



# GOING INTERNATIONAL ON YOUR CAMPUS

*How two athletic trainers are working with WFATT to provide more support for non-native students*

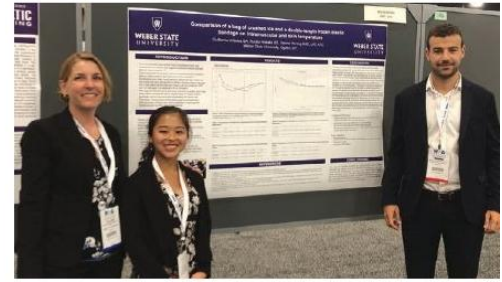
By Claire Higgins

Collegiate athletic training programs are working to find, welcome and support international students interested in studying the profession in the United States and introduce native students to health care in other cultures in new ways.

The program directors at two institutions, Weber State University and Saint Louis University, are part of an effort with the World Federation of Athletic Training and Therapy (WFATT) to increase recruitment and support efforts for other universities interested in upping their international learning opportunities.

Valerie Herzog, EdD, LAT, ATC, Department of Athletic Training chair at Weber State, and Anthony Breitbach, PhD, ATC, athletic training program director at Saint Louis University, both sitting on WFATT's Academic Institution Committee, have already established successful international learning opportunities for their programs. Their insights are informing an effort

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**LEFT:** Students from Athlone Institute of Technology in Ireland at the St. Louis Cardinals athletic training facility at Busch Stadium in St. Louis, Missouri. **ABOVE:** Valerie Herzog, EdD, LAT, ATC, poses with Ruriko Hosaka, a Weber State University athletic training student from Japan, and Guillermo Arbeloa from Spain and their thesis research at the 70th NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo.

to create a go-to resource for CAATE-accredited institutions with international learning opportunities.

Although Herzog and Breitbach offer international learning opportunities to work toward more inclusive patient care, their approaches are different, with each based on the capabilities of their universities.

“Those experiences need to be right sized for your institution,” Breitbach said. “International engagement comes in many different shapes and sizes.”

At Weber State, Herzog is more focused on recruiting international students to study athletic training in the United States then providing necessary support as they work through the athletic training master’s program. Whereas in Missouri, at Saint Louis University, Breitbach works more often through exchange agreements with partner universities in different countries. He hosts students for a semester from parallel programs in Ireland and Spain, while Herzog recruits students to complete the entire program on campus in Utah.

Regardless of the international program a university implements, the goal, according to Herzog and Breitbach, is increasing cultural competency and diversity for athletic training students who will graduate with a more inclusive approach to patient care.

“If students can learn how to interact with somebody who is different than them, they develop an appreciation for diversity,” Herzog said. “Diversity brings value to the table, so as a team of health care practitioners who each come

with a slightly different skill set, at the end of the day, we can provide better patient care.”

There is not a set formula for incorporating international learning opportunities into collegiate athletic training programs, but there are tips for where to start as an athletic trainer, how to increase recruitment and how to continually support students throughout their experience in the United States. WFATT’s Academic Institution Committee is currently working to create a space where members can access online resources.

NATA connected with Herzog and Breitbach for a rundown on their experiences, and their best tips for creating successful experiences for their international and native students.

### IMPACT THROUGHOUT THE CLASSROOM

International experiences aren’t a one-sided learning opportunity. Both Herzog and Breitbach said native athletic training students benefit from working alongside international visitors, as well. By simply increasing cultural diversity in the classroom, students are creating a richer learning environment, Herzog said.

All students, Breitbach said, increase their cultural competency when working together. Increasing awareness and providing access to other cultures is what ultimately improves future patient care, widening the lens to include a more complete view of health care, especially in different settings.

At Weber State, Herzog hosts diversity training in the classroom, which helps students recognize cultural differences and understand

how to address those when working with patients. Although a language barrier is often the most challenging part of international experiences, Breitbach said communication skills are significantly strengthened.

Herzog enrolls students most often from Japan, Korea, the Netherlands and Spain, so English is most often students’ second language. Breitbach sees this as another opportunity to strengthen communication skills for American students.

“They strengthen the ability to explain things and break things down, whether it’s a diagnosis or care plan,” he said. “Explaining those to a non-native English speaker, can be a really good learning experience.”

Students working with English as a second language also find challenges in feeling supported during their stay in the United States, Herzog said, which is why she sees efforts to increase support as crucial to any international learning opportunities.

### ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

There isn’t a set way to incorporate international opportunities for students at any institution, but Herzog and Breitbach said there are certain aspects to consider within every program: collaboration, recruitment and support.

First, finding partners on campus and off will be beneficial in kick starting international learning opportunities on campus. On campus, work with the international students department to identify partners in other countries who could expand to include athletic training students, for example.



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**LEFT:** Hosaka and Arbeloa conduct research at Weber State's laboratory.

**ABOVE:** Athletic training students from Spain work in the Saint Louis University athletic training facility during a trip to the institution.

## “International engagement comes in many shapes and sizes,”

- Anthony Breitbach, PhD, ATC, Saint Louis University

The international students department will also be helpful in understanding the legal requirements that accompany international students, from visas and applications to handling time zones and the best way to communicate – whether that's over email, WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, which Breitbach prefers.

Breitbach also works closely with the university's clinical education coordinator to build curriculums for visiting students that apply skills commonly used in American health care and how to incorporate those into their health care practice.

The WFATT Academic Institutions Committee and NATA International Committee are also resources for collaboration and can help identify other athletic trainers working with international students at the collegiate level who can offer advice.

When building a recruitment strategy, Herzog recommends adding a conditional admissions policy for international students, which Weber State has already seen success with for about seven years.

For students who earned lower TOEFL/IELTS scores, Weber State allows them to

attend the university one or two semesters prior to the athletic training program start date to complete English-second language and prerequisite courses.

This additional time spent on campus before starting athletic training courses also gives students an opportunity to get settled into the American culture, Herzog said.

Once students are on campus, supporting them throughout their experience is crucial to success. Staying connected with the international department on campus is a great place to start, and find connections with other international students studying in other programs at the institution, Herzog said.

Scheduling meetings and get-togethers with the athletic training department is another way to support students. Walk through the public transportation system in your city, identify where they can purchase groceries and items from their home countries and coordinate fun experiences off campus to explore American culture.

In the classroom, Herzog records her lectures and posts them online for students to review after class.

“Sometimes we talk fast,” she said. “Any time you learn a foreign language, you think you start to know it until you talk to a native speaker. ... If they're struggling to keep up, they can go back and listen to it again.”

She also encourages her students to limit using the English dictionary during exams and quizzes to help prepare for the Board of Certification exam, which does not allow the use of a dictionary during testing. The international student office should also be able to work with students to accommodate testing needs, she said.

The WFATT Academic Institutions Committee is currently working to increase online resources for athletic trainers working with international students and those interested in recruiting more to attend their CAATE-accredited program.

The committee, Herzog and Breitbach said, hopes to help athletic trainers and academic administrators build international partnerships and connections for more international experiences.

The NATA International Committee also provides resources online for international opportunities including checklists for enrolling international students, studying abroad and presentations on developing cultural competence. For more information, visit [www.nata.org/professional-interests/international/resources](http://www.nata.org/professional-interests/international/resources).