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Abstract

While athletic training students go through extensive preparations for engaging with patient populations as healthcare providers, less time is spent on preparing athletic training students on how to secure employment after graduation. Without proper employment skills development, securing employment can pose a challenge for the athletic training student trying to enter the workforce. These skills include developing cover letters and resumes, and remote interviewing skills. **Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to explore the preparations, execution, and lessons learned from a simulated, remote job application and interview process for athletic training students. **Methods:** This educational technique was performed using certified athletic trainers as interviewers and reviewers of job application materials (i.e., cover letter, resume, and application email) created by athletic training students. Athletic training students were interviewed by a certified athletic trainer with whom they had no previous relationship. After the structured interview process, a debrief was conducted between the certified athletic trainer and athletic training student. The process was conducted via Zoom. **Results:** By using simulation techniques, athletic training students are able to experience a realistic review of their cover letters and resumes and engage in a realistic, remote job interview in a low-stakes environment with real-time, objective feedback. **Conclusions:** Overall, athletic training students' reflections indicate the utility of the experience through interviewer observations, introspective observations, and overall thoughts on the experience. The faculty also identified ways to improve the experience in subsequent years.

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Remote Job Application Simulation Using Technology in Athletic Training Students: A Preliminary Teaching Technique

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ABSTRACT

Background: While athletic training students go through extensive preparations for engaging with patient populations as healthcare providers, less time is spent on preparing athletic training students on how to secure employment after graduation. Without proper employment skills development, securing employment can pose as a challenge for the athletic training student trying to enter the workforce. These skills include developing cover letters and resumes, and remote interviewing skills. **Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to explore the preparations, execution, and lessons learned from a simulated, remote job application and interview process for athletic training students. **Methods:** This educational technique was performed using certified athletic trainers as interviewers and reviewers of job application materials (i.e., cover letter, resume, and application email) created by athletic training students. Athletic training students were interviewed by a certified athletic trainer with whom they had no previous relationship. After the structured interview process, a debrief was conducted between the certified athletic trainer and athletic training student. The process was conducted via Zoom. **Results:** By using simulation techniques, athletic training students are able to experience a realistic review of their cover letters and resumes and engage in a realistic, remote job interview in a low-stakes environment with real-time, objective feedback. **Conclusions:** Overall, athletic training students reflections indicate the utility of the experience through interviewer observations, introspective observations, and overall thoughts on the experience. The faculty also identified ways to improve the experience in subsequent years.

Keywords: employability, hiring process, networking

INTRODUCTION,

Simulation has been used in athletic training education programs as a means to prepare learners to provide entry-level care to patients seen by athletic trainers.¹ However, there is little evidence of its use to prepare learners to understand and apply employability skills, such as job application creation or interviewing skills. Athletic training programs are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), but little of the required curricular content standards set forth by the CAATE involve soft skills, including those linked to gaining employment. As such, this deficit in learning can be detrimental to the individual learner's success post-graduation from an athletic training program. Literature suggests that some health care learners who do not gain employment are more likely to leave their field within the first six months after graduation.²

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is the practice of combining academic learning theory with learner exposure to experiences that are both realistic and applicable to their field of study.³ In athletic training, simulation is one means to bridge the gap between academic concepts and theory with practical, authentic experiences from the real world. Other healthcare fields have also been documented to use simulation as a means to prepare learners for authentic experiences in their respective fields of study.⁴ Simulation has also been used to assist in further developing skills involving teamwork, task training, and addressing systems issues.⁵

With simulation already present in athletic training education,¹ its use to further expand the knowledge and practice of employability skills in athletic training learners is a logical next step. Additionally, the use of simulation in this capacity can be used to portray real-life practices of remote job application skills, including interviewing for athletic training positions from remote locations via video conferencing technologies (e.g. Apple FaceTime, Zoom, etc.). With the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to research how reliance on these types of technologies to facilitate employment practices on behalf of both employers and job applicants has increased.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the preparation, execution, and lessons learned from a simulated, remote job application and interview process for athletic training students performed using certified athletic trainers who are unfamiliar to the athletic training students as interviewers and reviewers of the application materials.

METHODS

The project utilized a scenario that mimicked the job application process from beginning to end. Instructors from three different institutions had previous experience conducting mock interviews and reviewing resumes of their own learners. Feedback from learners in previous semesters were on the continuum from, "this was easy because I know the mock interviewer" to "this was much harder because I know the mock interviewer." In order to capitalize on the utility of online classes and introduce more objectivity into the assignment, the instructors decided to collaborate across institutions during the spring semester.

Learners in each of the three cohorts were taught resume and cover letter writing techniques and professional interviewing tactics as part of their normal course. In order to assess learning, the instructors created a scaffolded assignment where learners identified a job that they would like to apply to, created and sent an application email with cover letter and resume, and scheduled and completed a mock interview with an instructor from a different institution. Learners were free to choose any job posting, were told to tailor their cover letter and resume to that specific position, and to prepare as though they were invited to interview for that position. They were assigned an instructor from a peer institution who they were unfamiliar with to serve as the mock employer.

Upon receiving the application from a learner, the mock employer reviewed the resume and cover letter and sent an email to confirm receipt and schedule an interview session using the Zoom platform. During the 15-minute interview, the mock employers asked three questions that were consistent across all interviews. Additional questions were asked based on learner responses, learner nonverbal cues, and items included in the resume. All interviews were recorded for grading purposes and to allow learners to review their performance.

