

Athletic training trends

ATSU perspective



Pathways to leadership through the athletic training education continuum

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A qualitative review of the best athletic training career advancement pathways in clinical practice, education, research, and industry leadership. The purpose is to support the discovery process that includes matching required curriculum models to professional goals with applicable program tracks and concentrations.¹



As the athletic training profession experiences growth and change, opportunities for advancement are also expanding. Finding the best athletic training career advancement pathway in clinical practice, education, research, and industry leadership is a discovery process. A pivotal part of this process is matching the required curriculum models to professional goals with the right program tracks and concentrations.

The situation

The growing and evolving athletic training profession requires more thought leaders to lead the way, and flexible pathways in post-professional education to help them develop their specialized leadership potential. For many, this may reveal the educator that lies within.

By 2022, accredited athletic training programs will begin at the master's degree level, in accordance with the 2020 Standards from the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE).²

Combine that with the growing number of individuals choosing to enter the athletic training profession (sources: BLS and CareerBuilder), and the question becomes, "Who will teach them?" The answer becomes clear: More educators are needed. Available data indicates only about four percent of athletic trainers currently hold a doctoral degree (2,040 people).

Finding the best athletic training career advancement pathway in clinical practice, education, and industry leadership is a discovery process and requires the curriculum models be matched to professional goals with the right program tracks and concentrations.

The solution

Athletic trainers who elevate their standing in the profession with a doctoral degree in athletic training create new opportunities to expand and enhance the delivery of athletic healthcare and to improve the health outcomes of physically active individuals and their communities.

For athletic training professionals who want to align their passion points and areas of interest to their post-professional education, a distinctive education model offering specialty tracks can be the pathway to help them do just that.

These specialty tracks empower graduates with advanced professional degrees to elevate their standing as educators and leaders within the industry, or focus on their integrated areas of specialty within clinical practice.

"Given that new 2020 accreditation standards are going to require additional faculty for many programs and that all faculty exhibit 'contemporary expertise' and 'scholarship,' the Doctor of Athletic Training program is perfectly positioned to meet their needs," says Eric Sauers, PhD, ATC, FNATA, professor & chair, Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences at A.T. Still University and associate director of the Athletic Training Practice-Based Research Network. "They must also now teach the core competencies of quality improvement, health informatics, evidence-based practice, and patient-centered care. The doctor of athletic training degree perfectly positions faculty to develop 'contemporary expertise' in these new areas required of all programs."

Finding the right pathway

With the many educational opportunities within the athletic training profession, how does one go about aligning their interests with the right pathway? Identifying the appropriate graduate degree curriculum and specialty tracks is the key to finding the academic and professional advancement track best suited for them.

Area(s) of interest:

- Clinical application
- Leadership
- Orthopaedics
- Rehabilitation
- Administration
- Education
- Sport neurology/concussion
- Research

AT specialty tracks:

- **Clinical decision-making**

Demonstrate advanced clinical decision-making to determine the effectiveness of athletic training practice. [Learn more.](#)

- **Orthopaedics**

Demonstrate advanced practice athletic training knowledge and skills in the specialty area of orthopaedics. [Learn more.](#)

- **Rehabilitation**

Demonstrate advanced practice athletic training knowledge and skills in the specialty area of rehabilitation. [Learn more.](#)

- **Leadership and education**

Debate and apply contemporary knowledge and skills in athletic training leadership and education. [Learn more.](#)

- **Sport neurology and concussion**

Demonstrate advanced practice athletic training knowledge and skills in the sub-specialty area of sports neurology and concussion. [Learn more.](#)

For athletic training professionals who enter a doctorate of athletic training program that builds a degree with specialty tracks, they can apply course content immediately to their educational and/or clinical practice, thus benefiting both themselves and their students/patients. Doctoral students progress through content in a sequential manner, engage in discussions with peers and faculty, and complete a variety of assignments to enhance their learning:

- **Elective specialty track**

This includes selection of two specialized tracks, plus the required foundations to obtain a doctoral degree in athletic training.

- **Graduate certificate**

Obtain a graduate certificate now for immediate qualifications in this area. Then, if you decide to later obtain your doctorate, this certificate will provide for advance standing.

Explore the [educational pathways and professional opportunities](#) in athletic training.

Discover the [specialty tracks](#) that can [configure a doctorate in athletic training](#) to your passion.

[View student/faculty/alumni videos](#) for insights on their journeys.

Advancement opportunities

Change is imminent. The athletic training profession is evolving to become more integrally linked to the inter-professional healthcare team, and meet growing demand.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment of athletic trainers is projected to grow 23 percent from 2016 to 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for athletic trainers is expected to increase as people become more aware of the effects of sports-related injuries, and as the middle-aged and older population remains active.”

Add to that the CareerBuilder data in a March 2018 Forbes magazine article which states, “Athletic Training has experienced some of the fastest growth since the recession.”³ (See Figure 1)

Helping athletic trainers find the right fit is crucial as the profession continues to grow. Choices in athletic training education pathways not only provide opportunities for professionals to find their academic and professional fit, but advance their career path in an array of areas.

