Educating Students on Athletic Training
Political Involvement

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Most states have some type of regulation that defines the scope of practice of athletic trainers; however, athletic trainers in some states are currently fighting to get proposed regulation enacted (e.g., Maryland, West Virginia, Alaska, and California). Many things are also currently happening on a national level that may affect the scope of athletic training practice. On February 1, 2008, the National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) filed a civil lawsuit against the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) to defend the athletic trainer’s right to practice. The APTA subsequently filed motions to have the lawsuit dismissed and/or moved to a court in Virginia, both of which were denied by the Federal court in Dallas, TX. To learn more about the lawsuit, visit the members section of the NATA website at http://www.nata.org/members1/fairpracticehotline/index.cfm.

The Medicare Improvement Act, HR 1846, which is currently under consideration by the U.S. Congress, would grant Medicare reimbursement to athletic trainers for some services. When legislation is under review, contact with representatives is essential to gain their support. To learn more about HR 1846, visit the NATA Governmental Affairs website: http://www.nata.org/members1/gov_affairs/index.cfm.

The effort to gain Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) recognition of athletic trainers as providers of skilled services has been an ongoing political struggle for years. To learn more about this issue, visit the NATA website: http://www.nata.org/members1/gov_affairs/cms/index.cfm.

There has never been a more important time to educate young professionals about the political processes associated with regulation for our professional practice. The purpose of this report is to present methods that educators might use to empower students to become engaged in activities that strengthen the athletic training profession.

Regulation

There are three distinctly different types of regulation that may define the scope of athletic training practice in a state. Licensure is a form of state credentialing, established by statute and intended to protect the public, that regulates the practice of a trade or profession by specifying who may practice and what duties they may perform. Certification is a form of title protection, established by state law or sponsored by professional associations, designed to ensure that practitioners have essential knowledge and skills sufficient to protect the public. Registration is a type of state credentialing that requires qualified members of a profession to register with the state in order to practice. A significant expenditure of effort is required to secure any of these types of regulation. Once the regulation is established, its status must be continually monitored for any proposed modifications to its provisions. To determine the nature of athletic training practice regulation in your state, visit this NATA website: http://www.nata.org/members1/gov_affairs/stateregboards.cfm.

Education on this topic has often been limited to definitions of the three types of regulation. Hopefully, this report will encourage athletic training educators and students to learn more about the details of regulatory and political processes in their respective states.
Educators should set an example by becoming involved with the activities of the state professional association’s governmental affairs committee. Furthermore, educators should teach students about the political process and look for opportunities to get them directly involved. The most important thing any athletic trainer can do to positively influence regulation of the profession is communication with elected representatives in the state legislature. Student involvement can be incorporated into the requirements of a senior-level or graduate course that addresses professional development or administration (Table 1).

**Table 1. Possible Projects for Senior Level Students**

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<td>1. Field trip to state capitol during March Athletic Training Month.</td>
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<td>2. Attend the national “Hit the Hill Day” in Washington, DC.</td>
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<td>3. Students meet with a local legislator for coffee/lunch to educate them on our profession.</td>
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<td>4. Students get involved with individual legislator’s campaigns.</td>
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<td>5. Students each run a mock campaign to run for a specific public office.</td>
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Project Ideas

To create student involvement, an athletic training educator might organize a trip to the state capitol during Athletic Training Month (March). Such an experience might allow students to accompany athletic trainers to meetings with legislators and/or to observe a legislative committee meeting. This project could be combined with a state athletic training professional association “Day at the Capitol,” which assembles a group of athletic trainers from around the state to educate legislative representatives about the profession. Such an activity is most effective when a given representative is visited by athletic trainers who reside in his or her legislative district. The agenda for a brief meeting is to ensure that the legislative representative (a) knows what an athletic trainer does in professional practice, (b) knows about national certification and related educational program accreditation standards, and (c) knows about the nature of the state regulation of practice that currently exists. Often, the state professional association has a lobbyist who can help set up meetings in advance. Ideally, state legislators who did not know about the athletic training profession gain knowledge and remember the individuals who provided the information when issues related to athletic training arise in the future.

Another possible project is student attendance at the “NATA Hit the Hill Day” in Washington, D.C. Although the project is more practical for athletic training education programs in close geographic proximity, student travel funding may be available at some institutions. Details about this event can be accessed at www.nata.org. Following participation in the event, students could benefit from writing a reflection paper on its professional and personal impact.

An individual student or groups of students might arrange to meet with a local legislator for coffee or lunch. Many legislators welcome the opportunity to meet with young voters. The purpose of the lunch would be to educate the elected representative about the athletic training profession and any legislative initiatives that might need his or her support. Personal contact with each legislator in a state is essential to build political support that will be needed when legislation that affects the athletic training profession progresses to a vote. Legislative representatives are often more accessible in their home districts during the fall when the state legislature is typically out of session. To contact legislators for a given state district, go to the state government website (e.g., www.az.gov) and follow the links to legislators by district. Each representative will have a separate webpage that provides contact information.

Students can be encouraged to become involved in a legislative candidate’s election campaign. Involvement might include distributing lawn signs or posters, making phone calls, or canvassing a neighborhood with flyers. You should definitely become familiar with the candidate’s positions on various issues to answer questions from the public as they arise.

A project that could be done in the classroom is to have students run a mock campaign for a public office. What office would a student choose to pursue and why? What would he or she attempt to accomplish through the legislative process to advance the athletic training profession? Would he or she attempt to change the existing state practice act that regulates athletic training in the state? What strategy would be used to get a regulatory act passed by the state legislature? Perhaps an interview with the current legislator who holds the public office could be arranged. Such activities engage