I believe the purpose of post-secondary education within the realm of athletic training is to essentially prepare students to function as a competent and independent professional. Certified athletic trainers typically are on their own a majority of the time and are usually the only medical professional on scene when an incident occurs. They must act as first responders in emergencies but also act as liaisons between injured patients and physicians or are able undertake the injury and the follow-up care into their own hands if appropriate. They must be able to make good decisions using their knowledge and given the circumstances of the situation and be able to do so on their own. Students must be given a substantial base of knowledge and learn to think critically *before* they are faced with such situations. They also must learn to become independent learners. In medical professions, standards of care and new information are being presented constantly. What is found to be true while the students are in school isn't necessarily true five years post-graduation. I feel it is important for them to discover themselves as learners and use this to their advantage to be able to provide the best care possible at all times.

Though athletic trainers operate rather independently, they must also learn and know how to function within a team. Frequently they find themselves working in cooperation with physicians, therapists, coaches, parents and sometimes other athletic trainers all at once with the health and safety of the patient as the main objective. In addition, they are often working with physicians and other medical personnel to develop or revise protocols, standards of care, emergency action plans or other such procedures.

In working with athletic training professionals and students alike, I have observed that most are hands-on, visual learners. They need to see something be done then must try it themselves in order to better absorb the information. This type of student, especially in a profession such as athletic training, needs adequate time to practice skills and master them. They need hands-on experience outside the classroom, in real-life situations, to be able to use and test their skills and look for areas that need improvement. Of course, during these times they need to be under the direct supervision and guidance of a certified athletic trainer. Time allowances must be built into the curriculum for students to practice these skills not only in the classroom but also in the field. Lab sessions and a stern time requirement spent in the athletic or other such settings are necessary. The settings must also be appropriate for the level of education of the

students. Therefore, field experiences must be scheduled within the curriculum according to student knowledge and skill levels to allow for both personal and academic growth rather than intimidation and discouragement.

On a smaller scale, such as a classroom setting as opposed to the educational program as a whole, time must also be built into lesson plans to allow for practice of said skills. Group work or projects should also be incorporated to emphasize teamwork and social skills, as already noted as important qualities of the athletic trainer.

The role of the educational program planner(s) is to understand the material that needs to be taught and what requirements need to be met in order to produce a competent professional. Another is to set forth a clear and logical path for students to follow in pursuit of their professional goal. They need to ensure knowledgeable and experienced individuals are in the classrooms providing accurate information. They must also develop a system to evaluate students examine the program to determine if the services provided are fulfilling the needs of the soon-to-be professionals.

 Class instructors have their responsibilities as well. They must be able to recognize and acknowledge the different types of learners within the classroom. As a majority of these students will be hands-on, visual learners, they must cater to this. Providing adequate visual examples such as models, pictures, diagrams, video, etc. and adequate hands-on time within the class period will aid in fulfilling this need. However, they must also recognize different types of learners and be able to provide information in multiple ways in order to reach everybody in the classroom. Perhaps as students enter the academic program they should take a learning style questionnaire such as the Index of Learning Style Questionnaire as created by Felder and Solomon at North Carolina State University. Having this type of information available could take the guesswork out of the equation on behalf of the instructor in deciphering each individual's learning style.

Instructors must be able to gauge motivations of the individuals and in a sense, play towards them. Just as a coach can recognize what "fires up" their athletes, an instructor must do the same to encourage learning.

Below you will find a brief overview in the form of a diagram depicting how I understand program planning to work based on my own knowledge and prior experiences.

