# A REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION TASK FORCE

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## INTRODUCTION

The task force to address the educational preparation and continuing education of the athletic trainer was created by the NATA Board of Directors on June 13, 1994. The task force was officially entitled the Education Task Force on September 13, 1994.

## HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

Over the past several years a significant number of issues associated with the educational preparation and continuing education of athletic trainers have developed. These issues have surfaced from several sources including standing committees of NATA and NATA Board of Certification (NATABOC) as well as anecdotal information forwarded to individual board members. As the association has grown and the full time national office staff has been set in place, the logical step for continued improvement of the athletic training profession was to analyze educational preparation in all phases including organizational structure.

The charge of the task force as state below presented implicit rather than explicit directions. The co-chairs, in conjunction with the task force members, attempted to identify the salient issues and focus the group's efforts on recommendations that would provide the greatest impact and long-lasting positive results for the profession. Attendant with the review of educational preparation was a review of all educational services being provided by the NATA and its affiliates. This review was conducted in order to identify potential duplication or overlap of educational efforts by the various committees.

## NATA BOARD OF DIRECTORS CHARGE TO THE EDUCATION TASK FORCE

I. Undergraduate Education

II. Graduate Education

III. Continuing Education

IV. Future Implications

## CHARGE TO TASK FORCE

With knowledge of the past, experience from the present and educated vision for the future, the NATA Board of Directors asks that you evaluate the education and professional preparation of the NATA certified/state licensed athletic trainer. It is the objective of the NATA Board of Directors that your evaluations, discussions, and projections will give recommendations to us for the future. It is hoped that your input and guidance will influence the decisions the NATA Board of Directors must make concerning future direction of athletic trainer education and professional preparation. These decisions will affect our profession and members far into the next century.

With scope of responsibility in mind, it is the NATA Board of Directors' wish that this task force discuss, direct, evaluate, project, and recommend possible action for the Board of Directors to consider. This work is to evaluate education of the undergraduate, both internship and curriculum, graduate education, continuing education, and future education mandates or requirements that may affect the profession and NATA members. There should be no limitations in this task force's scope of evaluations and/or recommendations.

## MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

The composition of the task force, according to a July 7, 1994, memo from President Miller to all major committees, was selected by the Board of Directors to "include representation of women, minorities, dual-credentialed people, geographical segments, internship schools and curriculum programs."

John Schrader, HSD, ATC (Co-Chair), Indiana University
Richard Ray, PhD, ATC (Co-Chair), Hope College
Robert Behnke, HSD, ATC, Indiana State University
Don Chu, PhD, CSCS, ATC, Ather Sports Injury Clinic
James Gallaspy, MEd, ATC, University of Southern Mississippi
Susan Hannam, ATC, Slippery Rock University
William Lyons, ATC, University of Wyoming
Christopher McGrew, MD, University of New Mexico Health Science Center
Mike Nesbitt, ATC: Northern Arizona University
Louis Osternig, PhD, ATC, University of Oregon
Edward Ryan, ATC: U.S. Olympic Committee
Chad Starkey, PhD, ATC, Northeastern University
Karen Toburen, EdD, ATC, Southwest Missouri State University
Frank Walters, PhD, ATC, District of Columbia Public Schools
Paul Zeek, ATC, Lamar University

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE:
Dennis Miller, ATC, PT, NATA President
Eve Becker-Doyle, CAE, NATA Executive Director
Denise Fandel, ATC, NATA Board of Certification President
Paul Grace, ATC, NATA Board of Certification Executive Director

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ATHLETIC TRAINING EDUCATION

1. Curriculum students outscore internship students in all areas on the certification examination.

2. Internship students who have additional allied health education (physical therapy, nursing, etc.) score higher on the written and written-simulation portion of the exam, but not on the practical portion, than internship students without such education.

3. Curriculum students pass all three sections of the certification examination on the first attempt at higher rates than internship students.

