

Student Athletic Trainer Explores Preference in PT Program Admission

By Jeffrey W. Wimer,
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SPECIAL TO ADVANCE

Christopher Wise is a typical undergraduate student at The University of Charleston in West Virginia. He lives in the dorm, listens to music and studies in the library—although not as often as he should. Like many other students at other colleges and universities, Chris is required to take a variety of courses from many disciplines which enables him to gain a clear understanding of his personal interests, career plans and graduate school options.

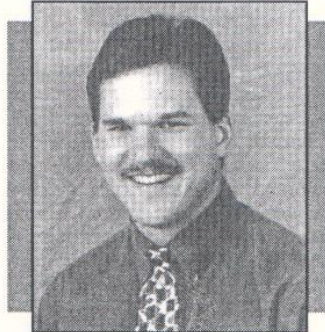
Chris' major is in sports medicine and athletic training. However, his ultimate goal is to attend physical therapy school.

For the past couple of years, Chris has listened to different people tell him that admission to physical therapy school is difficult. This resounding theme is echoed by many people Chris has contact with. His athletic training professors have told him that getting admitted to physical therapy school is often more difficult than being admitted to medical school. Furthermore, the physical therapist in his hometown where he does volunteer hours told him the entrance process is painstakingly harsh. Even the orthopedist who supervised his clinical rotation told him it is "tough-going" at physical therapy school and tried to steer him toward medical school.

UNCONVINCED, Chris persuaded his college professor to let him do a course project on physical therapy schools. As part of his athletic training course work, Chris enrolled a year early, and out of sequence, for a course titled "Tests and Measurements in Sports Medicine." The basic objective of the course is to introduce students to graduate school, thesis writing and how to conduct research in the field. He wanted to investigate how his major in athletic training would affect his chances of admittance to a master's level physical therapy program.

He wanted to know if physical therapy program directors perceive certified athletic trainers differently than they perceive other candidates when they apply to their programs.

Specifically, he sought an answer to the question: Should certified athletic trainers be given special consideration for admittance into master's degree physical therapy programs?



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He sent half his questionnaires to clinical physical therapists, defined as any physical therapist working in the sports medicine setting without direct university or college influence, (i.e., non-faculty members), and the other half to program directors of institutions that offer a master's degree in physical therapy. More importantly, he sent the questionnaire to the colleges and universities he currently

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has interest in attending.

The survey was sent to a total of 33 subjects who returned the completed survey to his mother's house in Delaware to eliminate any bias from physical therapists in Charleston, WV, who might recognize his campus address.

Twenty surveys were returned (61 percent) from seven program directors and 13 clinical physical therapists.

The questionnaire contained 11 questions. The first four questions related to the job duties of a certified athletic trainer. The next six questions related to the job duties of a physical therapist working in a sports medicine environment.

Chris hypothesized that physical therapists who responded positively to these 10 questions would be more likely to respond positively to his final question, which quite bluntly asked if a certified athletic trainer deserved special consideration for admittance to a master's level physical therapy program.

A statistical computer program was used for analysis of these data. The results show that physical therapists believe certified athletic trainers do not merit any special consideration for admittance into a master's level physical therapy program. The data also show no correlation between program directors and clinical physical therapists.

The information obtained from this survey is beneficial in that it shows that prospective students are appraised equally, regardless of specialized education.

Mean scores from the questions also indicate that physical therapists have positive attitudes toward a certified athletic trainer's job responsibilities.

Nevertheless, Chris was disappointed with the results. In his paper he wrote "One would think I would have a better chance at getting in [to a PT program] since I am already familiar with some physical therapy terminology and concepts vs. someone with less experience."

While the survey used a very small sample and should not be considered representative of all physical therapists' views, it does show the interest that students in athletic training have for a career in physical therapy. Chris wants to become a certified athletic trainer and then pursue his goal of becoming a physical therapist and plans to apply to a master's level physical therapy program after graduation.

• *About the author: Jeffrey Wimer is assistant professor in the department of sports medicine and coordinator of clinical education for athletic training students at The University of Charleston in West Virginia. He also serves as a certified athletic trainer for the university.*