

Young Professionals

THEN & NOW

The history, efforts and expansion of NATA's young professional committees

By Lydia Hicks

NATA's young professionals (YPs) aren't what they used to be. Formerly the NATA Young Professionals' Committee (YPC), the NATA Early Professionals' Committee (EPC) and the NATA Career Advancement Committee (CAC) were established to meet the professional growth, connection, support and advocacy needs of athletic trainers entering into and advancing within the profession in a more targeted way.

Why YPC Was Formed

The heart to serve NATA's YPs started with the NATA Board of Directors' vision to help its members thrive in the early stages of their career.

"In the summer of 2007, I was approached by former NATA President Chuck Kimmel [AT Ret.], and he let me know that NATA was considering starting a young professionals' committee, and that they were looking for individuals to help [serve young professionals]," inaugural NATA Young Professionals' Committee Chair Kim Detwiler, DAT, ATC, said. "So, they essentially realized that they needed to gain insight from young professional athletic trainers, but they didn't have any in leadership. So, rather than trying to imagine what the YPs might want, they decided to ask the YPs what they want and what they need."

Some of the needs were related to networking, the disconnect between older and younger members, students leaving the profession, respect for the profession, quality of life, fair practice and burnout. With these issues in mind, NATA established YPC at the end of 2007 with the goals to:

- Increase recruitment and retention of YPs in NATA
- Increase the number of YPs involved in volunteer positions at the local, state, district and national levels
- Increase the number of YPs attending the NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo
- Provide educational opportunities relevant to the interests and concerns of YPs
- Encourage YPs to become involved in public relations efforts to educate the public about the athletic training profession
- Encourage YPs to become involved in legislative efforts

- Promote professional socialization of YPs
- Encourage YPs to get involved in efforts to improve working conditions and quality of life of athletic trainers
- Promote professionalism among YPs

YPC's Achievements

To fulfill its goals, YPC primarily focused on professional development, which included interviewing skills training, self-advocacy, how to properly handle challenging administrative situations and annual community service at the NATA convention, Detwiler said.

Furthermore, the committee received support from the NATA Board of Directors, committee chairs and other leaders. For instance, the NATA Council on Practice Advancement and the then NATA College/University Athletic Trainers' Committee, now known as the NATA Intercollegiate Council for Sports Medicine, initiated collaboration with YPC.

The committee also helped connect YPs to their peers and leaders in the profession through networking opportunities.

"We asked the district representatives on the [committee], who often were chairs of their districts' young professionals' committees, to pass the word out to all their members at their district level," Detwiler said. "And then we basically just had a big networking event. The YPC networking event was a really great opportunity to just bring young professionals from all over the country together."

YPC also celebrated its young professionals through its National Distinction Award, YPC's highest honor. It was created to recognize a young professional athletic trainer who made an immediate and definitive impact on the athletic training profession at the national, district or state level.

YPC's professional growth is also evidenced by the fact that many of the young professionals continue to serve at the state, district and national levels, Detwiler said. The growth also took the form of a diverse YP population.

"There was minimal diversity, and so [YPC] brought in this whole new aspect of athletic trainers, and then [NATA members] started to be reflected in the leadership of the association and we're still making progress toward that," Detwiler said.

As time went on, the number of YPs in the profession grew and so did its members' understanding of their role in the profession, especially advocacy. A significant advocacy initiative was Capitol Hill Day, which provided YPs the opportunities to discuss legislation pertaining to the profession with their representatives in Washington, D.C.

After Detwiler transitioned out of the role of chair in 2012, YPC was led by Carissa Spraberry, LAT, ATC (2012-14), Samuel Zuege, MS, LAT, ATC (2014-18) and Blaise Kriley, MS, LAT, ATC (2018-21).

Evolving To Meet Members' Needs

As the young professional population grew, NATA Past President Tory Lindley, MA, ATC, charged YPC and the NATA Student Leadership Committee with forming a workgroup and determining the next evolution of the committees to adapt with the growing populations they each served.

YPC found that its population had differing needs that were dependent on how long they had been certified/licensed within the profession.

Young professionals had always been described as those within the first 12 years of certification, and YPC agreed to split the population and separate into two committees – EPC and CAC. While EPC serves members in their first six years of initial certification/licensure, CAC serves members in their seventh to 12th years of initial certification/licensure.



