

Service-Learning for the Athletic Training Curriculum

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Certified athletic trainers have long provided service to their communities. We volunteer for special events such as wellness fairs and local athletic tournaments, and serve as members of numerous civic organizations and committees. Some ATCs raise money for charity, build homes for the less privileged, and promote volunteer opportunities for athletic training students.¹

In an effort to build upon these good works and to move from passive learning models to active ones, several colleges and universities are requiring students to engage in structured service experiences. Typically labeled service-learning, a primary goal of this educational movement is for students to learn by doing rather than sitting, oftentimes passively, listening to professors lecture. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to describe an exciting teaching idea that athletic training educators may want to explore, and perhaps implement into their curriculum for the upcoming academic year.

Service-learning is best defined as "a [teaching] method whereby students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in, and meets the needs of, a community."² Different from volunteering, service-learning is a well-planned, transformational process whereby students are responsible for co-designing objectives and achieving outcomes that meet community needs, often for academic credit. This characteristic, sometimes described as purposeful civic engagement distinguishes service-learning from other forms of active learning such as Community Service or Practice-Oriented Education, which tend to operate at the convenience of students. Additionally, service-learning encourages cooperation among students, emphasizes time on task behaviors, and respects diverse talents and different ways of learning.³

Historically, athletic training students have learned by doing. From the demonstration of educational competencies and proficiencies to clinical experiences with various athletic teams, athletic training is a hands-on-profession. What is new, however, is the use of planned learning activities in which students demonstrate proficiency in settings that benefit poten-

tially disadvantaged members from the local community such as nursing homes, long-term disability care centers, after-school clubs and urban community centers.

As a result, service-learning places an emphasis on developing citizenship skills and achieving social change. Because many factors influence health and quality of life, service-learning holds great promise as a curricular strategy for developing community-minded certified athletic trainers. For example, some selected service-learning projects may include advocating a program to increase access to health care for members of traditionally underserved populations. Athletic training students might conduct health-risk screening assessments such as blood pressure or body composition in a rural or urban community, referring the identified high-risk persons to an appropriate health care provider. Perhaps another project might include the collection and interpretation of climatic data (temperature, humidity, etc.) via a sling psychrometer and wet bulb globe index at a county fair or amusement park followed by a review of appropriate consumer information about the prevention of heat illness targeted for the attendees.

At the University of Charleston, a CAAHEP-accredited athletic training education program located in West Virginia, faculty and students have created service-learning modules in a First Aid and CPR course designed to enhance learning of course objectives. Each module addresses various student-learning styles and multiple intelligences while assisting to meet the needs of the larger community in which the University co-exists.

course syllabi

Whether the task is service-learning or traditional direct instruction, a well-designed syllabus is essential because good teaching is known to involve careful planning. Before implementing service-learning into an Athletic Training curriculum, several components should be considered. For instance, "Are the service requirements stated? Is there a clear grading method explained for required activities? Is the number of visits to the community site specified? Are reflection methods described? Are

there specific descriptions of assessment methods for achieving the course goals?"⁴ Considering these questions before offering a course will facilitate positive results.

The Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Athletic Training (JRC-AT), the committee that sets educational criteria and ensures programs meet Standards and Guidelines, requires that course syllabi exhibit daily (or weekly) written instructional plans. Daily (or weekly) instructional planning (sometimes termed lesson planning) helps students and faculty reach desired learning outcomes by outlining what will be accomplished. Moreover, regional accreditation agencies, which grant accreditation to entire colleges or universities, have begun mandating course syllabi demonstrate measurable learning outcomes.⁵ Indeed, careful planning is not only crucial for enhanced learning, but a requirement of accreditation agencies.

orientation and the value of teaching others

After developing the syllabus, an orientation session is required before implementing service-learning. By design, approximately five hours of classroom time is devoted to informing students of learning goals, assessment criteria and past projects completed by students. Additionally, students meet face-to-face with representatives from selected community organizations.

In the Charleston model, teaching others is an important mantra of the program. On average, students retain only about 5% of what they hear and about 20% of what they see. However, when students teach others they retain 90% of the material.⁶ Although techniques such as peer teaching, student presentations, and peer mentoring during clinical hours have long been important in athletic training education programs, working with disadvantaged individuals and meeting community needs heightens the students' sense of purpose. In several instances, first and second year Charleston students reported feeling appreciated and valued after completing their service-learning project whereas before implementation of service-learning several students described their first

year and second year experiences analogous to a waiter or waitress, taking orders and serving athletes and coaches. Although service-learning can never fully replace athletic training clinical experiences, structured service as described here in is not only an important teaching strategy for educators, but a wonderful learning (and lasting) experience for students.

implementing the service-learning plan through self-reflection

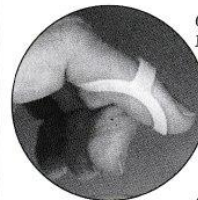
During the orientation session, students also learn self-reflection skills that they practice at the beginning, at mid-term, and end of the semester. The first phase is called pre-reflection. For example, Charleston students anticipate potential outcomes and strategize techniques for teaching basic first aid skills to mentally challenged clients at a long-term care facility, as well as write two-page essays describing their anticipated lessons and what they wish to accomplish in this phase. Students also tour the facility where they will perform the service. Pre-reflection during this phase establishes a baseline for student learning and helps to benchmark student growth and development.

By mid-term, students are fully engaged in teaching disadvantaged community members basic first aid skills. At this point, students reflect on how their project is progressing and begin planning ways for sharing their work with others at the University. Mid-term reflection also includes orally communicating the status of each project to the instructor and re-visiting previously submitted written pre-reflection plans in order to make adjustments or improvements. It is during the mid-term reflection that students begin to gain an appreciation for the important knowledge and skills athletic trainers must learn and demonstrate.

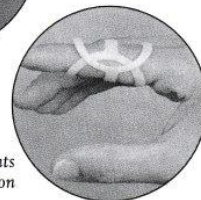
During the final weeks of the course, students are given several choices for demonstrating the successfulness of their off-campus work within the community. Some students prepare elaborate PowerPoint presentations that include video clips to document their work. Others have created electronic portfolios containing photographs, writ-

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The three phases of reflection are important from an instructional standpoint because it allows the instructor to assess affective domain traits such as personal growth and appreciation for others, as well as assessing cognitive domain traits such as knowledge and understanding over the course of a semester. Perhaps more importantly, we have found the University of Charleston students who participated in service-learning demonstrate greater psychomotor skills than the students we instructed using traditional classroom methods such as lecture.

summary

In summary, service-learning is an authentic learning strategy that the ath-

letic training community should be aware of, not only for meeting society needs, but for preparing athletic training students for the ever-changing athletic training environment. While service-learning is primarily a student-centered project, faculty oversight is required to ensure that the needs and goals of the community are being met in a responsible manner. Therefore, service-learning may not be suited for everyone. Nevertheless, there is mounting evidence to suggest that service-learning for the athletic training curriculum is a legitimate, as well as useful, tool for preparing future Certified Athletic Trainers. **nm**

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