

Athletic Trainers' Perspectives on Resources and Preparation Needed for Successful Salary Negotiation

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Context: Many athletic trainers (ATs) work under high stress, long hours, and low pay. These conditions often lead ATs and athletic training students to leave the profession. Previous studies show that over half of ATs do not negotiate salary, often because they feel the offer is fair or fear losing the job. Additional support is needed to help ATs prepare for negotiations, as current resources are limited.

Objective: This study explored ATs' views on the resources need to prepare for salary negotiations during the hiring process.

Design: Consensual qualitative research.

Setting: Individual video interviews.

Patients or Other Participants: Twenty-eight participants from a prior study volunteered for qualitative follow-up (age = 37.8 ± 8.9 years; gender = 10 men, 17 women, 1 nonbinary; experience = 15.1 ± 8.3 years). Of the participants, 18 had previously negotiated salary and 10 had not.

Data Collection and Analysis: Participants were interviewed via individual video conference. Interviews were transcribed and data were analyzed into themes and categories following the consensual qualitative research approach. Member checks, multianalyst triangulation, and an external auditor were used to ensure trustworthiness of the findings.

Results: Two main themes emerged: desired resources and advice for others. Participants described resources they believed would be helpful for successfully negotiating salary and provided insight they believed could be helpful for others preparing to negotiate salary.

Conclusions: Both negotiators and nonnegotiators expressed a need for access to detailed data and continuing education on negotiation skills. Individuals entering a new employment opportunity should do their research before applying for the job and should understand the value they bring to a given place of employment.

Key Words: Salary, terms of employment, wages, interviewing, resources

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KEY POINTS

- Both negotiators and nonnegotiators indicated that they did not learn about negotiating during their professional preparation, and both groups expressed a strong desire for more data accessibility to support negotiation efforts. Participants indicated that salary data need to be more discretely presented to reflect different practice settings and experience ranges.
- Both negotiators and nonnegotiators strongly desire continuing education in negotiating, and specifically stated that they would prefer opportunities that allowed them to practice negotiating and receive feedback on that process.
- The advice our participants had for others centered around doing one's homework (eg, researching expected salaries and the location's cost of living, or seeking out support from mentors) before entering the job market, and encouraging ATs to advocate for the value they bring to a given place of employment.

INTRODUCTION

For years, athletic trainers (ATs) have lamented the long hours, low wages, high stress, and lack of work-life balance inherent in the profession, and these issues have been identified as reasons for attrition from the profession.¹⁻⁴ Data from the Board of Certification in 2019 indicated that 21.6% of ATs who let their certification expire that year did so because they were unable to afford the cost of maintaining their certification. (Board of Certification staff, personal correspondence, March 2022) Additionally, students have reported that these factors have contributed to their decision to leave their athletic training programs and choose another career.^{4,5} It is clear that ATs' salaries have not kept pace with the rising costs of living and inflation in a way that makes the profession sustainable to all who enter it.

Low salary is commonly cited as a problem in the athletic training profession, yet there is a paucity of literature available regarding negotiation practices in athletic training and other health professions.^{2,4,6} Cavallario et al surveyed ATs employed in the clinical setting and discovered that more than half of ATs did not attempt to negotiate salary during the hiring process, and nearly 75% of ATs surveyed did not attempt to negotiate other terms of employment.⁷ Cavallario et al also found that the more positions an AT had previously held, the more comfortable they were with negotiating.⁷ There is evidence that gender also influences an individual's comfort with negotiating, with women indicating they were more likely to be uncomfortable engaging in negotiations during the hiring process.⁷

The findings presented by Cavallario et al provide a foundational understanding of ATs' perceptions of and experience with salary negotiation.^{7,8} The data also demonstrate that ATs may not be comfortable or adequately prepared with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully negotiate salary and other terms of employment. However, the existing data do not provide the

personal experiences of those who have gone through the hiring process to better understand what the profession could do to support them better in the negotiation process. Therefore, in this study, we aimed to explore ATs' views on preparing for salary negotiations.

