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### Original Research

## Student Retention in Athletic Training Education Programs

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### Abstract

**Context:** The success of any academic program, including athletic training, depends upon attracting and keeping quality students. The nature of persistent students versus students who prematurely leave the athletic training major is not known. Understanding the profiles of athletic training students who persist or leave is important.

**Objective:** To (1) explore the relationships among the following variables: anticipatory factors, academic integration, clinical integration, social integration, and motivation; (2) determine which of the aforementioned variables discriminate between senior athletic training students and major changers; and (3) identify which variable is the strongest predictor of persistence in athletic training education programs.

**Design:** Descriptive study using a qualitative and quantitative mixed-methods approach.

**Setting:** Thirteen athletic training education programs located in District 3 of the National Athletic Trainers' Association.

**Patients or Other Participants:** Ninety-four senior-level athletic training students and 31 college students who changed majors from athletic training to another degree option.

**Data Collection:** Data were collected with the Athletic Training Education Program Student Retention Questionnaire (ATEPSRQ).

**Analysis:** Data from the ATEPSRQ were analyzed via Pearson correlations, multivariate analysis of variance, univariate analysis of variance, and a stepwise discriminant analysis. Open-ended questions were transcribed and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding procedures. Member checks and peer debriefing techniques ensured trustworthiness of the study.

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**Results:** Pearson correlations identified moderate relationships among motivation and clinical integration ( $r = 0.515$ ,  $P < .01$ ) and motivation and academic integration ( $r = 0.509$ ,  $P < .01$ ). Univariate analyses of variance showed that academic integration ( $F_{1,122} = 8.483$ ,  $P < .004$ ), clinical integration ( $F_{1,119} = 30.214$ ,  $P < .001$ ), and motivation ( $F_{1,121} = 68.887$ ,  $P < .001$ ) discriminated between seniors and major changers. Discriminant analysis indicated that motivation was the strongest predictor of persistence in athletic training education, accounting for 37.2% of the variance between groups. The theoretic model accurately classified 95.7% of the seniors and 53.8% of the major changers. A common theme emerging from the qualitative data was the presence of a strong peer-support group that surrounded many of the senior-level students.

**Conclusions:** Understanding student retention in athletic training is important for our profession. Results from this study suggest 3 key factors associated with student persistence in athletic training education programs: (1) student motivation, (2) clinical and academic integration, and (3) the presence of a peer-support system. Educators and program directors must create comprehensive recruitment and retention strategies that address factors influencing students' decisions to stay in the athletic training profession.

**Keywords:** [socialization](#), [persistence](#), [career choice](#), [retention](#), [drop-out](#)

Thomas M. Dodge, PhD, ATC, CSCS, contributed to conception and design; acquisition and analysis and interpretation of the data; and drafting, critical revision, and final approval of the article. Murray F. Mitchell, PhD, and James M. Mensch, PhD, ATC, contributed to conception and design, analysis and interpretation of the data, and critical revision and final approval of the article.

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