



This year's Athletic Training scholarship recipients are (l to r) Fernanda Guitron Topete, Kyle Holland, Callie Tosh, Bailey Bastien and J.D. Pletsch. Not pictured: Stevie Blackburn-Lazalde.

## Students in Athletic Training Program Excel, Earn Scholarships

The hard work of five University of Arkansas students in the athletic training program has earned them recognition through a variety of scholarships.

Six graduate-level athletic training students were awarded scholarships named for legendary Razorback athletic trainers Dean Weber and Bill Ferrell.

Athletic training students who receive the Bill Ferrell Endowed Scholarship in Athletic Training for 2020 are Bailey Bastien, Kyle Holland, J.D. Pletsch, Fernanda Guitron Topete and Callie Tosh. Pletsch also earned the Dean Weber Athletic Training Scholarship. Stevie Blackburn-Lazalde earned the Dr. A.Y. "Al" Gordon, Jr. Award in Athletic Training.

The endowed scholarships were initiated in the College of Education and Health Professions by a group of 14 football players who were seniors during the 1979 Southwest Conference Championship.

Bailey Bastien, from Roseville, California, graduated in May 2019 from the University of Nevada with a degree in Community Health Science - Kinesiology. She has completed clinical rotations with Razorback swim and dive and the football team. She's currently interning at the University Recreation Sports Injury Clinic. Bastien is passionate about women's athletics and wants to be an advocate for both women and individuals with invisible disabilities in sport. She hopes to continue working at the Division I level following graduation.

Kyle Holland is from Pembroke, Massachusetts, and completed his degree in kinesiology at the University of Rhode Island before moving to the U of A to earn a master's degree in athletic training. He works with the U of A baseball

team, under the head athletic trainer. He'd like to work as an athletic trainer in professional baseball in the future.

J.D. Pletsch is from Springfield, Illinois, and graduated from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville with a degree in exercise science. He's currently doing a clinical rotation at UAMS Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine Clinic. Pletsch plans to remain in Northwest Arkansas and work at a high school or a sports medicine clinic after graduation.

Stevie Blackburn-Lazalde, from El Paso, Texas, graduated from Arizona State University in 2019 with a degree in exercise and wellness. She has completed clinical rotations with several Razorback teams, including swim and dive, baseball, and track and field. She dreams of working as an athletic trainer in professional baseball. Her overarching goal is to inspire and pave the way for young Hispanic females who want to pursue the same career path.

Fernanda Guitron Topete, from Guadalajara, Mexico, graduated from the University of Arkansas in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in exercise science. She's currently working in clinical rotation at Bentonville West High School, helping with spring sports programs like track & field, baseball, soccer and softball. Her professional goal is to become an athletic trainer for an Olympic or a professional team.

Callie Tosh, from Troup, Texas, graduated from Ouachita Baptist University in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in kinesiology and a minor in psychology. She is currently working in a clinical rotation with Razorback baseball. Tosh's desire to become an athletic trainer was sparked when she was an athlete in high school and sustained various sports injuries. She plans to work in collegiate athletics and possibly teach.



## Program Director's Corner

By Jeff Bonacci, DA, A.T.C; L.A.T.



Hello Razorback alumni, prospective students, and friends of the graduate athletic training program (GATP). We operated in interesting times this past year, but I'm proud of how everyone adapted and all that we were able to achieve.

The pandemic challenged the GATP faculty to offer classes both virtually and face to face while following CDC and Arkansas Department of Health requirements. In class this past summer, it was interesting to learn how to tear athletic tape with rubber gloves.

Given the pandemic, we didn't produce a newsletter in 2020. But no matter! We continued to move forward and admitted 19 new students for the 2020-2022 class.

Even though concessions were made to place students at clinical sites on and off campus during the pandemic, the GATP also wanted to provide learning opportunities for students in telehealth. We collaborated with the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) to offer virtual standardized patients to augment clinical education with telehealth and EHRgo Corporation (computerized medical case studies).

These two experiences were utilized to demonstrate compliance with current Commission on Accreditation Athletic Training

Education (CAATE) accreditation standards and to give students the opportunity to work with patients of various ages and ailments in a family physician setting, which wasn't possible in person. Students found the experiences to be unique, engaging and fun in providing patient health care. The GATP will continue to utilize telehealth in the coming years to expose students to various telemedicine experiences.

I am very pleased to announce that the GATP received reaccreditation from the CAATE. The next accreditation visit will be 2026-2027. I want to personally thank my colleagues, Drs. Brendon McDermott and Lesley Vandermark, and the COEHP administration for their team support during the process.