METHODS

Design

We employed a multiphase consensual qualitative research (CQR) design to explore the experiences of ATs who did and did not negotiate during the hiring process.^{9,10} The CQR tradition was selected because of its inclusion of multiple researchers to analyze the data, the rigorous process to determine consensus, and the use of an auditor to confirm representation of participants' voices within the findings. This study was determined to be exempt research by the College of Health Sciences Human Subjects Review Committee at Old Dominion University.

Participants

We used a convenience sampling approach to recruit ATs who had participated in at least 1 hiring process for a full-time position. Participants for this study were recruited from a list of individuals who had participated in a previous study and indicated willingness to participate in additional studies in the future. A total of 454 ATs from the previous study indicated they would be willing to participate and provided their email address. Potential participants for this study were recruited in 2 groups: those who reported they had attempted to negotiate during their most recent employment ($n = 221$; negotiators) and those who reported they had not attempted to negotiate ($n = 233$; nonnegotiators). Recruitment occurred in 2 stages: ATs within the negotiators group were recruited first, followed by recruitment of ATs within the nonnegotiators group. ATs in each group received a recruitment email that contained the study inclusion criteria, an explanation for the purpose of the study, a link to a Sign-Up Genius registration to sign up for an available interview time slot, and a disclaimer that signing up for an interview served as consent to participate in the study.

Data saturation was confirmed after the inclusion of 28 ATs (18 negotiators, 10 nonnegotiators) who met the inclusion criteria. Participants included 17 women, 10 men, and 1 individual who identified as nonbinary. Experience ranged from 4 to 39 years, and participants had a range of 0 to 8 previous full-time employment positions (1 participant was in their first full-time position at the time of data collection, representing the person who had 0 previous positions). The year of their most recent hiring process ranged from 1988 to 2020. Additional demographics of this sample, including ethnicity, race, National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) district, and current salary range were described in an earlier study.⁸

Instrumentation

Members of the research team developed 2 semistructured interview guides; although each interview guide generally contained the same main questions, the wording was tailored toward negotiators or nonnegotiators. After development, the interview guides were assessed for face and content validity by 2 members of the research team and then pilot tested after minor grammatical and reordering revisions. The 4 pilot testing participants were eligible for participation in the study; there were no resulting changes to the interview guides after pilot testing, and therefore their data were included in the final analysis. Details of validity and pilot testing have been published elsewhere.⁸

Procedures

Participant recruitment and data collection for the negotiator group occurred first (October 2021–November 2021) followed by recruitment and data collection for the nonnegotiator group (May 2022–June 2022). An email containing the study purpose and details regarding voluntary participation was sent by the principal investigator to all individuals who met the inclusion criteria for each group. Once interest was expressed by the participant, an interview day and time were scheduled via SignUpGenius. Zoom was used to conduct all interviews between the participants and the principal investigator. All interviews, which ranged from 25 to 45 minutes, were recorded and transcribed via Zoom. All transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by 1 member of the research team; any personal identifying information was redacted during the review. Once a transcript was proofed, it was sent to the participant for member checking. The instructions provided to participants to complete their member check permitted them to clarify or restate their answer but participants were asked not to edit the initial response within the transcript.⁸

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures for this study followed the multi-phase process of CQR^{9,10} and have been described elsewhere.⁸ After each phase of data analysis, the research team met to discuss the data and ensure consensus was achieved. To minimize researcher bias and ensure trustworthiness of the findings, we used several strategies. Member checks allowed the research team to confirm the accuracy of the participants' responses. The inclusion of multiple analysts during each phase of data analysis as well as the consensus process aided in the reduction of research bias during the interpretation of the data. Finally, an external auditor reviewed all data analysis procedures and findings to confirm that multiple viewpoints were considered.⁸

RESULTS

Six parallel themes emerged from the data across the 2 groups. The first 4 themes for both groups, which were primarily retrospective and reflective in nature, have been published elsewhere.⁸ The 2 themes that will be discussed in this manuscript, which emerged as more prospective in nature, include (1) *desired resources* and (2) *advice for others*.

Desired Resources

Within this theme, 2 identical categories emerged from both negotiators and nonnegotiators and 1 additional category was

identified within negotiators. The categories within this theme included *training or education*, *more data*, and *required salary disclosure (negotiators only)*. Additional quotes beyond those presented in the text are available in Table 1.

