their powers as a site visitor even if it decreases the number of visitors available. (Price, 2011).

CAATE also found site visitor bias to be a major concern to many Athletic Training Educators. The 2009 CAATE Satisfaction Survey question six asked, “What are the key strategic issues for ATEP accreditation in the next 5-10 years?” Of the 61% of respondents who answered question six, 33% of those responses focused on site visit experiences (CAATE, 2009). The following excerpts are from the CAATE response survey results discussing site visitor issues:

The site visit examination is very subjective depending on the site visitors. A reduction in the use of subjective behavior would assist in better program administration (CAATE, 2009).

Site visitors should be trained to interpret the standards consistently across all programs (CAATE, 2009).

Are site visitors using the same evaluation criteria...are they all on the same page? (CAATE, 2009)

In 2005, Wimer studied inter-rater reliability among athletic training accreditation site visitors. With his study he did however spark heated debates among the educational profession of athletic training. Wimer states the serious implications associated with this issue:

“Site visitors who misinterpret standard or apply personal values pose serious threats to the accreditation process because they may judge educational programs compliant when they are not and vice versa and that there may be a great deal of

variability across academic programs in applying accreditation standards because of the low agreement among site visitors (Wimer, 2005).”

He also concluded that, “a broader examination of personal bias and the promotion of integrity should be discussed at evaluator training sessions.” He also had hopes that his study would inspire other to conduct investigations about the consistency and reliability of accreditation evaluations in other allied health disciplines in the continual effort to improve health care (Wimer, 2005). Unfortunately, since 2005 there have not been many published articles concerning this topic.

CAATE has posted on their website their goals of the commission. Goal I states: “Comprehensive accreditation review process will be defined, *consistent and free of personal biases*, conflicts of interest and non-sanctioned interpretations with respect for institutional autonomy” (www.caate.net-Overview of the Commission). Even with all of this assurance in place by CAATE it is seen by the results of this research and other research this is not occurring as consistently as it should to reflect the fee increase and the cost of having a CAATE ATEP which is a major problem that needs to be addressed by CAATE.

Additional Comments

The faculty/staff from both of the responding universities were asked one additional question. This question pertained to comments or concerns about the proposed changes that CAATE announced to make to the site visits and site visitor training. Only two participants answered this question from University Green and one stated, “*I feel that the changes will benefit the program.*” The other participated answered, “*I am unfamiliar with the impending changes.*” The participant from University Yellow also commented

that the proposed changes that CAATE announced to make to site visits and site visitors “*will be positive*”.

We can see that CAATE has proposed changes to hopefully implement in the near future, but the real question is will they actually implement these changes and will they make a difference? In the 2005 Wimer study he writes, “several procedural changes were introduced to sit visitors over the past several years such as writing of reports, yet formal training to accompany the changes did not occur” (Wimer, 2005). This was conducted in 2003 and still nothing has changed, ten years CAATE let slip past without any major intervention of the site visit or site visitors.

There appears to be a significant problem with the perception of the ATEP’s faculty/staff and students of the CAATE site visitors. CAATE’s proposed new mission statement is, “To transform the profession... through quality education” (CAATE, 2012). How can they possibly expect to uphold this mission statement when they do not demand quality from their own site visitors? The increased cost for accreditation service currently does not reflect the quality that is given to all programs. How will CAATE continue to justify this increased cost to institutions that already have problems validating the current fee of 500 dollars to their administration will low quality site visitors? As a young professional and as a possible future educator, I believe CAATE should ownership with the revamping of CAATE site visitors. This should issue should be eliminated so the profession can really focus on improving the educational quality of Athletic Training Educational Programs instead of the accreditation process itself.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to identify and analyze faculty, staff, and students' perception of the site visitors who were involved with the 2011-2012 Athletic Training Educational Program (ATEP) Site Visits in Illinois. Accreditation is important to maintain high standards in higher education and health care; therefore, the benefits of exploring the perceptions from faculty, staff, and students on the 2011-2012 CAATE site visitors in Illinois will provide valuable insights about current site visitors and offer constructive information on improving CAATE site visitor performance. The questions that were addressed with this investigation included:

1. Do the faculty/staff, and students perceive the CAATE site visitors as being consistent in their evaluation of the 2005 Standards while evaluating their Athletic Training Educational Program?
2. Are the site visitors perceived to be doing their jobs without bias?
3. What do the faculty/staff, and students think about the changes in the accreditation process occurring in the 2013-2014 year and do they believe these changes will make a positive difference?

By choosing a qualitative study, two CAATE accredited universities were compared to determine whether there was perceived site visitor subjectivity during each ATEP's site visit. The two Athletic Training Educational Programs in Illinois gave consent to participant in this research study. There were three themes that arose from the responses of the participants from both of the Universities. The three major themes that arose included: site visitor performance, interview quality and process, and the time spent on

campus. As well as the three major themes, subthemes also emerged from the additional comments that were provided from the two universities.

