

▲ Interrater Reliability Among Athletic Training Site Visitors

TO THE EDITOR—In the Summer 2005 issue of *Journal of Allied Health*, an article was published by Dr. Jeffrey Wimer on interrater reliability among athletic training accreditation site visitors (*J Allied Health* 2005;34:65-75). The Joint Review Committee for Athletic Training (JRC-AT) would like to respond to the information presented by the author and to clarify several misconceptions in the article.

Although Dr. Wimer's findings were reported in Summer 2005, the research and data were gathered in 2001. There have been many changes in both the CAAHEP Standards for Educational Programs in Athletic Training as well as the entire Athletic Training accreditation site visit process since that time. In 2001, new CAAHEP Standards and Guidelines for the Athletic Trainer were developed that provided greater clarification of requirements than did the previous version.

In Dr. Wimer's article, it appears that the author's conclusions and discussion reflect current practice in athletic training accreditation; however, this is not the case. In 2003, site visitor training was updated, and all site visitors who were current at that time were required to participate in retraining sessions. In this study, there is no way to determine whether the subjects involved actually participated in updated site visitor retraining, and therefore, the conclusions made from their data should not be used to reflect current site visitor practices in athletic training accreditation. Furthermore, the author states that only 44% of subjects used in this study had ever done a site visit; therefore, the data from 56% of all respondents may not have reflected accurately the type of reviews conducted by actual qualified site visitors.

The study methods also are not an accurate representation of the actual site visit investigative processes, because they did not allow the site visitors to clarify situations or ask questions to gather more essential information. Seeking clarification and additional supportive information is common during an actual site visit. Current site visitor training not only encourages triangulation of findings, but it also requires the documentation of specific evidence and rationale for cited noncompliances. Furthermore, the current site visit process requires site visitors to interact with members of the JRC-AT after site visits to clarify any questions or concerns and to ensure that there is sufficient evidence to document cited noncompliances. Site visitors also are encouraged to contact the JRC-AT with questions that occur during the visit to ensure better accuracy and consistency in site visitor actions.

The method for site visitor selection and training delineated by the author no longer reflects current practice. This

method, which was modified in 2003, is being retooled again by the JRC-AT/CAATE (Commission on the Accreditation of Athletic Training Education, the commission that will replace the JRC-AT in July 2006 as the specialized accreditor for athletic training) to ensure even greater accuracy and consistency between site visitors. Site visitor training and retraining is conducted periodically to ensure that all site visitors follow the accreditation policies and procedures and utilize the same methods to determine compliance with the Standards. The new CAATE site visitor training, which is scheduled to begin this summer, corresponds with the transition to the 2005 CAATE Standards for Accreditation of Athletic Training Education Programs which will be implemented with the Fall 2006 site visits. This new training will require all current and new site visitors to pass an examination (at a pre-determined passing level) before becoming eligible to participate in a "live" site visitor training session. Site visitor training outcomes then will be used to determine whether a site visitor is qualified to represent the accrediting body on a site visit. These data, along with data gathered on the quality of the site visitor's work, also will be used to determine whether that site visitor will be used again for future accreditation visits.

This new process, which mirrors some of Dr. Wimer's final recommendations, is more reflective of actual practice in athletic training accreditation and will continue to improve the site visitor accreditation process in the future.

PAULA SAMMARONE TUROCY, EdD, ATC
Chair, Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in
Athletic Training
Centennial, Colorado
atheducation@duq.edu

IN REPLY—This study was the first real attempt to examine the accreditation process in athletic training. In essence, the study found that the process was broken and needed fixing. The letter from Dr. Turocy signifies that the process was in need of modification and that JRC-AT is in the process of "retooling" it.

Since the time of the study, the JRC-AT has taken several positive steps in identifying its own weaknesses, in addition to the weaknesses that I identified. For instance, Dr. Turocy writes that the JRC-AT is in the process of making sure site visitors are familiar with the Standards by giving them an examination, a procedure that I suggested in my article. However, Dr. Turocy does not address whether passing the new exam will eliminate an individual's biases during a site visit.

While some attempts have been made to improve site visitor retraining, the process is still little more than a lecture on organizational structure and travel reimbursement procedures. When vignettes were recently added to the lecture format, committee experts could not answer specific questions about Standards because of "institutional autonomy." Sadly, one site visitor in attendance at retraining chose to read a newspaper during the vignette activity. I find it ironic that Dr. Turocy would elect to criticize my use of scenarios as a research method when the JRC-AT now uses written scenarios (i.e., vignettes) during retraining as a way to mimic real-life situations.

It should be stated again (as was published in the article) that the JRC-AT, including Dr. Turocy, approved the research methodology used for this study. Additionally, several experienced site visitors, including the former chair of the JRC-AT, reviewed the survey instrument so that I could determine construct validity and reliability measures. Now that the article has been published, it appears that some of these same individuals who initially approved and endorsed the project are unhappy with the project findings, principally suggesting the study is outdated. As readers of JAH know, academic research is a time-intensive process that can take years to complete.

As a point of clarification, my study was performed in 2002, not 2001 as claimed by Dr. Turocy. Preliminary find-

ings were hosted online at www.cewl.com (the NATA's Education Council website at the time) and discussed on the Athletic Training and Athletic Training Education listserves during the spring of 2002. In July 2002, I was invited to present my preliminary findings at the annual CAAHEP meeting in Chicago. Furthermore, I reported that 16.7% of the subjects had not yet performed a site visit as a possible reason for the poor performance, not 56% as indicated by Dr. Turocy. In review, this statistic is somewhat irrelevant, because the entire subject pool was qualified to participate in the study due to their JRC-AT training. Moreover, all site visitors received the same set of validated scenarios to see how they would perform.

In closing, I was pleased to read that several of my recommendations "mirror" those being implemented. However, it was unclear from Dr. Turocy's letter whether there is any evidence that the "retooling" efforts underway by JRC-AT have actually worked. To my knowledge, no one has conducted an interrater reliability study of current site visitors in "real-life" situations.

JEFFREY W. WIMER, PH.D, ATC

Assistant Professor and Athletic Training Program Coordinator
Department of Wellness and Sport Sciences
Millersville University of Pennsylvania
Millersville, Pennsylvania

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Tel: 310-324-1000 / Fax: 310-515-3944