Training or Education. Nearly every participant in the non-negotiator group and nearly half of negotiators indicated a desire for additional training or education. Participants expressed desire for training in a variety of formats, including formal workshops or presentations and informal conversations or mentorship with trusted colleagues, specifically highlighting the need to learn about what is negotiable and how to conduct negotiations well. Adison said if she had been given training as a student, she would have appreciated that, sharing,

I think if I had gotten some level of [education] in school, like either in undergrad or grad school, just a one day of interviewing and job applications and . . . salary negotiation in a day or two . . . I think it would have been very helpful of at least giving me some guidance of like, here's how you ask for more money. We all want more money. Here's how you can go do it in a respectful way to your employers.

Several participants from both groups expressed interest in “advising,” “coaching,” “role-playing,” “mock scenarios,” and other forms of practicing the actual negotiation discussion.

More Data. Negotiators indicated they would prefer data about salaries for existing employees at the institution they were applying to be more widely available and easier to find. They would also appreciate a way to get data about comparable salaries for the position they were applying for at peer institutions or in the local geographic area. Several nonnegotiators indicated that they had attempted to use the NATA Salary Survey during previous negotiations, but their potential employer felt the data were biased because the survey was executed by the NATA. Avery explained,

I think the NATA salary survey is a good tool so long as the employers are willing to hear that . . . My last AD [athletic director], he was under the impression that “Well, the NATA is an advocate for athletic trainers so anything they put out is going to be for you guys and so that's not realistic.” . . . He didn't trust it because it was from NATA. But I still think it's a valuable tool to . . . give you kind of your own compass of if this job is worth it or not.

Stephanie expressed an interest in a resource that would provide a dollar value to demonstrate the worth of services provided by the AT, explaining, “I can prove that I have done X amount of treatment. I can prove how much it cost. So those are 2 things for sure that I wish that I had resources for.”

Required Salary Disclosure (Negotiators Only). Negotiators expressed a desire that employers be required to disclose the salary of the position on the job posting. Teddy stated, “I don't understand why so many companies don't list the salary.”

Advice for Others

Within this theme, 3 categories emerged. These included *do homework/research*, *have confidence/know your value*, and *other*. Our participants suggested that in the future ATs should gather data and use resources to ensure they are prepared before entering

Table 1. Additional Quotes for Desired Resources

Desired Resources	Negotiators	Nonnegotiators
Training/education	<p>I think in a general sense, just understanding and knowing what options there are out there. I think salary's just one part of that, right? There's benefits. There's, I mean, that's the huge part. The benefits part is something that I don't, I think is really misunderstood or not understood, and so I really have no idea about how to even negotiate that, plus every state is different. —Maggie</p> <p>I think having some, like, practice in negotiating and practice in how to go about negotiating, um, an offer, and ways to show your value and, like, why the negotiated offer you come with is fair and reasonable would have been good. —Arizona</p>	<p>I don't know if there's any way to practice those types of things or again, a tool that could be a little bit more specific to, no I can't even think of that because again, a salary survey does break it down any way that you want it to. So I don't know if again, if it, just there's practices or someone that kinda [could] walk through, like, almost like an advisor. Like, hey this is the job you're going for. This is the pay rate for the area and kind of help you navigate that instead of just you figuring out on your own. —Avery</p> <p>I know there's information out there that's more directed the business realm, but there are skills and points that you can take that are applicable to the athletic training profession. So, I think either doing a practice round, I know I practiced with my fiancée and she's going to hype me up, of course. But she went through a similar program so we kind of felt, not defeated, but like it was a losing battle already, so I think just talking to someone that's like a third party to help, like if it's like career specialist or something, I think that would be a fabulous resource to use to improve, either, improve the result or just make it a more worthwhile discussion. —Derek</p>
More data	<p>I don't know on my end if anything would have helped. Maybe policies. Having known policies from the institution of the timeline for money, I think that may have changed what I asked for and when I asked for it, I didn't realize a lot of things where we hope to get these one day. And it wasn't a contract like I thought it was. So, I think that a little more transparency, I thought resources, but if there were institutional policies guiding that, that would have been helpful. —Erica</p> <p>I wish that there had been data available for positions at this university, but our university does not participate in any data collection process to make that available. So that would've been helpful. —Maggie</p>	<p>I wish I'd known to possibly contact the union first to see what advice they would have had . . . I think that the union would have been the strongest resource because then they could have, they could have shown me the exact pay grid at the time for that year and what people were getting. They actually have, they get data on everybody's salaries who's within the bargaining unit. So they could easily say, "Yeah, that's fair." They wouldn't have to tell me what people were getting, they could just say, "Yeah, this is good," or "No, you need to ask for this much more." —Richard</p> <p>I think the only resource would have been that [more data] because our institution specifically is private, there's no way to gauge what other faculty members in our college, in other departments were making, and at the time there was only a program director and myself coming in as the clinical coordinator. So there was no other [athletic training] faculty to compare what generally they should be making and we couldn't compare to, like, colleagues in PT or OT because none of that was publicly accessible. So I had to go just off of the general state school because I couldn't get a comparable salary to people at the university, but otherwise, you know, so I just did my best with [the] NATA guide and then the state school employees. —Meredith</p>
Required salary disclosure (negotiators only)	<p>I think it would just be great if everything was publicly available, like everything's out. Everyone's salary was just like we could just see it and then there's not all this, like, who gets what and how much are you getting with your promotion and that kind of stuff. —Christina</p>	

