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# Professional Practice Opportunities for Student Athletic Trainers

**N**ATA is continually exploring new and challenging job opportunities where athletic trainers can use their knowledge, skills and abilities. Businesses, corporations, hospitals and government are places where the athletic trainer's competencies are put to good use. These and other emerging settings can benefit greatly from the professional medical services athletic trainers provide.

Recently NATA polled athletic trainers working in clinics or emerging settings. The study asked whether their employers offered professional practice rotations for student athletic trainers. Out of 706 survey responses, 294 clinics/settings said yes. Of the remaining respondents, 274 were interested in starting a program. This was very good news, given that most athletic training education programs do not have access to unique settings for student rotations.

The survey findings reinforce NATA's efforts to forge a pathway for athletic trainers to pursue these jobs. Interested athletic trainers— and student athletic trainers— need clinical experiences to gauge their enthusiasm in the setting they're pursuing, and to demonstrate that interest to prospective employers. This should help further member employment in new and emerging settings.

The survey highlighted the obstacles facing employers considering a professional practice rotation. Among them were locations without a college or university, entities requiring a high level of security clearance, space restrictions, legal issues and efficiency of patient care. Also, many employers didn't know how to imple-

ment a clinical rotation, and individual settings have their own unique challenges.

That said, some employers have successfully implemented a clinical practicum by thinking outside the box. Here's how the Kennedy Space Center's RehabWorks has created a much sought-after student internship.

Text **Erik Nason, MS, ATC, MBA, CSCS; RehabWorks**

## KSC RehabWorks - Kennedy Space Center

The KSC RehabWorks program has been accepting athletic training students as interns at the nation's spaceport for 15 years. Our goal is to provide a practical experience for current AT students, allowing them to put their education into action in a real life setting. Our program is run and operated by athletic trainers, who provide the students with valuable experience and direction when it comes to understanding the athletic training profession. The RehabWorks program provides AT students with the experience of a highly developed corporate/industrial setting, exposing them to a wide variety of corporate/industrial aspects such as: rehabilitation, chronic injuries, ergonomics, industrial hygiene, worker compensation, corporate health and wellness, patient education, OSHA regulations and corporate safety, facility design, educational outreach programs and much more.

Most universities have local programs, clinics and schools with whom they contract,

allowing the university to send AT students to these facilities every semester, but we are completely different. Although we work closely with our local universities, we cater to students across the United States. We are not committed or contracted to one school or one program. RehabWorks simply requires that applying students be actively enrolled in an accredited athletic training program and provide letters of reference, transcripts and a phone interview. Some students who come to RehabWorks are receiving credits towards graduation, and some are simply volunteering because they understand the value of this experience to their future goals.

RehabWorks is often asked why we started an athletic training program, and the answer is always easy. We did not start an internship program because we needed "free labor." We started the program because all athletic training students deserve an opportunity to broaden their horizons in this unique emerging setting. The ATs at RehabWorks are passionate about athletic training and were eager and willing to participate in the education of these students. Without a doubt, the extra hands in the clinic are a tremendous help, but our promise is to return the favor and invest deeply into their future and career as athletic trainers.

The RehabWorks internship program is not a shadowing program. These students are actively involved in all elements of our program, from the medical side to the business side. We want them to experience the full responsibility of an athletic



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trainer in a corporate/industrial setting. Due to legality issues, we do not sign contracts with any universities, but work closely with all program directors making sure that each student meets his or her requirements for the semester.

A lot of preparation, planning and continued managing goes into running a professional practice or internship program. There are legal concerns, organizational concerns, human resource concerns and security concerns. The list goes on, but once a pilot program is developed and becomes successful, subsequent internship rotations are very simple. If RehabWorks, located on a highly secure government facility, can create a reliable, secure and functional program, anyone can. There is no doubt there will be challenges, but starting small and keeping it simple will allow your company to see the value of investing in this level of educational outreach.

Finally, it is important to remember that an internship program is designed to be educational and not just a work program to gain hours or experience. RehabWorks has taken

this into consideration and has created a challenging educational experience consisting of research, presentations, educational outreach projects, shadowing opportunities with industrial hygiene, occupational health and local orthopaedics and professional development projects. All of these projects will encompass the skills and demands of the athletic trainer in the corporate industrial setting. Challenging students to set personal and professional goals, capitalizing on presenting and communication, and exposing them to alternative professions that make up the health care team are all skills that will impact these students for years to come. KSC RehabWorks is proud to be part of so many young professional's careers.

*For more information on the RehabWorks program or internship programs in general, please contact Erik Nason at:*

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