Inaugural NATA Young Professionals' Committee Chair Kim Detwiler, DAT, ATC (third from the left), with her committee members in 2010. Represented by YPC, NATA's YPs served at the state, district and national levels and continue to do so as the current EPC and CAC.

In March 2021, the NATA Board of Directors approved this separation and in June 2021, both committees were officially established.

EPC and CAC: Efforts and Growth

Since 2021, EPC has focused on transition to practice, professional discovery and exploration, leadership development and establishing healthy boundaries, EPC Chair Emily Mulkey, MS, LAT, ATC, said. CAC, on the other hand, has focused on work-life balance, career satisfaction, career growth and professional retention, said CAC Chair Nikki Harris, DAT, LAT, ATC.

Like its overarching predecessor, EPC has also helped provide members with support, advocacy, professional growth and connection.

Among its early accomplishments are educational campaigns through webinars and social media for the support of mental health awareness, female leaders, diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA), and more, Mulkey said.

She said a core tenet of EPC is representing the opinions and desires of early professional constituents throughout NATA. EPC committee members have held liaison positions to advocate for early professionals' interests across the membership organization.

"This is something I think NATA has been absolutely wonderful with," Mulkey said. "Whenever they have new ideas, projects or concepts, they've often asked our group, 'What do you think of this?' 'How, do you think this would impact your group?' 'Is this helpful?' 'Is this not helpful?' ... We are becoming a resource for the rest of NATA. ... So that's our biggest piece of advocacy."

EPC has also sustained YPC's value of member recognition. The first recipient of the transformed Early Professionals' Committee National Distinction Award is Hannah Couch, MS, AT, ATC, who was honored during the 74th NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo in June.

EPC has held webinars, educational sessions at convention and research projects, and is also fostering professional growth, Mulkey said. This includes the NATA convention's educational session "Conversations About Organizational Conflict for the Real World," the EPC/SLC/COPA four-part webinar series "Navigating Non-Traditional Athletic Training Settings" and the NATA Timely Topics event, "The State of Athletic Training: Employment and the Early Professional Athletic Trainer." "EPC was also thrilled to present its educational session for NATA 2023, 'Using Patient Care Data to Improve the Self-Value and Worth of the Athletic Trainer,'" Mulkey said. "Also at

How To Connect With NATA's Young Professionals

Young professionals can learn and grow in their profession through networking opportunities and resources from the Young Professionals webpage, www.nata.org/professional-interests/young-professionals.

For more information and resources from the NATA Early Professionals' Committee, visit www.nata.org/early-professionals and sign up for its quarterly e-newsletter. Follow EPC on Twitter, [@NATA_EPC](https://twitter.com/NATA_EPC); Facebook, [@NATA.EPC](https://www.facebook.com/NATA.EPC); and Instagram, [@NATA_EPC](https://www.instagram.com/NATA_EPC).

For more information and resources from the NATA Career Advancement Committee, visit www.nata.org/career-advancement, and sign up for their quarterly e-newsletter. Follow CAC on Twitter, [@NATA_CAC](https://twitter.com/NATA_CAC); Facebook, [@NATA.CAC](https://www.facebook.com/NATA.CAC); and Instagram, [@NATA_CAC](https://www.instagram.com/NATA_CAC).

convention this year, EPC joined with CAC to host a young professionals' social."

Maintaining the spirit of connection, EPC has and continues to collaborate with CAC, the NATA State Association Advisory Committee, NATA International Committee, NATA Government Affairs Committee and many more, Mulkey said.

Similar to its early professional counterpart, CAC has served its members with membership benefits of support, professional growth, connection and advocacy by staying true to its pillars of work-life balance, career satisfaction, career growth and professional retention.

"I think we really have dived into the pillars that we created," Harris said. "We knew that some of the problems existed, specifically, retention issues [and] work-life issues. We knew that those were things that existed in the latter half of [being a] young professional. ... So, really thinking about, 'What is it that is most pertinent to us as athletic trainers being representatives of that group?' And the same themes consistently emerged."

With this knowledge, CAC solidified the concepts and created programming around them as an individual committee and in partnership with other NATA committees.

Despite their uniqueness from each other, EPC and CAC team up on projects.

CAC, in collaboration with EPC, carried out a survey last year that revealed valuable insight now being prepared for submission to the *Journal of Athletic Training*. Harris said the document will provide a solutions-based perspective on the committee's future direction.