Abbreviations: NATA, National Athletic Trainers' Association; OT, occupational therapy; PT, physical therapy.

into negotiations so a clear expected number can be decided upon in advance. Our participants also felt that ATs needed to have confidence in their skills and value, indicating that ATs often undervalue ourselves and are hesitant to upset others by making requests. We also identified an *other* category within this theme. Quotes that support these categories are also provided in Table 2.

Do Homework/Research. Participants from both groups said they would encourage ATs to thoroughly investigate cost-of-living–related expenses such as rent, housing, groceries, and state tax laws and to use a cost-of-living calculator or paycheck calculator so they could ensure the salary they agreed upon will be adequate. Richard recommended, “Try to look and see if you can determine if the amount of money that they’re going to pay you is enough for you to live on.”

Advice from participants in both groups also included encouragement to attempt to negotiate more than salary, including relocation reimbursement, cellular phone bill paid by the employer, housing options, continuing education support, tuition reimbursement, and funds to purchase equipment or research start-up costs.

There were several specific homework recommendations from negotiators. Negotiators recommended that ATs confirm whether the pay structure of the position is salaried or hourly, and whether comp time or overtime is available or expected. Negotiating participants also indicated the importance of understanding not only the financial components of the offer, but also the nature and expectations of the position. Negotiators included recommendations such as negotiating all items together up front rather than serially and being able to support one’s request for a specific salary with evidence. Emphasis was also placed on the AT ensuring their ask is reasonable prior to attempting negotiation. Negotiators also recommended that applicants know what their priorities are for the job and for negotiation.

One piece of advice that was unique to the nonnegotiator group was the recommendation to research what a typical salary is for the type of job the individual was seeking. Amelia advised, “Talk to other people in your industry about salaries and what they think is appropriate for where you’re living and what kind of job you’re doing.”

Confidence/Know Your Value. Negotiators emphasized the importance that ATs understand their value when negotiating and to have confidence in themselves. They also discussed the importance of being able to articulate their skills and the value of those skills. Isobel said,

If they’re offering you a job, that means that they want you to work there, which means they think you’re competent. So, that’s like the baseline already that they’ve met. So, you know, you kind of have a little bit more confidence hopefully moving forward.

Negotiators would encourage ATs to not be afraid to ask for a higher salary or to ask for modifications to other terms of employment. This group also encouraged ATs to not be afraid to walk away if the job is not what they are looking for. Nonnegotiators emphasized the importance of knowing one’s value when entering the negotiation process. Participants also mentioned the importance of the value of life balance and self-care. Avery recommended, “Go advocate for yourself, you are not just an athletic trainer; you need to take care of yourself too.”

