

CATA Accreditation Standards Update – 2026

Summary of Key Changes for Accredited Programs

The 2026 Accreditation Standards modernize athletic therapy education by strengthening competency-based education, enhancing practicum oversight, and increasing accountability for student outcomes. The goal is to ensure graduates are consistently prepared for entry-level practice while providing programs with clearer expectations and greater consistency across institutions.

1. Greater Focus on Competency-Based Education

While competency-based education has been a longstanding component of accreditation, the 2026 standards provide clearer guidance and expectations through the introduction of formal definitions and enhanced documentation requirements.

Programs are now expected to more clearly document, review, and maintain:

- Curriculum Maps
- Programmatic Evaluation Plans (PEPs)
- Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs)

The standards also introduce clear definitions for key concepts such as Competency-Based Education, Curriculum Maps, PEPs, and EPAs to promote consistency and a shared understanding across accredited programs.

Programs are expected to regularly review these elements to ensure alignment between curriculum, assessment, and competency development.

2. Enhanced Practicum Requirements

Practicum education has been strengthened through:

- Alignment between practicum, competencies, PEPs (i.e. evaluation of students), and EPAs.
- Dedicated administrative oversight of placements
- Increased support and training for Clinical Educators

- Stronger alignment between practicums, competencies, and EPAs
- Structured classroom components linked to practicum courses
- Clearer expectations regarding practicum administration and quality assurance

Programs must also ensure sufficient practicum sites and Clinical Educators are available to support student learning and competency development.

3. Clearer Faculty Expectations

The standards provide more explicit expectations regarding:

- Program Director responsibilities
- Core faculty qualifications
- Faculty-to-student ratios
- Continuity planning during extended faculty leaves

These changes are intended to support program quality, sustainability, and student success.

4. Stronger Student Evaluation Processes

Programs must clearly document:

- How competencies are assessed
- When competencies are assessed
- The level of competency expected throughout the curriculum
- The use of theoretical, practical, and authentic assessments

This helps ensure students demonstrate competency development throughout their educational journey and that assessment practices are aligned with program outcomes.

5. Increased Accountability for Program Outcomes

Programs seeking reaccreditation will be expected to provide evidence related to:

- Graduation and completion rates
- Employment outcomes
- Attrition rates

- Graduate and alumni satisfaction
- Certification outcomes

These measures help demonstrate overall program effectiveness and support continuous quality improvement.

6. Expanded Student Support and Fair Practice Requirements

The standards include clearer expectations regarding:

- Student handbooks
- Practicum expectations
- Appeals processes
- Accommodation procedures
- Student conduct policies

These additions help promote transparency, fairness, consistency, and student success across accredited programs.

What Has Not Changed

The core purpose of accreditation remains unchanged:

- Preparing competent entry-level Athletic Therapists
- Maintaining high-quality educational experiences

The 2026 standards build upon existing accreditation requirements by placing greater emphasis on competency development, educational quality, practicum excellence, and evidence-informed program improvement. The revisions provide clearer expectations while supporting consistent outcomes for students, programs, and the profession.