

Athletic Training Transitions to Graduate

By Dr. Kelly Fiala, Associate Professor of Athletic Training & Associate Dean, Seidel School of Education and Professional Studies

In 2013, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Executive Committee for Education's workgroup of experts presented the *Professional Education in Athletic Training White Paper* to the NATA board of directors. Based on key findings, the workgroup concluded that professional education in athletic training should occur at the master's degree level. Although this recommendation is still under review and no decision has been made by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) to mandate this transition, Salisbury University faculty and staff recognize the value of the recommendation. Moving the professional program to the graduate level will align athletic training with other healthcare professions, likely increase retention of students in the athletic training profession, and eliminate curricular compromises due to General Education, liberal arts and foundational science requirements at the bachelor's level.

Currently, CAATE allows for professional programs to be at the bachelor's or master's level. At the writing of the *White Paper*, there were 333 bachelor's and 27 master's professional programs. Today, there are 31 master's degree programs and five bachelor's degree programs in the process of transitioning their degree. CAATE has a substantive change application that allows for the degree change of a program without requiring initial accreditation. Program faculty are in communication with CAATE to begin the process with the goal of accepting the first master's degree athletic training class in summer 2016. The undergraduate Athletic Training Program at Salisbury University was suspended in 2014. At that point, incoming students were no longer able to declare the athletic training major. This fall, the program faculty accepted their last class of undergraduate students into the professional phase of the program. These sophomores will have the opportunity to complete program requirements over the next two and half years and graduate in May 2017. The first class of master's students will graduate the following year, resulting in no gaps in graduating classes of athletic training students at SU.



Dr. Jenny Toonstra (right), assistant professor of athletic training, works with current students.

SU's Athletic Training Program has a long history of success. In 1972, the program began as an internship program and later transitioned to the curriculum program that it is today. The program has undergone various transitions to produce excellent professionals and maintain accreditation. Over the past four years, the program boasts a 100 percent, first-time pass rate on the Board of Certification examination. The alumni are well accomplished and continue to promote the program and profession long after their graduations. Alumni are employed in a variety of settings, including professional sports (Baltimore Ravens, Baltimore Orioles, Washington Capitals), intercollegiate athletics (Virginia Tech, Georgetown, Johns Hopkins, Notre Dame, Towson), high schools (Wicomico High School [MD], Delmar Senior High School [DE], Archbishop Spalding High School [MD], Cherokee High School [NJ]), military (Quantico Marine Corp Base), sports medicine clinics and physicians' offices.

The current mission of the program to provide a quality education in order to prepare students for professional careers in athletic training will continue to be the priority for program faculty and staff. To learn more about the Athletic Training Program as it evolves, visit www.salisbury.edu/hss/atep. ❖