Students with a doctorate in athletic training are practicing athletic trainers who want to advance to

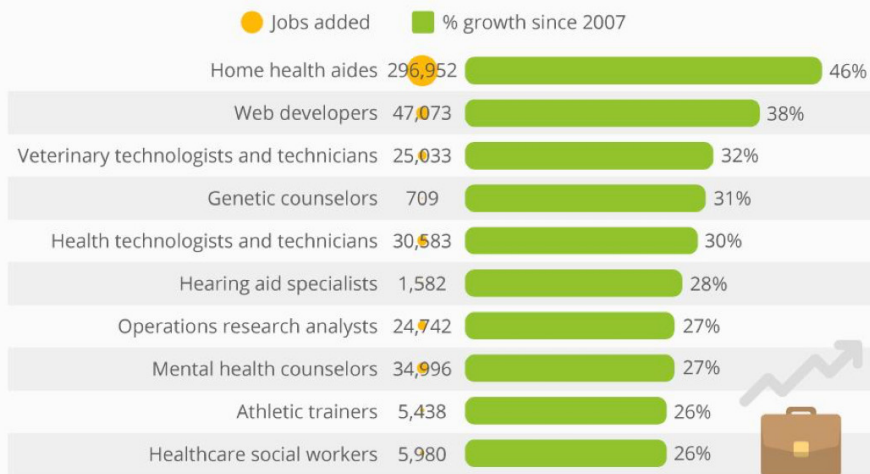
the forefront of their careers in many exciting areas of healthcare, including:

- Elite-level athletic trainer
- Head athletic trainer
- Clinical preceptor
- Director of athletic training services
- Clinical education coordinator
- Program director
- Core faculty
- Physician practice setting
- Entrepreneur
- Industrial setting

With a doctorate in athletic training, graduates serve as expert educators, clinicians, and administrators with advanced knowledge and skills for analyzing, developing, and implementing practical solutions to improve the delivery of athletic healthcare and health outcomes of physically active individuals and their communities.

The Occupations Growing The Fastest Since The Recession

Occupations with the fastest growth in the U.S. from 2007 to 2017



© StatistaCharts Source: CareerBuilder

Forbes statista

Figure 1: The occupations growing the fastest since the recession

Education pathways and professional opportunities

The following represents the broad continuum, in general, of the most likely real-world outcomes for athletic training (AT) professionals correlating to each type of athletic training education, once completed.⁴

Professional bachelor's or master's program

Generalist athletic trainer

- Athletic trainers within university settings
- BS level AT teachers
- Athletic trainers working in K-12 settings
- Athletic trainers working within medical practices
- Athletic trainers within military and government positions
- Athletic trainers working in clinic and hospital settings

Post-professional master's program

Advanced generalist or specialist athletic trainer

- Athletic trainers within university settings
- BS level AT teachers
- Athletic trainers working in K-12 settings
- Athletic trainers working within medical practices
- Athletic trainers within military and government positions
- Athletic trainers working in clinic and hospital settings

Residency AT program

Specialist athletic trainer

- Athletic trainers within university settings
- BS level AT teachers
- Athletic trainers working in K-12 settings
- Athletic trainers working within medical practices
- Athletic trainers within military and government positions
- Athletic trainers working in clinic and hospital settings

Advance practice doctorate (DAT) program

Advanced practice leadership athletic trainer

- Clinical professionals who desire to lead and further AT practice in the field
- AT professors teaching from the perspective of a terminal clinical degree
- Master's students who would like to practice clinically as their next step professionally
- Clinical practice-based research for the industry
- Government or military leadership
- Professional sports teams
- Physician practices
- Leadership in clinical hospital settings

Research doctoral program (PhD)

Professional scholar athletic trainer

- Lab research positions in university settings furthering AT knowledge base
- Lab research within the industry
- Professors teaching from the perspective of a terminal research degree
- Master's students within the industry who would like to research as their next step professionally
- Research positions within a hospital setting
- Research positions within medical practices

AT specialty graduate certificates

Specialty knowledge athletic trainer

- Clinical decision-making
- Orthopaedics
- Rehabilitation
- Leadership and education
- Sport neurology and concussion

Lifelong learning

Advancing the practice and teaching of athletic training involves lifelong learning, well beyond graduation with a doctorate. No matter where professionals are in their educational and professional journey. Continual learning involves applying new concepts, skills, and ideas to enhance professional development.

The Athletic Training Practiced Based Research Network (AT-PBRN) at ATSU is an ongoing and highly respected source for clinical outcomes and evidence-base practice (EBP) education to educate and train post-professional athletic training students.

Taking the pathway to thought leadership involves a continuum of learning in athletic training – learning that evolves athletic training professionals into the leaders and mentors who ultimately enhance the quality of healthcare globally and elevates the stature of athletic trainers in education, clinical practice, and industry leadership.

¹ ATSU Athletic Training Department

² Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) 2020 Standards

³ CareerBuilder, Forbes March 2018

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics