STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS have a long-standing tradition in higher education. Student groups can be found in every academic discipline, for virtually every cause, and in association with a wide range of activities. Like other academic disciplines, athletic training has utilized student organizations to assist in the professional development of students and advancement of academic programs. Athletic training student organizations (ATSOs) offer students the opportunity to demonstrate professional behaviors not found in the clinical and didactic educational requirements of an athletic training education program (ATEP).

Function

Athletic training student organizations promote education, student socialization, student representation, leadership, the athletic training profession, community involvement, professional involvement, and ethical behavior, as well as professional relationships with mentors, faculty, and staff. Berman identifies six skills that are gained from student-group involvement: (a) group process skills, (b) decision-making skills, (c) organizational and administrative skills, (d) budgeting and accounting skills, (e) programming skills, and (f) bureaucratic skills. These same skills are often overlooked by an ATEP, due to the large number of required clinical skills that must be taught. However, it is often the skills learned through involvement in a professional organization that become most important for ensuring the success of new graduates as they are socialized into a professional-practice setting.

Benefits

Participation in student activities provides important benefits to students in higher education. Students involved in organizations receive greater benefit from educational experiences, and their motivation to continue in

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an academic program until graduation is enhanced.\textsuperscript{2,6} In addition to increased retention of undergraduate students, student involvement in organizations is also linked to a greater number of students entering graduate programs at the professional, master’s, and doctoral level.\textsuperscript{7,8} Research suggests that membership in student organizations might also provide a positive influence on students’ social self-concepts.\textsuperscript{3,9} Students who become active members in groups with peers gain additional practice in social settings and develop better interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

The benefits of student involvement in a professional organization go far beyond increasing the motivation to graduate and seek further education. Research suggests that the acquisition of organizational skills is an important component of student-organization involvement and that there are benefits derived from the acquisition of skills associated with management and decision making.\textsuperscript{1,10} For example, student leaders in professional organizations appear to develop and enhance communication skills.\textsuperscript{11} Higher education research findings suggest that students involved in leadership positions in student organizations derive long-term benefits.

**Organization Development**

The development of a high-quality student organization is difficult and requires a great deal of time and effort from both faculty/staff advisors and students. Groups often exhibit dysfunction, lack of leadership, and poor organization that subsequently lead to a lack of achievement. Very little of the literature on organizational development addresses the needs of student organizations. Two useful tools specifically designed to assist student organizations are the CORE model\textsuperscript{12} and SOES instrument.\textsuperscript{13} The guidelines outlined in these models are helpful for creating and organizing high-quality student organizations.

The Student Organization Environmental Scale (SOES) was developed to provide systematic information to assist student-organization leadership. The SOES was derived from Weisbord’s model of organizational diagnosis.\textsuperscript{14} It is based on a six-box model of organizational functioning that includes the purpose of the organization, the structure, relationships, rewards, helpful mechanisms, leadership, and the organization–environment interface. Findings from the SOES can be used by student leaders to evaluate intervention effectiveness and to diagnose poorly functioning organizational elements.

The CORE model focuses on specific “central conditions” that must be met by student organizations to ensure success. They include cohesion, organization, resourcefulness, and energy. These essential core conditions are helpful in identifying and correcting problems associated with the operation of student organizations. For example:

- Develop group cohesion through communication (e.g., frequent meetings and organized agendas).
- Organization of a group is enhanced when the group goals are clearly defined and match those of the individuals within the group (e.g., create a clearly defined mission statement that outlines the purpose/goals of the group).
- Resourcefulness of students and the group as a whole is vital to establishing a high-quality professional group (e.g., take advantage of athletic training alumni and other resources to obtain items that might otherwise cost the organization money).
- The motivation, persistence, and initiative of the ATSO’s members will play an important role in the success or failure of the organization.

Once a core set of values is established by the group, achieving common goals becomes more realistic and easy to accomplish. Specific goals could include fund raising, frequent communication, group unity, good attendance, recruiting members, motivating members, and development of leadership. Although these goals might not be specific to the mission of the group, they relate to the process necessary to develop current and future stability for the organization. A final condition outlined by the CORE model is intended to provide rewarding experiences for the members of the organization. Specific examples of rewarding experiences could range from forming lasting personal friendships to developing professional contacts within the athletic training profession. Without a sense of reward or positive experience, the ability to establish and maintain a high-quality student professional organization is severely compromised.

**Mentoring Student Organizations**

Typically, it is the program director, clinical coordinator, or staff athletic trainer who serves as advisor to the ATSO. This advisor may have little or no experience...