Fields of Study-Athletic Training

Definition and Nature of the Field
Athletic Training is an academic major or graduate equivalent major program that is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). Students who want to become Certified Athletic Trainers (ATCs) must, at a minimum, earn a degree from an accredited athletic training curriculum. Accredited programs include formal instruction in areas such as injury/illness prevention, first aid and emergency care, assessment of injury/illness, human anatomy and physiology, therapeutic modalities, and nutrition. Classroom learning is enhanced through clinical education experiences. Upon completion of a CAATE-accredited Athletic Training education program, students become eligible for national certification by successfully completing the NATA Board of Certification, Inc. (BOC) examination. The ATC® credential and the BOC requirements are currently recognized by 48 states for eligibility and/or regulation of the practice of athletic trainers.

ATCs are highly educated and skilled allied health care professionals who collaborate with physicians to provide preventative services, emergency care, clinical diagnosis, therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation of injuries and medical conditions. Often, the ATC is the first line of defense in providing care for athletic injuries, making them an integral member of the athletic health care team in secondary schools, colleges and universities, sports medicine clinics, and professional sports programs. Because ATCs are multi-skilled health care providers, they can also be found working as physician extenders in physician offices and hospitals, in physical therapy clinics, in industrial settings, in the military and with the performing arts. As specialists in the prevention, recognition, and rehabilitation of injuries incurred by physically active individuals, ATCs provide immediate emergency care and use their knowledge of injuries and the factors influencing injuries to develop treatment programs based on medical, exercise and sports sciences.

Professional Education Requirements
Professional, or entry-level Athletic Training education, uses a competency-based approach in both the classroom and clinical settings. Using a medical-based education model, Athletic Training students are educated to provide comprehensive client/patient care in five domains of clinical practice: prevention; clinical evaluation and diagnosis; immediate and emergency care; treatment and rehabilitation; and organization and professional health and well-being. The educational requirements for CAATE-accredited Athletic Training education programs include acquisition of knowledge, skills, and clinical abilities along with a broad scope of foundational behaviors of professional practice. Students must receive formal instruction in the following specific subject matter area identified in the Competencies: Evidence-based Practice; Prevention and Health Promotion; Clinical Examination and Diagnosis; Acute Care of Injury and Illness; Therapeutic Interventions; Psychosocial Strategies and Referral; Health care Administration; Professional Development and Responsibility

Clinical Education Requirements
Students complete an extensive clinical learning requirement that is embodied in the clinical integration proficiencies (professional, practice-oriented outcomes) as identified in the Athletic Training Education Competencies. Through these experiences, students must gain clinical experiences with a variety of patient populations who vary by age and types of activities, and who are at risk for both musculoskeletal and general medical conditions. Clinical experiences provide students with opportunities for real patient care while under the direct supervision of qualified preceptors (i.e., Athletic Trainer or other credentialed health care professionals).

Related Work Experience
Because athletic trainers can be found in a variety of settings, individuals interested in pursuing this field of study may want to gain work experience that involves sport and movement activities, summer sports camps, sports medicine/physical therapy clinics, hospitals, and physician offices. High school courses in the areas of biology, chemistry, physics, sport, fitness, first aid, and CPR are useful to complete in preparation for studying athletic training. Volunteering in the school athletic training room, at local hospitals or sports medicine clinics is valuable.

Career Opportunities
With a bachelor's degree and successful completion of the BOC examination, an ATC may find full time or part time employment in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to school athletic programs. According to the National Athletic Trainers Association, today, more than 50% of its certified members are employed in settings other than "traditional" school athletics. Recognized by the American Medical Association in 1990 as an allied health provider, the ATC is in great demand in physician’s offices, hospitals, sports medicine/physical therapy clinics and outreach programs, and in occupational/industrial settings. Employment opportunities are growing as the allied health care industries’ recognition of the multiple skills and talents of the ATC continue to expand.

[Sources: Adapted from the NATA Athletic Training Overview: http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/AT-EducationOverview.pdf]