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Educational Outcomes of the DAT: A Document Review and Thematic Analysis

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Context: The transition in athletic training education allows for unique and new opportunities in postprofessional education. The Doctor of Athletic Training (DAT) degree is one of the postprofessional education pathways that could provide athletic trainers advancement in clinical practice, practice leadership, and scholarship. However, there is no data on the educational outcomes of DAT programs and what graduates should expect from their experiences. The aim of this study was to explore whether DAT programs are delivering curricula consistent with the development of clinical scholars with advanced knowledge and skills that are needed for high-level patient care and literature relative to DAT programs and their publicly stated educational outcomes. **Methods:** We used a qualitative design document review to explore DAT program websites. The primary investigator collected the relevant data from each of the program websites and recorded the data into a custom spreadsheet. We used a combination of deductive and inductive coding. The professional definition and previous literature established the overarching themes: Advanced Practice Leadership, Advance Clinical Practice, Scholarship, and Individual Programmatic Uniqueness. A two-member analysis team used inductive coding of program outcome data to identify the sub-themes. Researcher reflexivity, triangulation, and auditing were used to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy. **Results:** A total of eight DAT programs actively enrolling students with publicly available websites were included (Table 1; Figure 1). Every program (n=8, 100%) claimed to engage students in each of the following thematic areas: Advanced Practice Leadership, Advance Clinical Practice, Scholarship, and Individual Programmatic Uniqueness. In the theme of advanced practice leadership, sub-themes organizational, educational, and practice-based leadership were identified among the areas where programs claimed to prepare the DAT student for different roles. Of the eight programs, 38% (n=3) listed outcomes related to organizational leadership, 50% (n=4) noted practice leadership, and 75% (n=6) noted learning outcomes related to educational leadership. The advanced clinical practice theme was comprised of sub-themes about advancing the DAT student's skills in providing patient-centered care (n=2, 25%), evidence-based practice (n=7, 88%), intervention (n=4, 50%), and evaluation (n=3, 38%). The scholarship theme indicated that programs required DAT students to engage in traditional research (n=2, 25%) and practice-based research (n=7, 88%); one program requires no scholarship in the development of a DAT credential holder. Programs noted six different areas of programmatic uniqueness; however, overlap existed whereby 50% of the programs deliver curricula in manual therapy, 50% (n=4), 25% in business (n=2), and 25% in concussion recognition and care (n=2). Areas of true uniqueness, where only one program had a focus in that area were integrative health, sports performance, and neuromechanics. There was no consistency in how programs communicated through their websites and how they were measuring or meeting their outcomes. **Translation to Practice:** All eight program websites noted program content related to Advanced Practice Leadership, Advance Clinical Practice, Scholarship, and Individual Programmatic Uniqueness, suggesting alignment with the professional definition and previous literature. Through the review, there is a lack of clarity on what "role" programs believed a graduate from their program would play in athletic training (e.g., educator, practice leader, clinician). As applicants of DAT programs become more and more savvy, there will likely be an increased expectation to demonstrate how programs are meeting their stated goals with publicly available outcomes data, which is consistent with best practices for regionally accredited and specialty accredited programs.

Table 1. Program Characteristics

Characteristics	Percentage	Frequency
Enrollment Status		
Full-time status	50%	4
Part-time status	25%	2
Unspecified	50%	4
Graduate Assistantship Positions Available		
Yes	25%	2
No	0%	0
Unspecified	75%	6
Accreditation Status		
Specialty Accreditation		
Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE)	13%	1
Regional Accreditation		
Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACs)	25%	2
Higher Learning Commission (HLC)	37%	3
Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)	25%	2
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities	13%	1
Average Tuition Costs (Total)		
In-state		\$ 32,629
Out-of-state		\$ 35,281
Average Credits (Total)		
Credits		54
Program Length (months)		
23	13%	1
24	63%	5
36	25%	2
Program Type		
Cohort Model	75%	6
Individualized Model	25%	2
Delivery Mechanism		
Predominantly online	75%	6
Predominantly in person	25%	2

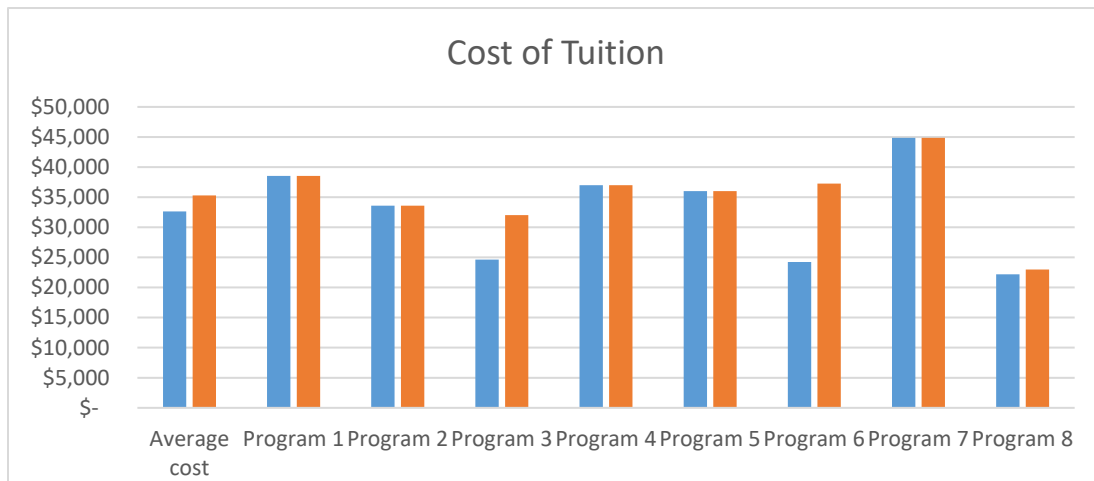


Figure 1. Tuition Cost per Program