We are sorry to say that Dr. Vandermark resigned in December (2020) to be closer to family. She took a position on the athletic training faculty at the University of Buffalo. We will miss her awesome leadership with clinical education and as a wonderful colleague. The GATP is surely in a better place because of Dr. Vandermark. A national search is underway for her position.

I also want to let you know that my last day at the U of A is on May 9, 2021. The AT program will be in good hands with a new director, Dr. Luzita Vela. Dr. Vela will be joining HHPR faculty from the University of Virginia this summer.

GO HOGS!!

Dr. B

## Research Opportunities Abound Despite Pandemic

By Brendon McDermott, Ph.D., A.T.C.



The 2020-21 school year has been a challenge in the realm of research for our program. Yes, this is not groundbreaking! However, our students are being athletic trainers and persevering during the pandemic and taking advantage of research opportunities.

Many of our students are now working with Dr. Erin Hickey Howie as part of our campus' Exercise is Medicine movement. Our students are helping collect data, supervising faculty/staff exercise sessions and organizing data in the lab. The outcomes of these studies help establish national recommendations for exercise and the benefits for patients of all levels.

The Heat Stress, Fluid Balance and Renal Physiology Laboratory has been busy collecting data on two studies. First, athletic training students are helping to determine if a novel hydration survey is indicative of physiological fluid balance in individuals. If these match up, this survey, developed at the University of Arkansas, could have widespread health implications. We are also conducting a study on fluid balance in females. Most hydration studies exclude females due to

potential influence of menstrual cycle hormones influencing fluid balance. In our case, we're determining the extent of influence from the hormones estrogen and progesterone.

A large group of athletic training students have recently received ideal training in Dr. Elbin's Office of Sport-Related Concussion. Since the pandemic has put a hold on face-to-face contact, data collection in this lab has been on hold. But, this lab continues to help set the standard for managing this enigmatic injury and our students are on the front lines of establishing the evidence.

Athletic training students are also helping in our biomechanics laboratories in our department. Both Dr. Kaitlin Gallagher and Dr. Abigail Schmitt are helping students in a variety of ways, whether that is training, understanding or providing data collection opportunities.

Our students are gaining valuable research experience that will help them as evidence-based clinicians in the future. Despite a pandemic with profound implications, our students are overcoming challenges and helping provide data for a multitude of arenas pertinent to our profession. Our program is excited for full in-person data collection to commence and for everything to be closer to normal.

## Incoming Class (from Coast to Coast) Average GPA 3.45

BRADEN HACKLER Oklahoma State University  
KHENLI HARP Hendrix College  
SAVANNAH HART Ouachita Baptist University  
ALISON HAUGHEY University of South Alabama  
KEELY LAGRONE Texas A&M University, College Station  
TKEYAH MCDANIEL Arkansas Tech University  
ADAM NEBEL University of Idaho  
EMILY NELSON Washburn University, Kansas  
JAYCE PARMLEY University of Arkansas  
KENT ROBERTS University of Illinois

WILLIAM SEIFERT University of Arkansas  
ANDREW SHELLEY University of Arkansas  
MICHAELA SLOSAR Tulane University  
MARY SMITH McNeese State University  
CESAR TORRES Texas A&M University-Commerce  
JULIET TUNBERG University of Minnesota  
ANNA TURPIN University of Arkansas  
JAYLA VERRETT University of Louisville  
ANNA WOODS University of Memphis

## Graduates of 2020 Working With All Levels of Athletes

EMILY APPOLD, Athletic Training Fellow,  
University of Michigan  
KATIE BURIA, Assistant Athletic Trainer,  
Arkansas State University  
IAN CHENNEL, Seasonal athletic Training Intern,  
Dallas Cowboys  
TAYLOR ESTRADA, Athletic Training - Intern,  
Nicholls State University  
ABIGAIL FLYNN, Athletic Training Fellow,  
University of Kentucky Sports Medicine  
HALLIE HAW, Athletic Trainer - seasonal Intern,  
San Francisco 49ers  
BLAKE HOCKADAY, Athletic Trainer, Loyola University,  
New Orleans Ochsner Sports Medicine  
CONNOR IMBODEN, Head Athletic Trainer,  
Hillsboro High School Mercy Hospital

ANGELINA MARCONI, Athletic Training Intern,  
University of Florida  
MACKENZIE MAY, Assistant Athletic Trainer,  
John Brown University  
YUTO MORI, Athletic Trainer, Tokyo Japan  
YUKA OGATA, Athletic Training Intern,  
Fresno State University  
SHELBY PARTHEMER, High School Athletic Trainer,  
RET Physical Therapy - outreach - Washington  
ALEX PHAM, Chiropractic School,  
University of Western States  
KURT ROBBINS, Head Athletic Trainer,  
Collierville High School, Memphis Tennessee  
EVAN ROCHAT, Athletic Training Intern,  
Auburn University  
SAMANTHA THOMAS, Assistant Athletic Trainer,  
University of Kansas



## Preceptors Play Pivotal Role in Athletic Training Program



**T**ricia Matysak is the volleyball athletic trainer and associate director of sports medicine for the University of Arkansas Razorbacks. She also serves as a preceptor for the university's graduate Athletic Training program.

