ATHLETIC TRAINING has become a health profession major in over 352 institutions throughout the nation. Recruiting quality applicants is an issue for all health profession education programs, including athletic training. Although there is a lack of research examining factors that motivate students to select athletic training, there is useful research offered by other health professions. Factors associated with health profession career choice and selection of a particular institution’s education program that have been identified by the available research can be organized into 3 basic categories: (a) age of the individual selecting the career, (b) career/program attractors, and (c) the influence of personal relationships. The purpose of this report is to present these factors as a basis for the organization of both long-term and short-term recruiting strategies, including recommendations for the types of information to disseminate to potential degree-seeking candidates and the individuals who should be included in the recruiting process.

Long-Term and Short-Term Strategies

The age at which career selection begins provides a timeline for the organization of long-term and short-term strategies. Many health profession students report having developed interest in the career that they ultimately pursued before entering high school. Students often begin to consider potential careers while in middle school or junior high school. The age at which a student selects a career corresponds to the age at which he or she has enough understanding of personal interests and career characteristics to make the decision. Other students enter college undecided on a career goal to pursue. These two distinct groups of students (pre-high school and undecided students) should be considered for the development of long-term and short-term student recruitment efforts.
Long-Term

Because many health profession-oriented students report having developed strong career interests at middle school and junior high school ages, the athletic training profession and individual athletic training education programs would benefit from educational activities directed to this age group. These students are ready for broad introductory career presentations, mentoring opportunities, and informative literature. Content should focus on the elements of various health professions and simultaneously introduce the manner in which athletic training fits within the health care field as a unique discipline. If recruiting efforts do not expose the younger population to athletic training as a health care career option, the profession may not be recognized as a potential choice in the minds of middle school and junior high school candidates.

Short-Term

More traditional short-term recruiting strategies focus on high school students (e.g., juniors and seniors) and college students. Many health profession students expressed a strong career interest at the age of 17. These students should be specifically targeted for career and program recruitment. A broad approach that includes all individuals interested in health professions should be utilized, rather than one that is limited to athletic training. By looking through a wide lens, students interested in health professions may see athletic training as a viable option. Employing both long-term and short-term strategies is important to attract preferred students.

Profession and Education Program Attractors

Several key elements attract students to health profession careers and individual education programs. Career attractors are presented as “Affective” and “External” based characteristics (Table 1). Although the literature concerning athletic training is limited, students appear to select athletic training on the basis of characteristics it shares with other health care professions, but with some important differences. Education program attractors are quite simple. These elements provide meaningful content that should be provided in communications with potential students.

### Table 1 Affective and External Characteristics of a Career in Athletic Training

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective/Altruistic Characteristics</th>
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<td>helping others</td>
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<td>working with others</td>
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<td>personal satisfaction</td>
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<th>External Characteristics</th>
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<td>working with diverse physically active populations</td>
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<tr>
<td>salary</td>
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<td>professional autonomy</td>
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Affective Attractors

Affective attractors are the “emotional” or “feeling” characteristics that attract students to a career. The primary attractors identified by students who ultimately choose a health profession are altruistic career attributes, such as “making a difference in people’s lives” and “developing meaningful interpersonal connections.” Students also describe an interest in deriving “personal satisfaction” through helping others. Like other health care professions, athletic training career can provide altruistic and personal satisfaction through “helping others” and “working with people.” Providing an affective/altruistic description of athletic training in conjunction with key descriptors of the professional role (i.e., prevention, care, rehabilitation, and reconditioning) may have the greatest impact on potential students.

