

Kinesiology Regents Academic Advisory Committee
“The Value of an Athletic Training Graduate”
November 2016

1. What is an Athletic Trainer?

Athletic trainers are highly skilled medical professionals that work closely with physicians and other medical professionals. Athletic trainers must graduate from a nationally accredited bachelor’s or master’s program and then must pass a national accrediting examination in order to be considered certified athletic trainers. Approximately 70% of athletic trainers who receive a bachelor’s degree go on to complete a master’s degree. Athletic training is recognized by the American Medical Association, Health Resources Services Administration, and the Department of Health and Human Services as an allied health care profession. Certified athletic trainers are qualified to apply for a National Provider Identifier (NPI) as mid-level health care professionals. The taxonomy code for athletic trainers is 2255A2300X, allowing for health insurance billing of services rendered.^{1,2}

In Georgia, the athletic training profession is recognized and regulated by a licensure board. All state licensed athletic trainers must provide proof of the proper degree along with proof of national certification. Certified athletic trainers serve Georgia residents in many capacities, increasing the health and well-being of Georgians young and old. Certified athletic trainers are employed in work settings including, but not limited to; secondary schools, sports medicine clinics, hospitals, colleges/universities, professional sports, healthcare administration, military, occupational health, performing arts, physician practice, and public safety.

2. How do Students in University Systems of Georgia Institutions Benefit from an Athletic Training Degree?

Athletic training students benefit from classroom and laboratory instruction and diverse hands-on clinical experiences in a way that prepares them for future employment. As a high demand major, the Athletic Training major allows for an immersive applied learning environment. Coursework prepares students to pass the national accrediting exam to become a certified athletic trainer upon graduation. Laboratory courses help students transition didactic learning obtained in the classroom to their assigned clinical rotations. Unlike most majors, the transition from theory into practice occurs immediately. Athletic training students learn the value of evidence based practice through exposure to faculty across the state of Georgia who are engaged in nationally recognized research in the field of sports medicine. Students often build a long lasting rapport with faculty, clinical preceptors, and other sports medicine professionals during their time in the athletic training program.

Students are required to complete a series of clinical rotations in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Georgia with patients of diverse age, socioeconomic backgrounds, race, and ethnicity. Clinical rotations prepare students to manage injuries and illnesses associated with contact and

¹National Athletic Trainers Association Education Overview. Retrieved from <http://www.nata.org/about/athletic-training/education-overview>

²Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education – *FAQ*. Retrieved from <http://caate.net/professional-faqs-post-professional-faqs/>

non-contact sports, upper and lower extremity predominant sports, athlete and non-athlete populations, and male and female sports. Students are exposed to a wide variety of sports medicine professionals, including certified athletic trainers, orthopedic surgeons, family medicine physicians, dietitians, and strength and conditioning experts among others. Many students seek and secure summer internships to gain additional experience.^{3,4}

Upon completion of the program, students possess a marketable skillset that makes them competitive within the sports medicine field. Employment of certified athletic trainers is projected to grow 21% from 2014-2024.⁵ Athletic trainers with a bachelor's degree make an average annual salary of \$49,719. The athletic training major also prepares students to pursue graduate degrees, increasing earning potential to an average annual salary of \$54,660 after a master's degree and \$80,011 after a doctoral degree.⁶ The athletic training major also prepares students to pursue careers in related health care fields to become physicians, physician assistants, and physical therapists.

Currently, all athletic training programs are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), which is under the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. There is a current mandate from the CAATE requiring the entry level for athletic training certification transition into a master's degree professional program by the year 2022. There are currently 5 accredited undergraduate programs in the state of Georgia and one master's level program at a private institution. Currently all five institutions in the University System Board of Regents system with undergraduate programs are in the preparation phase of submitting a substantive change to the master degree level in order to comply with the mandate handed down by the CAATE.

3. How does the Athletic Training Degree Benefit Georgia?

Certified athletic trainers hold a place of value in both rural and urban communities as health care professionals, delivering and monitoring safe environments for Georgia's diverse patient populations. Certified athletic trainers play a vital role in servicing rural populations across the state. Georgia has a critical need for health care in rural areas, and certified athletic trainers expand the limited reach of physicians into these areas. Because certified athletic trainers are skilled at coordinating medical care in addition to providing it, they are a valuable resource to the patients under their care, facilitating communication across a network of health care providers for their patients. Certified athletic trainers can help fill a void where schools do not have access to a full-time nurse or other medical professional.

³Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education – *Standards*. Retrieved from <http://caate.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2012-Professional-Standards.pdf>

⁴Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education – *5th Edition Educational Competencies*. Retrieved from <http://caate.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/5th-Edition-Competencies.pdf>

⁵United States Department of Labor – *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/athletic-trainers-and-exercise-physiologists>

⁶National Athletic Trainers Association – *Salary Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.nata.org/career-education/career-center/salary-survey>

Further, certified athletic trainers are uniquely suited to provide critical emergency care following potentially fatal athletic traumas, such as spinal cord injuries, cardiac complications, traumatic brain injury, and heat-related illnesses. Beyond orthopedic related trauma and injuries, certified athletic trainers provide critical health care services to not only athletes, but secondary school administrators, coaches, support staff, and the non-athlete student body.

These emergency medicine skills are especially valuable at the high school level. There are currently 956 public and private high schools in Georgia, however only ~ 51% employ full-time Certified Athletic Trainers. This means that in the state of Georgia, among the approximately 200,000 student-athletes who participate in high school sports (statista.com), only half benefit from athletic training services. In a published report on athletic training services nationwide⁷, high schools where full-time certified athletic trainers were employed managed a significantly higher number of injuries, meaning those athletes that had full-time access to certified athletic trainers received more comprehensive medical care. Not only are certified athletic trainers uniquely suited to provide emergency care, they are able to provide critical injury assessment, management, and rehabilitation services that many high school students would not be exposed to otherwise.⁸

Conclusion

Athletic trainers are highly skilled medical professionals that benefit the community around them. Athletic training students in University Systems of Georgia benefit from exposure to nationally recognized research, a hands-on clinical learning environment, and experience with a wide-range of health care professionals. Through a curriculum focused on injury prevention, recognition, management, and rehabilitation, athletic training students develop the skills to be important contributors to the healthcare landscape of Georgia.

⁷Pryor, R.R., Casa, D. J., Vandermark, L. W., Stearns, R.L., Attanasio; S. M., Fontaine, G. J., & Wafer, A.M. Athletic Training Services in Public Secondary Schools: A Benchmark Study. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 2015; 50(2): 156-162.

⁸National Athletic Trainers Association – *Emerging Settings*. Retrieved from <https://www.nata.org/about/athletic-training>