At the conclusion of the interview, the mock employers provided feedback to the learner or the learner's home instructor for dissemination and review with the learner. In order to ensure equity in grading, the instructors created specific rubrics for cover letters, resumes, and mock interviews. When creating the rubrics for resumes and cover letters, the focus was on elements related to aesthetics, style, and formatting. For the interview rubric, focus was placed on learner's preparation prior to the interview (e.g., email to mock employer, knowledge of position they were applying to), body language, and substance of answers. In addition to the formal rubric, mock employers provided feedback to each learner, with comments on strengths and suggestions for improvement. Within a week of mock interviews, the instructors met to debrief and reflect on the process. Informal feedback on the process was solicited from learners at their home institution.

RESULTS

Learner’s reflections were collected and helped identify how they felt about the activity and whether they found it beneficial. The reflections could be summarized in three basic areas: Interviewer Observations; Introspective Observations; and Overall Thoughts.

Interviewer observations addressed that the learner did not know with whom they would be interviewing. One learner remarked, “I like that we didn’t know who we were interviewing with because that helped make it more real.” Another appreciated that they “received feedback from someone who isn’t normally our professor or someone who knows us.”

Introspective observations were formed by re-watching the recording and evaluating their interview. Learners were able to detect their own habits that were distracting such as using filler words, moving around in their chair being disruptive, eye contact (e.g., looking at the camera rather than the person), positioning of the camera, and location of the interview. It was noted that “There were times when I didn’t know when to stop talking; I felt like I was rambling a little,” and “I had no idea I say ‘Ummm . . .’ so much.” Multiple learners said they need to self-reflect on ways to better highlight who they are in an interview situation. Additionally, learners who have social anxiety or levels of nervousness realized they need new ways to help ease nerves on a Zoom-type interview.

Overall thoughts provided feedback for the instructors. Learners described the process as being intimidating, but as a good experience to learn from. They felt it was helpful and encouraged the instructors to do it again with future learners. One learner noted, “The interviewer provided some good tips on how to improve that I had not heard before.” Another added, “I think I’ll be less stressed next time I have to do an online interview.”

DISCUSSION

From the learner comments and being part of the interview process, the instructors also reflected on the activity. The pandemic required creativity that may not have been considered in the past. It also allowed new interactions across the country that would not have been possible prior to the state of emergency. Although this idea came out of trying to use the newer established communication of Zoom, this is an activity that will be continued. However, it was not without its own set of issues to consider in the future.

Lessons Learned

Table 1. Lessons Learned

Original Strategy	Updated Strategy
Guidelines were vague	All instructors should follow the same guidelines (e.g., do all students include a copy of a job description).
Zoom platform was chosen	All interview recordings should be consistent (e.g., interviewer and interviewee on the screen versus just the interviewee).
Pre- and post-activity goals were not clearly defined	Goals need to be set prior to the activity. What is the student learning in this process? Why is it being done? How will it be helpful? Is it for a grade or for feedback?
To debrief, or not to debrief	Honest feedback while looking at the student in the eye is important. Not all interviewers thought to do this; decide if that is important to the goals.
Only one interviewer per student	Depending on the job description, including multiple interviewers, as would occur in many job interviews.
Only one interview	It may be appropriate to allow the student to have a follow up interview once the debriefing has occurred.

- Guidelines. The instructors did not all follow the same guidelines for the learners. For example, one had their learners include a copy of a job description that they were applying for, while another instructor allowed the learners to simply include the information in the cover letter. While either way would be acceptable, it would be beneficial for consistency.
- Zoom Recording. Should both the interviewer and the interviewee be on the screen the entire interview? Should the presenter view be used? If a goal is for the learner to evaluate their interview, it would seem more appropriate to have the presenter view. Also, it is so important to make sure each interview is separate; splicing videos can be time consuming.
- Pre- and Post-Activity Goals. There are numerous pieces to consider for this project. What is important for the learners to learn in this process? Why is this important? Is there a way to capture the learner’s thoughts and feelings about the

process, or does that even matter? There should be concrete outcomes for the learners to find this useful. In addition, how are the rubrics going to be used? Are they for a grade, or are they for feedback only?

- Debrief. Because it was not part of the discussion during planning, not all instructors made sure to have a quick debrief with the learner after the interview. This is believed to be important because interviewers can all see different things in the interviewee. Giving a grade on a rubric is one way to share information but looking the person in the eye and giving honest feedback can be an important component of the project.
- Next Phase Interview. One component to consider is a follow-up interview after giving structured feedback. This gives the interviewee a second experience interviewing and a chance to improve skills.
- Interviewer Selection. Is one interviewer appropriate for the activity? Would a real interview include multiple interviewers? One interviewer could be from a different profession for an interprofessional slant, or perhaps a Human Resources professional could be included. Since athletic training students may “apply” for a position at the high school or college level, or maybe in an industrial setting, involving program preceptors in the interview process will make the interview more realistic to a specific setting.

CONCLUSION

While professional healthcare programs focus on preparing learners for jobs, some learners feel unprepared to apply for and obtain a position post-graduation. As educators, one responsibility is to prepare learners for the job interview process, common to the profession. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a unique opportunity to collaborate across institutions in three different states via a remote online platform arose. This experience allowed learners to prepare and submit documents required in a job application and offered a real time, authentic interview with professionals within the field. Learners were able to receive valuable feedback on performance from third parties who do not have intimate knowledge of the learners, either personally or professionally. This allowed learners to improve their skills in a low-stakes environment prior to actual job application. Both learners and faculty believed that the experience was worthwhile and offered both groups the chance to reflect on their strengths and areas of improvement. With the changing landscape of job applications and interview processes, learners will be better prepared to seek employment.

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