

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION:** Professional Socialization of Graduate Assistant Athletic Trainers in the Collegiate Setting

**STUDENT:** Ashley Thrasher

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Education

**COLLEGE:** Teacher's College

**DATE:** December 2014

**PAGES:** 286

Graduate assistantships are prevalent amongst many new athletic trainers (ATs) enabling them to gain experience while being supervised by a veteran AT. Many newly credentialed athletic trainers gain initial employment as graduate assistants (GAs) in the college setting, yet their socialization into their role is unknown. Although there is a great deal of research on professional socialization of experienced ATs in the collegiate and high school settings, there is a lack of research on the GA experience. The purpose of this proposed study is to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the professional socialization process of GAs. To explore the professional socialization of GAs, interviews were conducted with GAs working clinically in the collegiate setting (i.e. with an intercollegiate athletic team) and ATs who supervise GAs in the collegiate setting. Data were collected via individual phone interviews and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were conducted until data saturation occurred. Data were analyzed through phenomenological reduction as described by Giorgi (1975), with data coded for common themes and subthemes. Trustworthiness was established via member checks, data triangulation, and peer debriefing. Eight themes emerged: 1) previous preparation, 2) role identity, 3) initial entry into role, 4) role expectations, 5) supervisor's role in development and support, 6) maturation, 7)

shortcomings, and 8) success. Most participants felt GAs were prepared for their roles, but needed additional clinical experience prior to becoming full time ATs. GAs perceive themselves as the primary care provider for their athletic team. Role orientation occurred both formally (e.g., review of policies and procedures) and informally (e.g., immediate role immersion). GAs who were immediately immersed into clinical practice adapted to their role quickly. GAs felt a formal orientation process and policies and procedures manual would have alleviated some of the stress experienced initially. The supervisor's role development and support consisted of mentorship and intervening when appropriate. GAs matured in their roles by developing their skills, enhancing their education, and adapting to their role. Personal attributes, clinical experience, support system, and institutional fit contributed to success as GAs. Factors that hindered success were an unsupportive environment and long hours. When looking for assistantships, future GAs should find a position that allows them to practice independently but provides a formal mentorship, didactic educational opportunities, and professional development opportunities. Supervisors should include formal mentorships and orientation as a way to socialize GAs into their roles.