The perceptions of the faculty/staff and students show that they do not perceived the CAATE site visitors as being consistent in their evaluation of the 2005 Standards while evaluating their Athletic Training Educational Programs. They also do not perceived the CAATE site visitors to be doing their jobs without personal bias. Also, the faculty/staff from both of the ATEP have positive feelings about the changes in the accreditation process occurring in the 2013-2014 year. The faculty/staff believe these changes will make a difference once they are implemented by CAATE.

Directions for Further Research

The results from my research study provide directions for further research. Further research should include reinvestigation of CAATE's proposed changes to the site visitors once they have been implemented. As previously stated ten years have gone by between the 2005 Wimer study and this research study with minimal changes to the CAATE site visitors. My hope is that the reinvestigation would show significant improvement of perceived CAATE site visitors from the proposed changes.

REFERENCES

- Accrediting Council for Independent College and Schools (ACICS). (n. d.) History of Accreditation. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, <http://www.acics.org/accreditation/content.aspx?id=2258>
- Accreditation Guide. (1999). Accreditation Guide. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, http://www.degree.net/accreditation/accreditation-guide_199911302316.html
- AR Online Dictionary. (2006). Definition: perception. Retrieved May 10, 2012, from www.ardictionary.com/Perception
- Braskamp, L., Poston, M., & Wergin, J. (1997). Accreditation: “sitting beside” or “standing over”? *The CHEA Chronicle*, 1(4). Retrieved May 10, 2012 from the CHEA Chronicle <http://TheCHEAChronicleJuly1997.htm>
- Brittingham, B. (2009). Accreditation in the United States: How did we get to where we are? *New Directions for Higher Education*, 145, 7-27. Retrieved May 20, 2012 from www.interscience.wiley.com
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). (2006). At a Glance. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, www.chea.org
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). (2010). The Value of Accreditation. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, http://www.chea.org/pdf/Value%20of%20US%20Accreditation%2006.29.2010_buttons.pdf
- College Athletic Trainers Society. (2008). *CAATE opens Site Visitor Training to ALL Athletic Trainers*. Retrieved on September 17, 2011 from, <http://www.collegeathletictrainer.org/news/story.php?release=24>
- Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training (CAATE) (n.d). *Overview of the Commission*. Retrieved on September 17, 2011 from, <http://www.caate.net/imis15/CAATE/About/CAATE/About.aspx?hkey=1b198b36-7205-4b7f-9447-abd3800a3264>
- Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training (CAATE) (2005). *Standards for the Accreditation of Entry-Level Undergraduate Athletic Training Education Programs*. Retrieved on June 12, 2012 from, <http://www.jrc-at.org/selfstudy/2005standards.pdf>
- Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). (2006). *Overview of the Accreditation Process*. Retrieved September 17, 2011 from <http://www.caate.net/>. [click on “Report Forms”, “Self-Study Documents”. “Accreditation Overview”]

- Commission of Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). (2009). *CAATE Customer Satisfaction Survey Summary 2009*. Retrieved on November 1, 2011 from, <http://www.caate.net>
- Commission of Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). (2012). February Newsletter. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, <http://www.caate.net/imis15/CAATE/Newsletters/CAATE/Newsletters/>
- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) (2005). *Accreditation Manual*. Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation, Retrieved on June, 12 2012 from, <http://caahep.org/documents/CAAHEP%20Accreditation%20Manual.pdf>
- Craig, D. I. (2003) *Educational reform in athletic training: a policy analysis*. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 38(4), 351-357.
- Delforge, G. D., & Behnke, R.S. (1999). The history and evolution of athletic training education in the United States. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 34, 53-61.
- Eaton, J. (2003). Before you bash accreditation, consider the alternatives. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49(25), B15-18.
- Eaton, J. (2007). Institutions, accreditors, and the US federal government: redefining their appropriate relationship. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, <http://www.changemag.org/Archives/Back%20Issues/September-October%202007/full-institutions-accreditors.html>
- Eaton, J. (2011). An Overview of U.S. Accreditation. *CHEA Research and Publications*. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, <http://www.chea.org/Research/index.asp#overview>
- Ebel, J. G. (1999). *Far beyond the shoe box*. Toronto, Canada: Forbes Custom Publishing.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
- Harrison, B. T., & Brodeth, E. (1999). Real work through collegiality: faculty seniors views in the drive to improve learning and research. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 21(2), 203-214.
- Joint Review Committee on Education Programs in Athletic Training (JRC-AT) (1998, Spring). JRC-AT News.