4. The internship route to certification is the route of choice for most students and produces more certified athletic trainers than does the curriculum route. We are encouraged to offer an alternative route to certification in order to maintain our recognition as a certifying agency, although this is not an absolute requirement. At present the alternative is the internship route to certification.

5. The certification examination is a psychometrically sound, valid and reliable instrument for determining if candidates possess entry level knowledge and skill in athletic training.

6. Entry-level standards in athletic training are changing over time. These changes are reflected in the certification examination based upon periodic NATABOC role delineation studies.

7. Certain employment settings are at present more open to athletic trainers seeking employment than others. The job placement trend has clearly shifted to sports medicine clinics.

8. The term traditional setting is becoming an obsolete term based on present employment patterns.

9. The number, quality, and variety of athletic training continuing education opportunities has increased dramatically over the past few years.

10. Lack of adequate oversight of internship candidates results in over half being denied permission to sit for the certification examination by the NATABOC.

11. For the years 1993 and 1994 there were 573 institutions utilizing the internship route to certification and 84 accredited/ approved undergraduate institutions. Although most of the universities sponsoring students via the internship route produced a small number of certification candidates, 81 institutions produces an average of 8.8 candidates per year. The 84 accredited/approved athletic training programs produced an average of 9.3 candidates per year.

12. For the years 1993 and 1994 a total of 3,014 (66% of all certifees) were certified by the NATABOC through the internship route and 1,561 (34% of all certifees) through curriculum programs.

13. For the year 1995, a survey of baccalaureate titles used by graduating athletic trainers indicated 20 different titled degrees all representing athletic training.

14. The distinction between accredited and unaccredited athletic training education programs is unclear to the general public. For the year 1995, according to *Peterson's College Guide*, 133 institutions advertised majors in athletic training. Only 52 of these programs were approved by the NATA or accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP). Similarly, 130 universities advertised majors in sports medicine. Only 43 of these programs were approved or accredited. The actual number of approved/accredited programs is 84.

## History of Activities

### February 1995 • First Meeting

The initial meeting of the task force focused on identification of current realities and concerns from NATABOC, the Joint Review Committee on Athletic Training (JRC-AT), NATA Professional Education Committee (NATA PEC), NATA Board of Directors and the task force members. A preliminary exercise was designed to solicit perceived problem areas in the academic preparation of athletic training professionals. Subsequently, small group activities were conducted to elicit opinions and perceptions of task force members regarding the ideal methods to educationally prepare an entry-level athletic trainer. A list of 80 issues/concerns related to education was generated and subsequently consolidated into 14 major issues listed below. Subgroups for continuing education, entry-level preparation and graduate preparation were established to address these. At the conclusion of this meeting each group's responsibilities were outlined in preparation for the June meeting.

### June 1995

Preliminary progress reports were submitted by the sub-groups. In addition, the co-chairs were present with the Board of Directors at the town hall meeting to entertain comments from the membership on educational issues.

### Summer 1995

Preliminary work on the draft of recommendations was conducted by the implementation subgroup. This draft was forwarded to the entire task force for review and comments and will be the basis for a concluding meeting in December.

### December 1995

A review of the preliminary draft of the task force report with proposals and recommendations was discussed and finalized. The task force prepared a plan to present recommendations to the membership at the district meetings. A scripted format will be utilized in the same manner as the Government Task Force. A progress report was presented to the Board of Directors.

## Future Activities

### January-July 1996

Public forums at district meetings will be conducted to receive member feedback on proposals. Feedback from these forums will be disseminated to task force members for consideration of the final draft.

### August 1996

After hearings and feedback at district meetings, a final draft of the task force report with recommendations will be constructed. Any members in dissent will be given the opportunity to attach a minority report with the final draft.

### September 1996

Final report and recommendations to be submitted to the NATA Board of Directors.

