

Minority Workforce Issues in Athletic Training

Daniel Nevarez, Dan K. Hibbler, and Michelle A. Cleary
Florida International University, USA

Abstract: Certified Athletic Trainers belonging to ethnic minority groups have many issues in the profession. This paper addresses workforce issues including distribution of minorities, recruitment and retention of minority Certified Athletic Trainers, and support systems for minority Certified Athletic Trainers.

Minorities in the United States continue to be confronted with workplace issues such as racism, discrimination, glass ceilings, and under representation in higher education. Improvement of minority status in the workforce will require many changes. As is true in the field of athletic training, minority under representation is a major workforce issue. Athletic training is an allied health profession concerned with the health care of athletes and physically active individuals. Certified athletic trainers are allied health professionals trained to prevent, treat, and rehabilitate athletic injuries. They work in various settings from physical therapy clinics and hospitals to high schools, college and professional athletics. In order to become a certified athletic trainer, one must hold a Bachelor's degree from an accredited athletic training curriculum program and pass a national board examination. The governing board for athletic trainers is the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA). Their mission is to enhance the quality of health care for athletes and those engaged in physical activity. In addition, the NATA promotes the advancement of the athletic training profession through education and research in the prevention, evaluation, management, and rehabilitation of injuries (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999).

The purpose of this paper is to identify and describe minority workforce issues in the field of athletic training, including job placement, recruitment and identification of support systems for minority certified athletic trainers. Minority athletic trainers are unequally distributed in the profession as supported by the following data. A total of 26,096 members of the NATA includes certified athletic trainers, athletic trainers not yet certified but practicing, retired athletic trainers, and student athletic trainers (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999). Of the total number of athletic trainers, there are only 1,826 minority athletic trainers, or less than 7% (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999), compared to 25% of the minority composition of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). A detailed breakdown of these minority athletic trainers is presented in Table 1. This information is gathered from a personal report of members when renewing their NATA membership. Although some members did not respond to the ethnicity question, the distribution is very much lopsided in favor of the dominant Caucasian group.

Data from the NATA provide the breakdown of minority athletic trainers in a variety of employment settings (Table 2). Employment settings for members of the NATA include physical therapy clinics, high schools, colleges/universities, professional athletics, and college students. The minorities not accounted for in the workforce distribution are certified athletic trainers working in hospitals, industry/corporate, junior colleges or other professions related or not related to athletic training but still members of the NATA (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999). Compared to certified athletic trainers currently working in the profession, a relatively equivalent number of minorities are students studying to become certified athletic trainers. Although there may be an equal number of individuals studying to become certified

athletic trainers, minority student athletic trainers are not entering the athletic training workforce at an equal rate as certified athletic trainers. While there may be an increased number of minorities entering undergraduate programs in athletic training, further research must be conducted to determine a correlation between minority athletic training students and minorities who actually enter the workforce as certified athletic trainers (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999).

Table 1. *Ethnic Minorities members of the NATA*

African-Americans:	384	1.5%
Asian:	552	2.1%
Hispanic:	577	2.2%
Native American:	125	0.5%
Other:	188	0.7%
Caucasian	20,287	77.7%
Blank:	3,983*	15.3%
Total	26,096	

*Members who chose not to disclose their ethnic background.

(National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999)

Table 2. *Percentage of Ethnic Certified Athletic Trainers by Employment Setting*

	Clinical	High School	Univ/College	Professional	Students
Black (Not of Hispanic Origin)	13%	7%	17%	5%	48%
Asian or Pacific Islander	17%	10%	11%	5%	37%
Hispanic	22%	14%	11%	5%	37%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	25%	11%	16%	2%	34%
Other	17%	6%	4%	4%	57%
Caucasian	31%	14%	14%	3%	24%

(National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999)

With so many of our athletes in the high school, collegiate, and professional sports worlds being minorities, recruiting minorities into these positions can only help the structure of your organization. It is important that not to hire any minority, but one that is qualified and capable of handling the job at hand. In order to recruit minorities to their organizations, employers must show cultural sensitivity, especially if the positions that are being applied for are not in large minority communities. Minorities choose careers for the most part, and anyone for that matter, in professions in which they are exposed. When young African Americans see Michael Jordan as a role model, they want to become basketball players. When young Hispanics see Sammy Sosa or Alex Rodriguez as role models, they want to become baseball players. If young minorities see other minorities as nothing other than sports stars, they will believe that this is the only avenue for success. It is up to the educated minorities to spread the word in our communities.