Other. Some other areas of advice emerged from the interviews. Ellis advised that an AT should never accept a job on the spot, explaining,

The very first thing I tell them is never take a job on the spot no matter how excited you are for the job, no matter how good the salary and benefits sound, do not take that job right away or else you literally lose the opportunity to negotiate.

Other negotiators recommended that ATs ensure they are in a quiet place where they can focus and concentrate when negotiating with potential employers and to be prepared with an answer when asked directly what salary they want. One nonnegotiator recommended developing negotiating skills by engaging in mock interviews to improve skills and confidence with the negotiating process.

DISCUSSION

Salary negotiation is an opportunity that is available for all ATs, but the profession is lacking in resources or advice ATs would find helpful before engaging in salary negotiation. Negotiators and nonnegotiators alike expressed a strong desire for additional resources to better prepare them to negotiate and increase their confidence with the process. Both groups also provided advice for other ATs based on their personal experiences.

Desired Resources

Nonnegotiators and negotiators were united in their desire for resources in the form of more data and more training. Participants highlighted that they had not been taught negotiation strategies in their formal education and were reliant on trial and error to figure out how to negotiate. They expressed interest in professional development that allowed for practicing negotiation techniques to gain comfort in employing them. Our participants expressed an interest in more available salary data, especially specific to the clinical practice setting, and some bluntly indicated that they wished employers would provide transparent salary information on all job postings.

Participants from both groups expressed that they would appreciate formal training in negotiation approaches to increase their comfort and proficiency in using such approaches in real life. Because the existing body of evidence suggests that increased real-life experience in negotiating salary results in an increased likelihood of negotiating, it stands to reason that mock scenarios could serve as a form of experiential learning to improve confidence and proficiency in negotiating.⁷ This strategy could be used in both professional education and continuing education formats to better prepare ATs at all levels of experience for the process of negotiating. Because many ATs prefer hands-on learning, an in-person meeting or conference where mock negotiations can be implemented would be preferred.¹¹ However, because of financial considerations associated with conference attendance and travel costs, we recommend that state and district conference planners consider implementing learning labs or panel discussions on this topic to allow more participants to potentially attend.¹¹

Participants of both groups expressed an interest in access to more data to support salary requests and negotiation attempts. When asked what resources were used, most participants mentioned the NATA salary survey, websites such as Indeed.com and Glassdoor.com, word of mouth, and online databases that provide salary data for employees in the public sector (eg, <http://>