## Methods of Information Collection

Information for use by the task force was gathered from a wide variety of sources:

1. Formal and informal survey data
2. Certification data
3. Formal requests for comments in the *NATA News*
4. Review of athletic training bulletin board letters
5. Public forums at the national, district and state meetings
6. Pertinent letters to the executive director or president
7. Accreditation documents of the JRC-AT
8. CME documents of other allied health organizations
9. Accreditation documents of allied health organizations
10. Formal Education Task Force workshop on current issues facing the profession
11. Telephone calls
12. Review of pertinent literature on health care reform and credentialing

## MAJOR ISSUES DRIVING THE REFORM OF ATHLETIC TRAINING EDUCATION

**1. Need for more consistent educational preparation of the entry-level athletic trainer.**

**Eligibility Requirements to Sit for the Certification Examination by Route**

**Curriculum**

**Academic (based on course content)**

Human Anatomy
Human Physiology
Exercise Physiology
Kinesiology/Biomech.
Health (prsnl. or comm.)
First Aid/CPR Card
Prev. of Athletic Injuries
Eval. of Athletic injuries
Therapeutic Modalities
Therapeutic Exercise
Administration of Athletic Training
Nutrition
Psychology

**Clinical**

800 supervised clock hours
200 with high risk
400 must be at host school

**Internship**

**Academic (based on course titles)**

Human Anatomy
Human Physiology
Exercise Physiology
Kinesiology/Biomech.
Health (nutr., drug use, etc.)
First Aid/CPR Card
Basic Athletic Training
Adv. Athletic Training

**Clinical**

1,500 supervised hours
375 with high risk
500 may be in allied settings

In addition to these differences in routes to certification, the inconsistency in degree titles contributes to a misinterpretation of the individual's background and qualifications. Listed below are samples of 1995 graduates from a survey of 70 students applying for assistantships at one university with their listed major.

*Athletic Training*
*Chemistry & African American Studies*
*Health and Fitness and Sports Medicine*
*Kinesiology/Sports Medicine*
*Health & Exercise Science*
*Secondary Math/P.E. and Coaching*
*Athletic Training and Fitness Management*
*Movement Science and Athletic Training*
*Health Education*
*Recreation Management*
*Athletic Training and Physical Education*
*Athletic Rehabilitation*
*Sports Medicine/Athletic Training*
*Athletic Training/Pre-physical Therapy*
*Kinesiology*
*Sports Medicine*
*Exercise Science and Physical Education*

*Exercise and Sport Science*
*Athletic Training & Community Health*
*Health Ed. & Sports Injury Management*

**2. Need to address the divergent scores occurring on the NATABOC certification examination.**

Curriculum and internship students perform differently on all three sections of the certification exam. These differences are made even more obvious when those internship candidates with a background in physical therapy, physician's assistant or other health care professions are eliminated from the mix.

**3. Need to prepare entry-level athletic trainers in the context of a rapidly expanding body of knowledge.**

The knowledge explosion occurring in the area of sports medicine is evidenced by the number of available texts currently listed with major publishers. In addition, the increasing variety of work settings requires a vigilant review of the requirements for entry level preparation in order to provide students with the necessary skills for the work place.

**4. Need to ensure entry-level preparation in the context of strong institutional support for athletic training education.**

Many athletic training educational programs, both curriculum and internship route, have existed on the coffers of a gracious athletic department with limited support by the academic units. Increased performance expectations placed upon students at graduation mandate an academic legitimacy equivalent to other degree programs offered at that institution. While proof of this formal recognition is required with the JRC-AT programs, the level or recognition or financial support for internship routes is unknown.

**5. Need to improve the consistency and quality of athletic training instruction.**

At present, it should be noted that accredited programs have their course work evaluated on the basis of course content addressing the 191 competencies identified in the *CAAHEP Essentials and Guidelines* while the courses taken by internship students are evaluated based solely on course title. Additionally, while there are some excellent internship route "programs," it remains totally up to the internship sponsor as to what type of education the student will receive. There isn't any basis to assure quality of instruction, supervision, equal opportunity, equal access, medical supervision, or effective staff/student ratios.

