

SETTING THE PATH FOR THE FUTURE OF AT

Education

Recent document created by the NATA Executive Council for Education looks ahead, sets priorities

BY BETH SITZLER

Overseeing all matters related to athletic training education, the NATA Executive Council for Education and its six committees ensure athletic training students and athletic trainers in all stages of their careers have the resources, education, support and professional development needed to succeed in health care.

To assist in these efforts and create a framework for the future of athletic training education, ECE created the “Reshaping Athletic Training Education in the 21st Century” document, which was approved by the NATA Board of Directors in October 2021.

“The document was created with the idea that this should be a visionary document with recommendations to help guide education within the profession of athletic training over the next 10 years,” said ECE Chair Brian Vescei, DAT, ATC. “It was important that we have a clear vision as to what our time and resources should be spent on and developing the future of athletic training education. . . . It really is meant to be the set of recommendations that guides anything we do within the Executive Council for Education for the coming years.”

ECE began working on the document in May 2019, using the 2012 “Future Directions of Athletic Training Education” document as its starting point.

“[The ‘Future Directions of Athletic Training Education’] document, over the years, would be used by the ECE to chart projects and tasks to be completed,” said former ECE Chair MaryBeth Horodyski, EdD, LAT, ATC, who oversaw the creation of the new reshaping education document. “We would review the document and mark off things that had been successfully completed.

“As we got further down the line, completing all of the items in the document, it became apparent that there was a need for a newer version of that document.”

Under the direction of former NATA President Tory Lindley, MA, ATC, and the NATA Board of Directors, ECE started by examining all avenues of athletic training education – from what was currently being done well and what areas needed to improve to where the profession fit within in the health care field in the long term.

“So we were looking at the large scope of educational planning, not just a very narrow scope,” Horodyski said.

Horodyski said the AT Strategic Alliance’s Vision 2030, which was introduced to the NATA membership during the 2019 NATA Joint Committee Meeting, and the NATA Strategic Plan – which focuses on advocacy, engagement and development – influenced the creation of the document and how ECE saw the future of athletic training education.

“Looking at the current strategic plan of NATA, what needs to be done from an engagement piece with members, what needs to be done for an advocacy piece for members and, then, what

resources need to be developed and provided to the membership to help improve the educational process, the ability for us to recruit and retain really talented people into this profession and show the pathways for them to develop throughout their career?” Vescei said.

With the direction of the document set, a steering group of eight ECE members was formed to oversee the development of the document. From there, four workgroups were established to represent four key athletic training stakeholders: professional, early career, mid to late career and clinical education.

“Those four workgroups were each chaired by members of the steering committee, and then those chairs had the ability to add subject matter experts to their individual workgroups to then start with data collection and the genesis of the recommendation that eventually made it to the final document,” Vescei said.

“There were some absolutely awesome people on the four different groups, specifically the leaders of each of those four areas, who helped develop the document,” Horodyski said. “The work of all of the people we selected to serve on all of the different workgroups was just unbelievable. It was really impressive to see how they all came together, how they came up with all of their different ideas. The research that they did to back up or support their ideas was exceptional.”

After looking at athletic training education through their specific lenses, each workgroup

submitted its recommendations to the steering group, totaling 18 recommendations. In the document – written by Horodyski, Sara Nottingham, EdD, LAT, ATC, and Kimberly Peer, EdD, ATC, FNATA – the recommendations are organized into six categories:

- NATA Collaboration With the Strategic Alliance
- Professional Education
- Transition to Practice
- Advanced Clinical Practice
- Advanced Practice Leadership
- Stewards of the Profession

Vesci said the idea of how to organize the recommendations came from an April 2015 *NATA News* article, “A Framework For the Future: Communicating and Enhancing the Future of Athletic Training Education” written by Eric Sauers, PhD, ATC, FNATA, which outlined five strategic priorities of athletic training education.

“The thought of the steering group was that the recommendations should be organized based on what was previously released from the ECE as strategic priorities in athletic training education,” he said. “And then we, as a steering group, felt that we needed to add the sixth area [NATA collaboration with the Strategic Alliance] to address things that we thought raised above just the purview of NATA, but were visionary items that would likely have some involvement from each member of the Strategic Alliance.”

Next Steps

After two years of research, data collection, conversation and collaboration, the reshaping education document is available to members on the NATA website, www.nata.org/professional-interests/job-settings/higher-education/resources. Next for ECE is to bring the recommendations included in the document to life.

“The work conducted by the Executive Council for Education over the past two years ensures that the association has a strategic pathway to keep athletic training education – and, as a result, the profession – at the forefront of health care,” said NATA President Kathy Dieringer, EdD, LAT, ATC. “The NATA Board of Directors supports the council’s efforts and looks forward to the continued work of the

ECE, staff and our volunteers to implement these important initiatives.”

In December 2021, each recommendation was assigned to an ECE committee that will oversee the efforts to operationalize that recommendation with the assistance of a secondary ECE committee. Since then, the committees have started the review process to determine next steps in regards to projects, resources, tasks and goals to meet each recommendation.

“We certainly recognize that some resources might already exist or be currently in development that would fit within the recommendations themselves, so we’re working to map either currently completed or in-development resources that would align with the guidance within each of the recommendations,” Vesci said. “The committees are also starting to add to their current plan of what would need to be developed to meet that recommendation.

“We’re trying to add a little bit of context and direction to effectively, if possible, establishing a finish line for each recommendation. Then, when we’re able, the ECE will come back and start to prioritize the ask for resources from the board for us to start developing the resources that are recommended from each of the committees that are overseeing the specific recommendations.”

As ECE and its committees work to operationalize the recommendations, Vesci said members are encouraged to read the reshaping education document and provide feedback and ideas on how they think the recommendations can be brought to life.

“A lot of meaningful conversations occurred in 2012 after the future directions document was released, and I’m hopeful that same process occurs now,” he said. “If there are conversations that aren’t happening now about how we get better, then I hope this is the catalyst that begins those conversations. I realized that sometimes that can be polarizing, but we’re not going to improve without some level of change. We won’t get better by staying the same.

“I hope that this is the impetus for very constructive conversations among the membership about how we can improve athletic training education and the profession, as a whole.”

The Impact on Membership

Whether they identify as an AT EducATionalist or not, all members will be impacted by the

reshaping education document as it will influence all aspects of athletic training education, and even the profession overall.

“Beyond [credentialing and professional education], if you look at the overall health and well-being of our profession, in general, there’s certainly aspects of this document that speak directly to the recruitment and retention of individuals into the profession of athletic training, making sure that we remain viable as a profession in the long term with the continuing changing landscape of health care in our country and in the world,” Vesci said.

“It’s really important for all members to realize how important it is for us to continue to grow our membership, the services that we provide to our patients and the opportunities for individuals joining the profession to find meaningful work, to treat patients in a way that matters to them and is important to patients.”

As members familiarize themselves with the reshaping education document and the framework it sets for the future of athletic training education, Horodyski said it’s important to keep in mind not only the work that went into it, but the number of athletic trainers who contributed to its creation.

“I want to say ‘thank you’ not only to the workgroup members, but to all of the other athletic training educators and clinicians who were more than willing to answer questions of our workgroup members as we were developing the document,” Horodyski said. “There were a lot more athletic trainers out there involved in this project, in this document, than those who are listed as writers of the document.”

Learn more about the 18 recommendations on the following pages, and read the “Reshaping Athletic Training Education in the 21st Century” document in its entirety at www.nata.org/professional-interests/job-settings/higher-education/resources. §

Blog Shares ECE’s Tips for Success

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