Table 2. Additional Quotes for Advice for Others

Advice for Others	Negotiators	Nonnegotiators
Do homework/ research	<p>I've moved to a different state where the tax setup is a lot different and so when I had initially presented my number, that was something that I didn't realize and it actually made my take-home pay go up a fairly decent amount and that was why I was comfortable to take a little bit less, was because of the way that the taxing there was. So knowing little things like that about the area that you're moving to and just being able to support what you're asking for. —Adele</p> <p>There are other things that would impact your quality of life that can be negotiated. Making sure they understand the expectations for the workday, you know, are they going into an athletic training clinic space on a university that the athletic training room is open from 7 to 7 and you're here no matter what, or what are those policies that impact your workday expectations, and can those be negotiated? I think they need to understand . . . depending on the nature of the job, are there opportunities for additional pay such as are they in an overtime structure, or are there opportunities for independent contract work through camps and so forth? They just need to understand all of those opportunities, and are they opportunities or are they expectations? —Maggie</p> <p>You have got to be reasonable in your negotiations. You have to use some sort of evidence or data to inform where you're coming from and present that information. But I think if you make a reasonable offer, most employers are going to entertain a reasonable consideration. Whether or not they accepted or not, they'll at least say, "Okay, well, that's a, that's reasonable. Let's see what we can do." —Alex</p> <p>It's what's important to you. Is it the hours you work? Is it the days you work? Is it time off? Is it resources? What are your priorities? And start to kind of make that list. Because if you're negotiating, it is a compromise at the end of the day. But what are you going to draw the line at and know that going in. So, I think that's important. —Erica</p>	<p>Preparation to go into the negotiation. So preparation is ask them what their salary range is. Ask them if that's negotiable. Make your budget to see if it's if it's livable. Look at the cost of living and make sure it's livable. Look at the pros and cons of the position. If you're going to be tight on the budget. I also look at the pros and cons, I tell them don't go for the highest-paying job because if it's open, something's wrong. —April</p> <p>I think the biggest thing that I would give them is to do your research and to know your value and that if you do that, you can at least go in prepared for where you believe that you should be in comparison with colleagues or other folks. As much research as you can gather from publicly accessible information. But also, talk to your friends, talk to other people in the area to see what they start out making or what not to get an idea. And then what are the other things in addition to salary that can bump the value. So, continuing ed conferences, continuing ed, do they pay for your licensure, that type of thing. That kind of all plays in. How much do you pay for health insurance and all of the other things that play into your take-home money. So just because they give you a value of x, if you're spending a lot more in health insurance and state taxes and all of those [state] wage tax and all that kinda stuff. You have to kind of play that out. —Meredith</p> <p>I would tell them to look at the whole package. Right? Because yes, salary is a big thing, but so is health care, so is the time off and like how you can actually use that time off. That's one thing I've noticed huge here. And so kind of balancing those things. Using the salary survey, I would be willing to do mock scenarios with them if they wanted to practice. Yeah. I don't know of any formal training to like say "Here, go do this." —Adison</p>
Confidence/know your value	<p>Don't sell yourself short in it, you can always ask for more than what they're willing to give you, but you get one chance to ask. —Maggie</p> <p>You as the applicant have got to be okay with them saying, "No, we're not going to negotiate." And you say, "Thanks, have a nice day." . . . If it's not going to work out for you financially, you're going to be miserable. So, move on. Now. —Denny</p>	<p>I told them they're graduating from a really great university and the skills you have—don't sell yourself short. I know that some of them want to be in the profession and will take whatever salary there is and I said, "Make sure you're taking something that you can live on that doesn't affect your mental health." —Derek</p> <p>Don't freaking take those things that are internships that are paying \$20 000.00 when you're worth \$40 000.00 and there's no health insurance. Don't do it. Just say no. And they all do it anyway. And do you know why they do it? They do it for the same reason I took a pay cut coming from [City]. They want that position . . . If you can survive, then do it. But just know you're worth more than that. —April</p>

Table 2. Continued

Advice for Others	Negotiators	Nonnegotiators
Other	<p>I interviewed at [University], the department chair said to me, what will it take to get you here? And I hated it in the moment because I was so on the spot but I will tell my students that might you need to think about that question and have an answer because even if you're not asked that directly, that's what you have to be able to convey. —Maggie</p> <p>If you have negotiations occurring, you know, make sure you're in a place where you can fully concentrate and dedicate to that. —Teddy</p>	<p>But definitely trying to have that conversation more than once before you go into the real one because of nerves and everything like that . . . Like mock, you know, mock negotiations. —Amelia</p>

www.transparentcalifornia.org). Although the NATA does provide access to a salary survey to its members, some participants indicated that employers are wary that the data are biased because it is presented by a group whose mission is aligned with advocacy of the profession.¹² Other potential employers may believe the data are inaccurate because they are self-reported by the ATs themselves, or that there is limited availability of data for ATs in unique employment settings or more remote areas, although more research is likely needed to fully understand employers' concerns with this database. Another challenge associated with the NATA salary survey is the lack of access to survey information by employers unless they themselves are a member. One recommendation to mitigate these challenges would be for the NATA to enable the ability to download salary reports that contain information about how the data were gathered. The NATA uses a third party to conduct the salary survey, but it is unclear how well members and prospective employers understand that process.¹² If reports were enabled, prospective employees could provide the data they are using to target their negotiation outcome to their prospective employer, and employers could review the data and how the data were gathered as a part of the negotiation process. Alternatively, if the Board of Certification could incorporate a salary database as part of an AT's certification profile, additional salary information that covers a much larger swath of professionals across all practice settings could be gathered and disseminated for use by employers and employees alike.

