LEARNING CLINICAL SKILLS as an athletic training student (ATS) is paramount to professional competence, but students making the transition to professional practice must also develop advanced learning skills.\(^1\) Recently, a shift in athletic training employment has occurred with over 50% of athletic trainers working in hospitals, physician and physical therapy clinics, and industrial settings.\(^2,3\) Third-party reimbursement in athletic training practice has contributed to an increased need for research to guide clinical decision making and optimize patient outcomes.\(^4\) Athletic training experts are concerned, however, that outcome research for athletic training is “lagging behind” other health care professions and that increased educational rigor might be necessary to advance the profession.\(^5\)

A recent unpublished inquiry on why clinical athletic trainers do not conduct research found that a lack of mentorship and lack of opportunities to participate in research and other scholarly endeavors as an undergraduate student were barriers.\(^6\) Currently, the Athletic Training Education Competencies (4th ed.) indicate that components of the research process should be included in entry-level athletic training curricula.\(^7\) Further recommendations suggest inclusion of instruction in research methods in the undergraduate athletic training courses so that future ATs can gain the knowledge needed to appraise research evidence and to potentially contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.\(^5,8\)

How can we influence ATSs to embrace research? How can we provide ATSs with the ability to become discriminating consumers of research? The purpose of this report is to present a professional writing and research engagement model for undergraduate athletic training education programs.

**Research Engagement Model**

The Research Engagement Model (REM) is a sequential approach to development of research-related knowledge and skills that includes professional writing, literature reviews, case reports, poster presentations, and development of a research prospectus (Table 1). The REM has been used for the past 10 years in two different athletic training education programs. The learning outcomes for this model are (a) to introduce strategies...
that promote utilization of various databases to acquire research evidence early in a student’s academic career, (b) to develop professional writing and presentation skills, (c) to promote analysis of the quality of evidence presented in research reports, (d) to develop professional relationships with project mentors, and (e) to promote utilization of published research to address clinical questions.

The REM begins in the spring semester of the sophomore year, when ATSs are required to develop a proposal for a case report of an injury/illness that has been encountered during a clinical experience. Students are directed to utilize indexed databases, including MEDLINE, Pub Med, SPORTDiscus, and Eric, and to present information in a manner that reflects characteristics of scholarly writing. This stage also involves development of an annotated bibliography and a synthesis of the literature on the topic. Students are required to use a minimum of 25 sources from 3 different databases. Development of the case report proposal progresses into the fall semester of the junior year, when the students write the case report in a format suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. Topics for case studies have included commotio cordis in a youth baseball athlete, bilateral exercise-induced compartment syndrome in a college basketball athlete, an acetabular lesion in a female college soccer player, and an osteochondral talar dome fracture in a 21-year-old football athlete. During this semester, the ATSs also present the cases to their peers and faculty in a poster format. At this stage of the REM, students take a research methods course, which prepares them for development of a research prospectus. In the spring semester of the junior year, ATSs begin to write a research prospectus that is completed during the fall semester of the senior year and is orally presented to peers and faculty in the following spring semester. If an ATS chooses to pursue data collection, statistical analysis, and a report of the results, they receive academic credit through registration for independent study.

Throughout the REM, each ATS is assigned to a faculty member or clinical instructor who is available to provide continuous mentorship as the student progresses through the development of the case report and the research prospectus. Faculty mentors are instructed to meet regularly with students to provide guidance and assistance in the research and writing process. Each stage of the REM is linked to course requirements that contribute to the course grades. Students are required to work individually on the case report,