Recruitment of minority certified athletic trainers requires diversification in three areas: a) the need to acquire cross-cultural communication skills, b) awareness of workplace attitudes towards minorities, and c) the need to increase knowledge about traditional and nontraditional ethnic minority populations (Martin & Buxton, 1997). Retention of minority employees is just as

important as the recruitment process. Retention of minority certified athletic trainers requires positive feedback, an excellent working environment conducive to all parties involved, and the ability to evolve into well-rounded employees (Martin & Buxton, 1997). Employers may consider initiating a diversity management program in order to develop an organizational culture that will value all employees, resulting in more effective recruitment and retention.

Support systems for minority athletic trainers are important in that minorities are often one of only a few minorities in an organization. Support from others in similar situations is helpful while sharing experiences, thoughts, interests, and challenges of working in an organization. Sharing with others does not have to be with people exclusively in the department in which they work. Minorities must network with each other regardless of their particular unit or group. Getting ahead and breaking stereotypes must be accomplished together as a group or as a team effort. This is not to say that minorities should only network with other minorities. It is very important for any certified athletic trainer to have a professional network of people of all ethnicities.

The NATA recognizes the importance of professional networking in dealing with minority workforce issues by forming the Ethnic Diversity Advisory Council. This council promotes the advancement of ethnic minorities in the profession of athletic training (National Athletic Trainers' Association, 1999). The council requests mentors for minority students, supports research on minority issues, and emphasizes networking of minority athletic trainers. Education about minority experiences in the profession of athletic training is integral in raising awareness. The council is an excellent forum for communication among certified athletic trainers of all ethnicities.

Support systems using modern technology connect minority athletic trainers and promote open lines of communication. The Listserv for Ethnically Diverse Athletic Trainers is used as an electronic forum to discuss minority workforce issues, network with other minority athletic trainers, and share information over the Internet. The listserv is an innovative and wonderful tool for support of ethnic minority athletic trainers.

Under representation of minorities in the profession of athletic training is primarily attributed to the reduced number of minorities entering higher education. Hispanics graduate from secondary school at a lower rate than Caucasians and African Americans. In 2001, secondary school graduation rate for Caucasians was 81.6%, for African Americans was 73.4%, and for Hispanics was 59.8% (American Council on Education, 2001). The lower secondary school graduation rate for Hispanics may be attributed to several factors including, but not limited to, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. These factors apply to many minority groups that face adversity in their lives and in their pursuit of higher education. The lower secondary school graduation rate of African Americans and Hispanics results in lower recruitment and lower admission rates of minorities in athletic training education programs. Other important factors also are considered for young minorities wishing to enter the athletic training profession. Support from parents and teachers, financial stability, and intrinsic motivation are very important in any young person's life (Mathis & Jackson, 2000).

Discussion

Progression of the NATA on minority workforce issues is vital to increasing diversity in the athletic training profession. Minority populations in the United States are increasing rapidly (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). As the diversity increases, it is important for the athletic training profession to adapt and reflect the changing fabric of America. The NATA has shown progress

on minority workforce issues with the creation of the Ethnic Diversity Advisory Council, meetings on minority workforce issues at the NATA annual conventions, and requests for proposals on research on minorities in the athletic training profession.

Health care of athletes and physically active individuals is the primary focus of certified athletic trainers. These individuals arise from ethnically diverse backgrounds, and it is important for health care providers to reflect their culture. This can be achieved by recruitment and retention of qualified, competent minority certified athletic trainers and the inclusion of minorities in athletic training education programs. As America becomes increasingly diverse, the athletic training profession must recognize and address the concomitant workforce issues to progress in the new millennium.

Conclusion

Increasing the representation of minority certified athletic trainers can be accomplished by promoting the athletic training profession to minorities. Promotion through the media, community service, or education will increase exposure of the athletic training profession. In order to reach minorities, promotion of the profession should include the inner cities as well as the suburbs to expose young people to the rewarding profession of athletic training. Once young people have been exposed to the profession, it is important to recruit and admit them into an accredited athletic training education program so they may become certified athletic trainers.

Future Direction

Research is paramount in addressing the workforce issues for minority athletic trainers. Identification of the challenges faced by minority certified athletic trainers currently employed in the profession will provide a basis for recommendations for improvement. Athletes and coaches should be surveyed to elicit the attitudes and preferences of these individuals toward health care provided by minority athletic trainers. Finally, administrators' concerns regarding diversity and minority under representation in the workplace may help recruitment and retention of minority certified athletic trainers.

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