 I believe that first and foremost, the end result should be identified. In my opinion, it is the only logical place to start. It makes much more sense to know where you're going than to meander through winding roads as it were and hope to
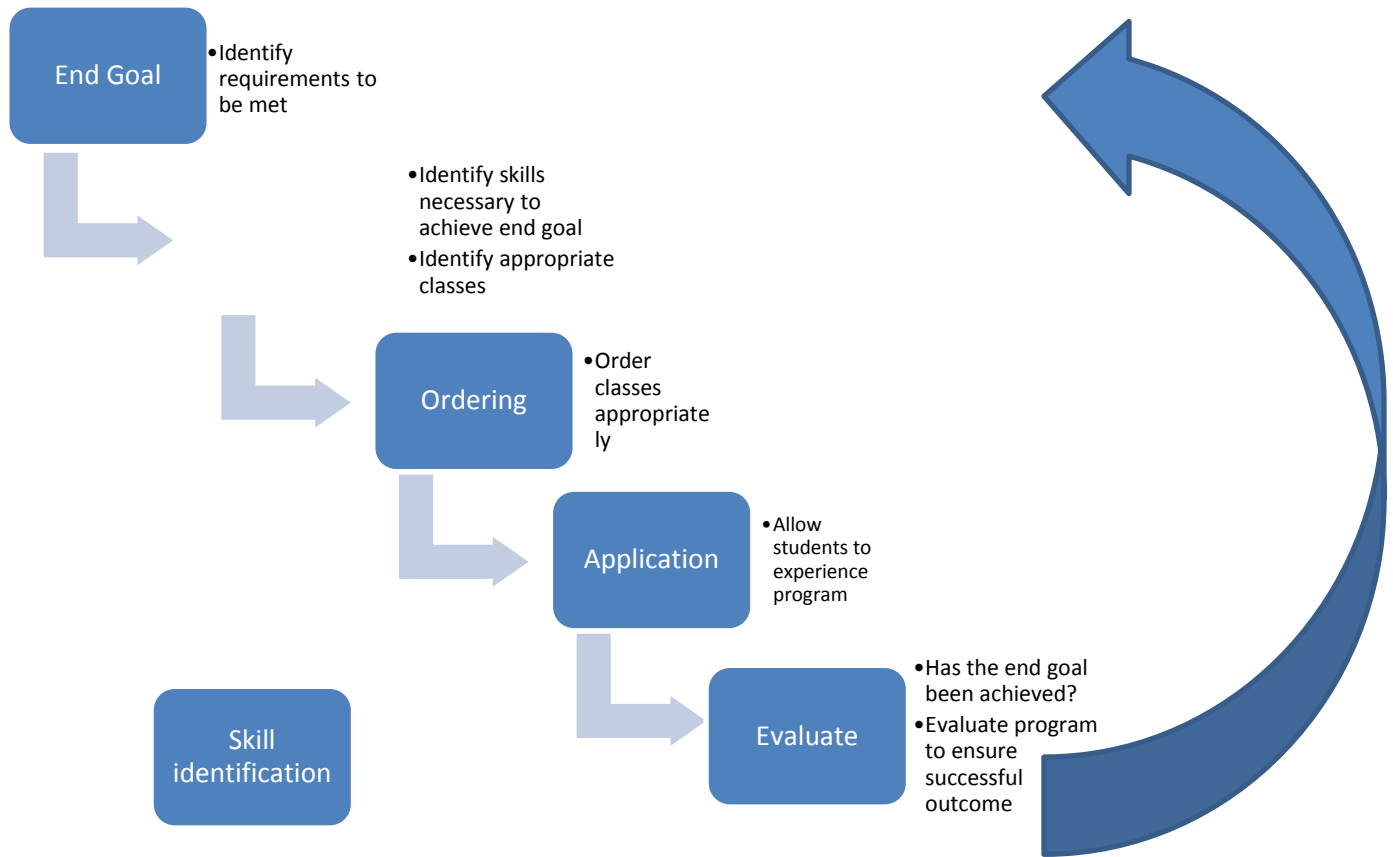
end up at a destination. Having a destination or end goal in mind makes the planning process smoother and gives it direction.

Once the requirements to be met have been identified, next comes the strategic planning of how those will be met. I believe identifying the skills necessary to meet the end goals is crucial. Classes that will fulfill the need should be identified or developed, if necessary.

Next, these classes should be assembled in a logical order. Each class should act as a stepping-stone to the next, allowing the students to build a firm knowledge base in a sequential manner.

Application of the program should then take place. Students and instructors alike should be run through the entire program as it is organized.

Last but not least is evaluation of the program. An evaluative process must be set in place to ensure that the needs have been met and the end goal has been achieved. Even if the end goal has been successfully achieved, is there something that could be improved? That question should be asked continually to avoid unanticipated roadblocks. Both students and instructors should be able to give honest feedback. The evaluation process then should lead back to the beginning of the model.

End Goal
- Identify requirements to be met

- Identify skills necessary to achieve end goal
- Identify appropriate classes

Ordering
- Order classes appropriately

Application
- Allow students to experience program

Evaluate
- Has the end goal been achieved?
- Evaluate program to ensure successful outcome

Skill identification

References

Solomon, B. A., & Felder, R. M. (n.d.). *Index of learning styles questionnaire*. North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, Retrieved from http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html