"We really drilled down and looked at post-pandemic career satisfaction. And not only that, but the factors that had an effect on that," Harris said. "So one of the things we found out was organization. Administration and the support that they provide is a huge component of individuals' satisfaction in their respective jobs, but also their outlook and wanting to stay in the athletic training profession.

"Work-life balance is an issue ... longevity is an issue, but it really gave us a little bit more perspective as to why, so that we can, again, drill down those resources."

CAC and EPC have also partnered with the NATA Research & Education Foundation's Educational Resources Committee to retrieve the contact information of relevant individuals by state and district to ensure that there are specific member-accessible resources on the NATA Foundations' website for their members.

Mulkey and Harris said their committees

have also supported members moving across state or district lines by making a way for them to link back from the NATA Foundation website to the NATA website and by providing resources on both websites.

Another example is a research project both committees are working on.

"[CAC has] people who are further in the [AT] education world," Mulkey said. "So they have more access to some research tools than a lot of early professionals. [For instance], they're able to help us as we're doing a research project on how COVID-19 impacted young professionals. We [surveyed] both demographics for that one."

EPC and CAC also collaborated on a presentation to NATA leadership at a virtual 2023 State Leadership Forum. In the presentation, they provided specific ways to increase consistency and transparency about accessing resources and better communicate with YPs. They also presented equitable strategies for leaders to help members grow into leadership roles.

Both committees have started career workshops to help polish members' professional development skills. The workshops entail roundtable sessions in which members get hands-on practice of their skill set and learn how to pull data from research to advocate for themselves.

In the area of professional growth, CAC held a DEIA panel at the 73rd NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo in 2022.

"It was really well received by the members in terms of attendance, but also just in terms of the commentary that we received," Harris said. "So we are really proud of that session."

Also keeping with the heart of YPC, CAC prides itself on honoring one of its members, Jasmine DeBose, DAT, LAT, ATC, with the Career Advancement Committee National Distinction Award at NATA 2023.

Other ways CAC has provided connection includes facilitating social media networking and fostering relationships with its national, state and district leaders.

Concerning advocacy, CAC is helping its members practice self-advocacy by developing methods with which they can evaluate and advance their career.

"The results of the survey have [shown] a lot of places that individuals need to advocate for themselves," Harris said. "And we feel like

the discussion section of [the survey] really provides some tangible strategies to assess where you are and where you need to be in order to stay in athletic training and ... what that process might be for them.”

EPC and CAC: Plans for the Future

Mulkey said EPC hopes to collaborate more with other committees in the near future. For instance, it’s looking to work with GAC on third party reimbursement.

“If we want third party reimbursement, we’re going to be a large part of that push,” she said. “So we’re trying to get early professionals involved in that.”

The committee has begun working with the NATA Connection and Engagement Committee, but it also plans to continue its work with CAC, SLC, the NATA Foundation and the NATA Political Action Committee.

“[We are] trying to make sure that those roots, fundamentally as early professionals,

are super strong as they go into the rest of their career,” Mulkey said.

One of CAC’s plans for the future is its educational session at the 75th NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo, which is June 25-28, 2024, in New Orleans.

Along with EPC, CAC also plans to collaborate with ICSM to tackle professional retention and job satisfaction challenges. Harris said this partnership will help capture “the pulse of the people a little bit more specifically about what’s going on in the collegiate setting and how we can encourage [ATs] to advance in their careers within that specific setting, because that seems to be, through the research and anecdotally, the most challenging part for individuals.”

Harris and Mulkey said it’s important for YPs to participate in their committees in order to enhance their career and preserve the profession.

Harris said that while young professional ATs can advocate for themselves within

their communities and local networks, CAC can strengthen their visibility and improve retention.

“Without engaging at the national level or a collective groupthink in a positive way, it’s difficult to really shift and make the change that we need to really change retention,” she said. “We’re trying to get a pulse of what the membership is going through. So, I think it’s difficult for us to do that and give them the resources they need, if they’re not engaging with us and telling us what’s going on.”

Mulkey said that without the involvement of the profession’s young practitioners, athletic training would struggle in the next 10 to 20 years, as they are its future leaders.

“So the more we can get early professionals involved now, the better our profession is going to be in 20 years, and I firmly believe, after working with all the current district directors, we have such a wonderful support from the leaders of our profession right now,” she said. §

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