**6. Need for an alternative route to enter the profession.**

The NATA Board of Certification is strongly encouraged by National Organization of Certifying Agencies to provide an alternative route to certification besides the traditional baccalaureate program. While this has currently been satisfied by the internship route, consideration could also be given to entry-level graduate programs as the alternate route to certification exam eligibility.

**7. Need to provide the intellectual resources to ensure an expanding body of knowledge in athletic training.**

One of the frequent criticisms of the athletic training profession has been the dearth of research produced by its members. True advanced master's degree programs are the foundation and incubator for future researchers and educators. Woven within the fabric of our entire educational plan must be a philosophy that places a high value on the importance of scientific investigation that contributes to our body of knowledge.

Doctoral level study should be highly encouraged in the various domains of athletic training. Recognition of high academic achievement and published research should continue, and as finances allow, increase the grant monies available to support quality research within the athletic training domains.

**8. Need to provide quality athletic training education "across the life span."**

The need for continuous professional improvement across an individual's career has been well established in other allied health care professions. Providing quality educational experiences for different skill levels is important for both the young as well

as the experienced athletic trainer. As a membership service, establishing an educational plan for specialty or athletic training domain skill building along with a method to assure continuing competency is essential.

**9. Need to assure continuing competence of practicing athletic trainers.**

While the responsibility for monitoring continuing competence falls within the purview of the NATABOC, the NATA maintains the professional obligation to determine what it considers to be a competent practicing professional. The hand-in-glove relationship mandates a close working relationship between the two boards. While mutually autonomous, the boards must be singular in purpose with regard to the standards necessary for a practicing athletic trainer to be deemed "current."

**10. Need to recognize special competence.**

A frequent concern expressed to the association has been a need to address the growing number of professionals in very specific work environments. Although without substantial evidence, concerns have been raised that newly certified individuals are not adequately prepared to enter certain work environments or do no possess the appropriate credentials to gain employment.

**11. Need to prepare athletic trainers for post entry-level competencies required in specialized settings.**

The academic core of entry level preparation is framed around the NATABOC's role delineation. The NATA PEC's panel of professional educators utilize this information in conjunction with historical data and intuition to develop the best projected pedagogical curriculum to prepare students for the future job markets. This curriculum, however, has been based upon the traditional athletic training setting. The essential core for someone in this setting is arguably different than for many of the entry-level work environments. At issue is whether the academic core should remain consistent with the traditional setting or modified to reflect the varying work environments.

**12. Need for professional advocacy of education "across the life span" through a common voice.**

The national association has grown immensely in both numbers and dimensions over the last several years. While there has always been a recognized need for continuous improvement through education, there has been a diversion of mission by some committees to take on education as a primary mission in addition to their normal functions. This growth problem has led to a duplication and sometimes conflict between different committees. The NATA needs to have a singular voice that outlines the educational mission, vision and plan for its membership. Each of the subcommittees should have the opportunity for direct input to this group either by representation or a formalized communication mechanism. The latter may be more practical, since the size of this group could become unwieldy.

**13. Need to address a potential diminishing employability of athletic trainers prepared via the internship route to certification.**

Credentialing rules have been enacted in some states that are restrictive enough to prohibit employability or the ability to be meaningfully employed based upon the individual's route to certification. Tiered licenses and ineligibility for a license based upon the athletic trainer's route to certification diminish professional mobility and marketability, and limit the individual's usefulness in both traditional and clinic settings.

**14. Need to streamline the educational functions of the NATA.**

An implied part of the task force mission has been to assess the various educational functions of the association and identify areas of duplication, conflict and overlap in service to the membership. In addition, educational components were analyzed as to organizational structure, areas of responsibility, and operational functions. At present, NATA educational functions are spread over several groups without a collective vision or purpose. The NATABOC, Research and Education

Foundation, Professional Education Committee, Convention Committee and many of the sub-committees currently organize and sponsor programs that represent the NATA. This situation has occurred for at least two reasons. In some cases these subgroups have strayed beyond their missions. The Board of Directors, however, has occasionally issued directives charging them with tasks not originally part of their mission. Whatever the reasons, the situation should be rectified.