

NATA WELCOMES IMMERSION EXPERIENCES



How athletic training students
and athletic trainers can connect
for real-world opportunities

BY ELIZABETH QUINN

For athletic training students, hands-on learning and real-world experiences are an integral part of growing professionally. Innovation in athletic training education and curricular design have provided increased capacity for athletic training students to participate in full-time immersive clinical education with little to no competing coursework.

This increased capacity, teamed with the mobility offered by not having to attend class, presents an opportunity to develop clinical site experiences not previously available to students. The NATA Professional Education Committee (PEC) is seeking to capitalize on this opportunity through the development of a resource aimed at connecting students to those experiences.

PEC member Meredith Petschauer, PhD, LAT, ATC, originally brought the idea to the committee after discussing the need for this resource with colleague Jennifer O'Donoghue, PhD, LAT, CSCS. She, in conjunction with PEC member Patrick St. Louis, MS, ATC, CKTI, and Chair Brian Vescei, DAT, ATC, approached NATA with the idea to implement an online job-board-like experience on Gather, NATA's online athletic training community, through which athletic training students and ATs could connect with one another for immersion opportunities. The new recruiting board is called the NATA Immersion Experience Search Engine, and is on Gather's Volunteer Portal.

Athletic training students and program directors/clinical education coordinators often have to reach out to people they're already connected with in order to work on an affiliated clinical site. This can be limiting for students, especially those who don't have ties to professional ATs.

"I didn't like how students get [clinical] sites based on who you know," Petschauer said. "Just because you know someone at that level doesn't mean your student is the only one who can have that opportunity."

After discussing the best platform ATs could use to reach students, Gather was proposed as a host and accepted.

There are many benefits to the NATA Immersion Search Engine, Petschauer said. The immersion experiences are similar to job boards in that ATs post their listing on the Gather volunteer page, and students can apply with whatever is asked of them, such as résumés and cover letters.

"I asked, 'Why can't we figure out a way to open experiences to students across the country as well as have a great clinical site choose their student?'" Petschauer said.

"If I'm choosing someone working with me... at an immersion site, I want to have some say and at least have a conversation. Our clinical people should have the ability to have some say in who comes in ... as a way for all students to have an opportunity. I feel like often times, we try to enhance diversity as athletic trainers and address issues, but athletic training is still a 'who you know at that clinical site,' and I don't think it should be."

How It Works

As an immersion host, the first step to posting your experience is to complete the immersion experience host form.

As part of completing this form, you will be asked a series of questions pertaining to the immersion experience, such as:

- What type of work setting is the experience in?
- What patient population is the student being exposed to?
- What requirements are you looking for in a student?

There are also options to include information about housing and meal allowances. It's important to include as much information as possible to find the best candidate.

When the immersion host has completed this form, NATA will post the experience so it can be viewable by prospective applicants.

Once it is time to narrow down the candidates, the immersion experience host will be provided the applications of the prospective candidates.

It should be noted that NATA will not review postings before they are uploaded. It is up to the program director or clinical coordinator to vet the clinical site.

"We can't evaluate and go out or talk to every preceptor," Petschauer said. "What might be great for one person, might not be a good fit for the next person. The hope is that, over time, there are sites that are vetted by program directors and clinical coordinators."

As an athletic training student, after logging on to Gather, go to the "Volunteer" tab under the "Participate" dropdown box. You can begin to narrow down your search through the filter function by types of opportunities (such as immersion experiences) and qualifications (such as setting and district). You are able to view information for specific immersion experiences by division, setting, sport, time frame and experience, for example. The state that the immersion experience will be hosted in can be found in the title. If you are interested in only looking for specific states' experiences, try to search by the name of the state. After finding the perfect fit, click the apply button and upload the required materials.

The Gather Immersion Search Engine launched in January as a pilot, the member benefit will be available in the spring semester to start collecting and posting immersion experiences.

NATA is always looking for ways to continually improve its member benefits.

"We hope to get productive feedback as to whether it's working for students and sites or programs," Petschauer said. "We want it to open doors to students in the future. My really big hope is that we can help students improve their educational experience because ultimately, as an educator and member of PEC, that's what we care about."

To post an immersion experience, complete a form at new.forms.nata.org/form/nata-immersion-experience-host-submission. Students can search for immersion experiences at gather.nata.org/participate/volunteeropportunities. §