- Joint Review Committee on Education Programs in Athletic Training (JRC-AT) (2003, June). Leaving CAAHEP. Retrieved on June 12, 2012 from, <http://www.jrc-at.org/ppt/leaving.ppt>.
- Pratt, D. (1997). Reconceptualizing the evaluation of teaching in higher education. *Higher Education*, 34, 23-44.
- Pollock, D. (2005). Does accreditation lead to best practice? Maybe. *Policy & Practice of Public Human Services*. Academic Search Premier: American Public Human Services Association, 26.
- Price, Lee Ann. (2011). *Perceptions of Athletic Training Accreditation Visits for Program Evaluation in Post-Secondary Education: Student, Faculty and Staff Perspectives*. Dissertation: Illinois State University. Department of Curriculum & Instruction.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (2007). Definitions: Perception. Retrieved on May 2, 2012 from, www.m-w.com/dictionary/perception
- National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) (1990, September). AMA endorses athletic training as an allied health profession. *NATA News*, 4.
- National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) (1994, May). JRC-AT Update. *NATA News*, 34.
- National Athletic Trainers' Association Professional Education Committee (NATA-PEC) (1991, December). *Athletic Training Newsletter*.
- Turocy, P. S. (2006) Correspondence to Interrater Reliability Among Athletic Training Site Visitors. *Journal of Allied Health*. 34:65-75.
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.) Accreditation in the United States: Retrieved on May 12, 2012, from <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>
- Wimer, J. W. (2005). *An investigation of interrater reliability among athletic training accreditation site visitors* [Electronic version]. *Journal of Allied Health*, 34(2), 65-75.
- Worldtrans.org. (n.d). The meaning of perception. Retrieved on May 10, 2012 from, <http://www.transworld.org>
- Young, K., Chambers, C., Kells, H., & Associates. (1983). *Understanding accreditation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

NOTICE: By completing this survey and returning it to the researcher, you are indicating your voluntary consent to participate in this research study and you may choose to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze faculty, staff, and students' perception of the site visitors who were involved with the 2011-2012 Athletic Training Educational Program (ATEP) Site Visits in Illinois. The researcher does not foresee any risks or direct benefits to the participants who choose to complete this survey. All information will be kept confidential and no records identifying the participant will be maintained. Only the researcher and Dr. Lee Ann Price will be permitted to have access to the research records. If you have any questions please contact Tiffany Green at tlgreen6@eiu.edu.

Perceptions of the 2011-2012 Accreditation Site Visitors for the Athletic Training Educational Programs in Illinois

Demographic Information

Your Gender: Male
 Female

My role in the Athletic Training Educational Program (ATEP) is:

Including this semester I have been involved with the ATEP (as a student in the program, Faculty/Staff, or an Administrator) at my current university for:

Number of years (1 semester = 1/2 year)

I have been through another ATEP CAATE site visit before the 2011-2012 site visit (as a student in the program, Faculty/Staff, or an Administrator). (Any University)

Yes if yes where and which years?

No

I have previously worked as/am currently a CAATE site visitor:

Yes No

(Please check ONE of the following answers to each question)

4-Strongly Agree; 3-Agree; 2-Disagree; 1-Strongly Disagree

Questions	4	3	2	1
I thought the CAATE site visitors <i>were enthusiastic</i> about conducting the site visit.				
I felt that the CAATE site visitors <i>were passionate</i> about what they were doing.				
I felt that the CAATE site visitors <i>were professional</i> in their actions and demeanor				
I thought the CAATE site visitors <i>were knowledgeable</i> about the ATEP.				
I thought the CAATE site visitors <i>were knowledgeable</i> about the current standards that need to be upheld for an ATEP according to CAATE.				
I perceived that the CAATE site visitors <i>wanted to help</i> my university meet their goals with the ATEP.				
I believed that the site visitors <i>spent enough time</i> in evaluating the various aspects of the program.				
I felt that the CAATE site visitors assessed each standard <i>fairly and without bias</i> .				
I felt that the CAATE site visitors <i>asked questions beyond the requirements</i> of the "Standards".				
I felt the CAATE site visitors <i>were very supportive</i> of the program.				
I felt that the CAATE site visitors <i>were trying to expose the faults</i> of the ATEP.				
I felt the CAATE site visitors <i>were not all in agreement</i> with one another.				
I thought the site visitors <i>were friendly</i> .				
<i>I felt at ease</i> around the CAATE site visitors.				
I felt the atmosphere during the site visit <i>was pleasant</i> .				
<i>I felt nervous</i> around the CAATE site visitors.				
I felt <i>comfortable with the types of questions</i> the CAATE site visitors were asking me.				
<i>I felt welcomed</i> to participate by the CAATE site visitors.				
I perceived the CAATE site visitors to be <i>inattentive</i> .				

Additional Questions:

Do you have any ideas how the CAATE site visitors can improve? And if so how?

Do you have any additional comments about the CAATE site visitors?

Faculty and Staff ONLY:

Do you have any comments or concerns about the proposed changes that CAATE announced to make to the site visitors and site visitor training?

Thank you for your time and participation with this research study.