COVER STORY

As Internships End, Experts Offer Advice, Alternatives

As time runs out for athletic training internship students to earn a seat at the NATABOC exam, experts are offering advice, explaining alternatives and issuing reminders.

By Valerie Hunt
NATA News

How much time do athletic training internships have left? If you think it's just less than four years – keep reading.

According to ongoing education reform, students who apply for the NATA Board of Certification exam on or after Jan. 1, 2004, must have a degree from an accredited athletic training curriculum.

Internship candidates will not be accepted.

But the 2004 cutoff will be felt long before that date, said NATABOC President Russ Cagle, PhD, ATC.

While internship candidates may apply to take the exam right up until Jan. 1, 2004, they must meet certain requirements before the NATABOC will seat them for the test– And one rule says clinical hours earned by interns must take place in no less than two academic years, Cagle said.

"Internship students cannot cram all the required athletic training experience hours into one semester or one year," he said. "Essentially this means that students cannot begin an internship program any later than the end of 2001."

Those who advise college or high school students should clearly understand this timeline, said Chad Starkey, PhD, ATC, chair of the NATA Education Council.

"If students are on track to apply for the exam prior to 2003, the advice is just to make sure that you graduate on target," Starkey said. "If somebody does not graduate on time, they will not be able to sit for the exam.

"Freshmen should be forewarned that they have a very specific amount of time to meet the requirements and graduate," he added.

Institutions also need a better understanding of the education changes.

Administrators – many of whom use students to fill gaps in their sports medicine coverage – equate the end of the internship with the total loss of student involvement, said Pete Koehneke, MS, ATC, chair of the Joint Review Committee on Athletic Training.

Officials at institutions that do not seek or cannot gain accreditation mistakenly believe they cannot have students involved in the athletic training program, he explained.

"That is one of the most misunderstood parts of the education reform," Koehneke said. "They think they're losing student assistance, but that's not necessarily true. If a student needs a work study position, they can join the athletic training department. Provided they are following state regulatory guidelines, the department can use those students."

In addition, CAAHEP on April 27 will consider accrediting the first entry-level master's program for athletic training. Students can work in and earn a degree from a non-accredited site but still enter the profession via the master's program, Koehneke said.

Another option for schools not seeking accreditation is affiliating with an accredited curriculum, Starkey added.

"Northeastern University, for example, uses Harvard, MIT and nine other sites – both high school and college – to place our student athletic

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trainers for the clinical experiences," Starkey said. "It's not difficult to establish those affiliations."

However, institutions cannot use students as a cheaper alternative to certified personnel, Koehneke said.

"Student athletic trainers must work under the direct supervision of an ATC," he said. "At no time is a student to take the place of qualified staff."

Frequently Asked Questions

As institutions continue to address the reform, Koehneke has identified these frequently asked questions.

Q: How do I begin to look at accreditation?

A: Go to the *NATA News* September 1999 article, or visit www.caahep.org for the Standards and the JRC-AT section of the Education Council website at www.cewl.com. Accreditation requires a two-year candidacy period, followed by a self-study and site visit.

Q: What are the costs?

A: See cewl.com. It costs $500 for candidacy; $500 application fee; $300 annual CAAHEP fee; $600 annual JRC-AT fee; plus the cost of the site visit and the annual budget of the athletic training education program.

Q: How many faculty do I need?

A: The cewl.com site has matchmate data that was collected a year ago. This includes things such as salaries, academic ranks and numbers employed. The program director must be a faculty member. Part-time and adjunct faculty may be used as well. Clinical instructors should receive compensation for their duties in the supervision of students.

Q: How many students can each program have?

A: For clinical instruction, the maximum per instructor is eight students. In some situations, due to caseloads and administrative responsibilities, this may be too high. Didactic courses are controlled by the institution. Laboratory size must allow adequate instruction and supervision.

Q: Must the program be a major?

A: Beginning with the 2002 Standards, it is proposed that all programs must be a major (undergraduate) or track (graduate). The major or track on the transcript must be athletic training.

Q: When do the 1999 Competencies go into effect?

A: The 2002-03 academic year.

Q: How are students supervised in clinical experiences?

A: Students must be under the direct supervision of an ATC. The JRC-AT uses the NATABOC definition of supervision. Students acting in any other capacity are acting as first responders, provided there is a job description and they are qualified as such. At no time is a student to take the place of qualified staff.

Q: When is the "constant visual and auditory" supervision required?

A: This is for instruction and evaluation of clinical skills and proficiencies in a classroom and laboratory setting. In some programs this includes these skills being part of an experience instructed in the athletic training room. This insures that there is one-to-one instruction and evaluation of these skills. The NATABOC definition of direct supervision applies to the field experiences where the skills are actually being applied to the individual involved in physical activity. ■

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