External Attractors

External attractors include the characteristics of a typical employment arrangement for someone in the profession, such as salary, benefits (e.g., retirement, vacation days, and health insurance plan), placement opportunities, job security, opportunities for career advancement, and professional autonomy. A key difference between athletic training and other health
care professions is the patient population that is primarily served. Typically, students who become athletic trainers report having had a strong interest in staying involved with competitive athletics. Although athletic training has expanded to serve other physically active patient populations, competitive athletes are still the major patient population served and remains as an attractor to the profession. Athletic training provides diverse employment settings that involve working with physically active patients of all ages (e.g., scholastic and professional sports, sports medicine clinics, performing arts, industrial worksites, military clinics). Another external consideration is the significant increase in athletic trainers’ salaries reported in the National Athletic Trainers’ Association 2003 to 2005 Salary Surveys for Certified Athletic Trainers. The potential to work with a diverse physically active patient population, a high degree of professional autonomy, and increasing salary levels should be included in recruiting information.

**Education Program Attractors**

Program attractors should provide unique information that differentiates the program from others. Students consistently ranked accreditation status as a primary consideration in education program selection. Accreditation provides credibility for the program and should be acknowledged in recruitment communications, but it only establishes that the program has met minimum standards. A program should present more detailed information associated with accreditation to demonstrate that it is a well-established program, such as the length of time the program has been accredited and noted strengths of the program from the most recent accreditation review. Program reputation, quality of faculty, and atmosphere are also primary factors considered by students during the process of program selection. Board of Certification (BOC) and state licensing exam pass rates, initial placements of graduates, and student/faculty ratio have also been identified as important factors in a student’s decision to apply to a particular program after a career decision has been made.

Student recruitment literature might address the unique characteristics of an athletic training education program, such as clinical sites/rotations (e.g., high school or professional sports teams, outpatient clinics, fitness centers, etc.) or NCAA division. Because students have reported that staying involved with athletics is a primary career attractor to athletic training, inclusion of such information in program information materials seems appropriate.

Student recruitment information is delivered through various methods, including brochures, flyers, e-mail messages, websites, career presentations, shadowing programs, and student advisement meetings. To capture the broadest range of health profession-oriented students, the recruiting message should encompass all the elements identified by the relevant literature on student recruitment. Examples of affective and external characteristics for a career in athletic training are displayed in Table 1.

### Personal Relationships in the Recruiting Process

A final factor to consider in the recruiting process is the degree to which personal relationships influence a student’s career selection. Two groups are consistently identified as highly influential in a student’s career decision. Health profession students consistently identify parents as the most influential persons in terms of career choice. Providing parents with recruiting materials and an invitation to a career presentation may be effective elements of a recruiting effort. If parents develop an understanding and appreciation for the athletic training profession, recruiters may acquire highly influential allies.

A second group identified as highly influential on the decision to pursue a health career is practicing professionals who interact with the student. A very large proportion of students in athletic training and other health care professions report having being introduced to the career of choice by someone already practicing in the field. Including practicing professionals in the recruitment process may be a very effective strategy, because they can directly relate satisfying personal professional experiences to prospective students. A high school athletic trainer, who may be the first exposure to the athletic training profession for many students, may be able to identify interested students and could be included in career presentations.

The athletic training staff of an institution that has an athletic training education program should be included in student recruitment (e.g., prospective student interviews, e-mail correspondence, telephone calls).
conversations). The involvement of practicing clinicians in career presentations and shadowing/mentoring programs can provide prospective students with a more comprehensive view of the profession’s characteristics. Athletic training staff participation also allows potential students to meet the people who would be serving as their clinical instructors and mentors. An athletic training camp/workshop can provide an invaluable recruiting opportunity. This type of experience incorporates many of the elements that potential students indicate as important in the decision-making process, such as exposure to practicing professionals and athletic training facilities and the opportunity for hands-on learning experiences.  

Health profession students rate guidance and career counselors as having little to no influence on the career decision. Research suggests that the lack of assistance by these groups is attributable to their lack of understanding about health professions. Consequently, guidance and career counselors may need to be educated about athletic training as a health care career choice for college-bound students.

**Summary**

The number of athletic training education programs has grown substantially in recent years, which has increased competition for recruitment of the best students. Research pertaining to recruitment of students to other health professions provides useful guidelines for development of a recruiting program. Consideration of age of career selection, career/education program attractors, and the influence of personal relationships can maximize the effectiveness of recruiting efforts.

**References**


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