Some participants stated that they wished salaries would be included on all job postings to allow them to make decisions about whether to even apply to a position before investing time and energy in the interview process to receive a disappointing salary offer. This could be achieved if the NATA career center had stricter requirements regarding salary disclosure, but ATs should also explore the laws in their state and local municipalities regarding their rights around salary disclosure during the hiring process. Although highly variable by location, laws exist that require employers to disclose salary ranges when asked or during interview processes, or that prohibit employers from asking a prospective employee about past salaries to determine a position's salary.¹³

Advice for Others

Negotiators and nonnegotiators both had a variety of thoughts on what kind of advice they might give to ATs who are entering the profession. Both groups' comments were focused primarily on doing thorough research about the position, location, and cost of living in the area and encouraging the AT to know their value. This does highlight the connection between the resources

our participants desired and what they would encourage young professionals to use. Participants also emphasized the importance of a thorough understanding of the cost of living in the area, tax laws, gas prices, rent/housing costs, and other expenses in any employment location.

Negotiators and nonnegotiators both advised future ATs to do their homework relative to the associated costs of living of any geographic location, and they also indicated a need to understand the difference between gross pay and take-home pay. There are many publicly available online resources or calculators to help ATs navigate these complex concepts; however, sometimes these tools calculate costs only for large metropolitan areas, so their usefulness may vary based on location.^{14,15} This would be another ideal area in which entry-level education program faculty could instruct athletic training students to assist them in their initial job search. An educational technique paper suggests that even a 3-hour, stand-alone lecture on salary negotiations can improve students' understanding of negotiation and their confidence in negotiating.¹⁶ Guiding athletic training students on how to determine what wage is necessary to live in a given location could mitigate the potential that young professional ATs will have to work additional positions to survive financially, potentially reducing burnout and increasing longevity in the profession.^{2,6,17}

Both negotiators and nonnegotiators said they would advise ATs to consider negotiating not just salary, but other terms of employment as well. Participants suggested having the employer pay for required continuing education units, including travel to conferences when necessary. Human resources experts highly value this benefit for both employees and employers, as most continuing education enhances employees' work-related skills, which has a direct benefit to the employer.¹⁸ Additionally, in cases of employment in private sector businesses, paying for continuing education can be a tax-deductible expense for the employer.¹⁸

Negotiators and nonnegotiators alike emphasized the importance of the AT knowing and understanding their value and having confidence in what they bring to the job. Not only should ATs understand their value, but participants also said it was important that ATs be able to articulate this professionally. Professional negotiations require that requests be supported by data and be conducted in an assertive, although not aggressive, manner. Negotiations should not be presented as ultimatums, and negotiators must anticipate that the employers are likely to counteroffer to reach an agreement on terms that both parties are satisfied with.^{19,20}

Lastly, participants explained that even if the salary is appropriate, life balance and mental health must always be a priority, and

ATs should not be afraid to turn down an offer if the salary is insufficient or the nature of the job is not a good fit.

Limitations and Future Directions

Due to the nature of qualitative research, findings rely on participants' viewpoints and assume honesty in all responses. We also only interviewed ATs about their experiences being hired and did not triangulate these findings with the experiences of the employers. Lastly, several of our participants engaged in their most recent hiring process years or even decades ago and therefore our findings may not fully represent the current landscape of negotiation practices, although the descriptions our participants provided still reflect their lived experience with this process. Future researchers should aim to explore how, or even if, athletic training programs are preparing students for job and wage negotiations as they enter the profession. Researchers should also aim to establish if experiential negotiation training is beneficial to job candidates and determine if those benefits equally apply to all demographic considerations. There is a need for future research that examines the impact of salary on personal and professional life factors, such as life balance and mental health. Lastly, additional research is likely needed to understand the negotiation experience from the employers' perspective.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study found that both negotiators and nonnegotiators desire more data accessibility to support negotiation efforts, and both groups strongly desire formal training and/or continuing education options in the area of negotiations. There is a need for intentional education and equipping of ATs and athletic training students to successfully navigate difficult negotiation conversations with their prospective employers. Our participants advise those entering the profession to do their research before entering the job market, and encourage this group to advocate for the value they bring to a given place of employment.

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