



Division III Athletic Trainer Survey: Executive Summary

Introduction

In November 2023, the Division III Athletics Trainer Working Group sent a survey to the Division III membership to identify what Division III athletic trainers value from their work environment and to inform best practices and steps Division III institutions can take to help with recruiting and retaining athletic trainers.

The web-based survey was distributed to the person identified as the head athletic trainer at each of the 435 Division III member institutions and 278 responses (64%) were received. A second survey was distributed to the person identified as the director of athletics and 218 responses (50%) were received.

Key Findings

Overall

- When asked to identify what their athletics departments could do to retain athletic trainers, other than increasing salary, the top responses from athletic trainers were:
 - Increase the number of full-time athletic trainers to improve workload (54%).
 - Establish practice/game schedules that better align with standardized athletic training room hours (18%).
 - Ensure athletic trainers are part of the policy making process for practice/game schedules and consulted in a timely manner when changes to the schedules are considered (18%).
 - Establish regular work hours for athletic trainers (14%).
 - Establish a work environment of respect, appreciation, and support (13%).
- When asked to identify the challenges their department has faced in retaining athletic trainers, the top responses from directors of athletics were:
 - Inadequate compensation (e.g., salary, benefits) (59%).
 - Excessive workload (e.g., unsustainable work-life balance) (39%).
 - Work schedule (e.g., long hours, evenings, weekends) (31%).

Background information (unless otherwise noted, the following are based on responses from athletic trainers)

How many certified athletic trainers at your institution are:

Designation	Average
Fellows	Less than 1
Full-time Employees	4
Interns	Less than 1
Part-time Employees	Less than 1
Residents	Less than 1
Other	Less than 1

- 61% of athletic trainers have been at their institution seven or more years.
- 78% of athletic trainers are employed by and report to the athletics department.
- 89% of athletic trainers are employed on a 10- or 12-month contract (60% report being employed on a 12-month contract).
- When asked about open athletic trainer positions at their institution, 67% of athletic trainers and 52% of athletic directors reported they had no open positions and 22% of athletic trainers and 33% of athletic directors reported they had one open position.

Emergent Themes

The Working Group identified three themes to guide future recommendations: 1) workload, 2) communication and culture, and 3) recruitment and retention. The Working Group noted that issues related to work-life integration are inherent in each theme.

1. Workload

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement:

I feel that the student-athlete healthcare model on my campus is appropriate.

Response	Athletic Trainers Percent	Director of Athletics Percent
Strongly Agree	5	7
Agree	21	17
Somewhat Agree	24	26
Somewhat Disagree	19	17
Disagree	18	23
Strongly Disagree	13	9

- Athletic training staffs are responsible for an average of:
 - 489 student-athletes. 25% are responsible for 600 or more.
 - Eight different locations/venues used for athletic practice or competition. 25% are responsible for 10 or more.
 - 21 sports. 25% are responsible for 24 or more.
- 89% of athletic trainers reported each athletic trainer is responsible for 76 or more student-athletes. 59% reported more than 100.
- While an optimal athletic trainer to student-athlete ratio is beyond the scope of the working group, respondents who indicated the student-athlete healthcare model on their campus is not appropriate were likely to be on campuses where the athletic trainer headcount to student-athlete ratio was approximately 1:130.

2. Communication and Culture

Is the head athletic trainer consulted about the scheduling of student-athlete practices and competition?

Response	Athletic Trainers Percent	Director of Athletics Percent
Yes, always	10	23
Yes, frequently	15	29
Sometimes	25	36
Rarely	33	10
Never	17	1

- More than two-thirds of athletic trainers who indicated the student-athlete healthcare model on their campus is not appropriate are rarely or never consulted about the scheduling of practices and competition.
- 50% of athletic trainers say they are rarely or never consulted about scheduling of practice and competition while 11% of athletic directors responded that athletic trainers are rarely or never consulted.

How much notice are you given regarding changes to practice and competition schedules that are not due to inclement weather?

Amount of Time	Athletic Trainer Percent
72-48 hours	11
48-24 hours	48
Less than 24 hours	37
Right before the event starts	1
No notice is given by a staff member	3

- More than half of athletic trainers who indicated the student-athlete healthcare model on their campus is not appropriate are given less than 24 hours of notice regarding changes to practice and competition schedules.
- 41% of athletic trainers say they receive less than 24 hours of notice regarding changes to practice and competition schedules that are not due to inclement weather.

Are you consulted on legislative and/or policy changes considered by the NCAA and/or your conference?

Response	Athletic Trainer Percent	Director of Athletics Percent
Yes, always	15	61
Yes, frequently	32	27
Sometimes	29	12
Rarely	13	0
Never	11	0

- More than two-thirds of athletic trainers who indicated the student-athlete healthcare model on their campus is appropriate are frequently or always consulted on legislative and/or policy changes considered by the NCAA and/or the conference.
- 24% of athletic trainers say they are rarely or never consulted about legislation or policy changes.

3. Recruitment and Retention

- 62% of directors of athletics indicated inadequate compensation (e.g., salary, benefits) as the top challenge in terms of recruiting new athletic trainers. About the same proportion indicated inadequate compensation as the top challenge in terms of retaining athletic trainers.
- When asked to identify the most important variables when searching for their current position, 63% of athletic trainers identified staff culture. This was second to compensation.
- When asked for the reasons athletic trainers have stayed at their current institution, 47% cited the sports medicine department culture and staff morale. 35% cited overall department culture. A similar percentage (37%) cited salary.
- When asked for the reasons athletic trainers have separated from their institution, 40% cited value and support from administration, coaches, and co-workers.