Preceptors supervise clinical practice for athletic training students and are invaluable to their success. The program draws on the expertise of about 77 athletic trainers and physicians every semester.

Matysak has worked with multiple students in her more than 11 years at the U of A.

"I enjoy everything about it," she said. "I enjoy working with my staff athletic trainers, the student-athletes, and the athletic training students. I especially love being able to help get a student-athlete get back on the court following an injury."

As a preceptor, Matysak focuses on teaching student

athletic trainers how to prevent injuries and best practices for recovery if an injury occurs anyway.

She especially enjoys helping athletic training students find internships after graduation, earn scholarships or look into programs to further their education.

"I write lots of letters of recommendation," she said.

Matysak is from Knox, Indiana, and started out as a student athletic trainer at Purdue University from 1995 to 1999. She went on to be a graduate assistant athletic trainer at Auburn University, then assistant athletic trainer at the University of Notre Dame. She was a senior athletic trainer at the University of Kentucky before moving to the U of A.

Matysak said it's particularly rewarding to see student athletic trainers jump in and become part of a team in their own unique way.

"Building relationships is one of the most important parts of being an athletic trainer," she said. "I have enjoyed seeing how successful the graduates of the program have become in their careers over the years."

## Students Offered Multiple Choices in Clinical Site Opportunities During Pandemic

**T**he University of Arkansas athletic training program has initiated a wealth of clinical immersion sites for summer experience in 2021. This is the initial class completing required clinical education over the summer in conjunction with a clinical course and they are truly setting an example for others to follow. As of now, they have already established learning opportunities in professional sports, division I athletic training rooms, physicians' offices, rehabilitation clinics and occupational settings. Further, because of our proactive students, we now have clinical sites from Virginia to California, and a lot of places in between.

Our students are now able to set up clinical assignments of their choice and participate in clinical education with hardly any conflicting coursework in their way. They will be enjoying the clinical site of their choice, in the setting of their choosing, and experiencing the full day of athletic training. This invaluable experience will take place between May and mid-August this year. We also chose to maximize

opportunity and not require the CAATE accreditation minimum of 4 weeks for this assignment, but we require 6 consecutive weeks of experience for this opportunity. This will allow students to examine where and in what setting they wish to work when they graduate. Further, it allows them to develop a resume unmatched by their peers. This does not mean that there is no clinical experience in our program – this summer immersion is in addition to the current clinical instruction plan within our program. Our students all still work with Razorback athletics as well as local clinics, high schools and small colleges. We can truly advertise that we offer it all at this point.

We place high value on the education part of clinical education, and we remain open to future possibilities. We are looking forward to working with our alumni to help provide innovative, truly meaningful clinical learning opportunities for years to come.





## Jeff Bonacci Retiring After 20 Years as AT Program Director

**D**r. Jeff Bonacci was hired to lead the University of Arkansas' first graduate Athletic Training program 20 years ago.

He began by building trust with Razorback athletics and recruiting students from across the country. The first class in 2002 only had four students, but the program quickly began to gain national notoriety.

Bonacci is retiring in May.

The U of A was one of the first athletic training programs in the nation and the first in the Southeastern Conference to develop a degree program designed to prepare students to test for certification after the completion of a demanding two-year graduate degree.

Over the past two decades, Bonacci has led the program through several successful accreditations. He also facilitated partnerships with multiple internship sites so students could experience a variety of diverse experiences. Sites include Razorback sports, public schools, physical therapy clinics and other medical providers.

Professor Emeritus Sharon Hunt, department head of the Health, Human Performance and Recreation program at the time Bonacci was hired, said one of his attributes that impressed her most was the sincere interest in keeping up with the program's graduates.

"He was an excellent advocate for our graduates as they pursued their first professional job after graduation, and he remained interested and committed to his former students as they rose to leadership positions in colleges and universi-

ties, professional sports, sports medicine clinics, or as they pursued a doctoral degree," she said.

Current department head Matthew Ganio also commended Bonacci's commitment to students.

"I am appreciative of all the work Jeff has done with the Athletic Training program," Ganio said. "His ability to connect with students has truly made a difference in recruitment and remaining connected to our alumni."

Brendon McDermott, an associate professor in athletic training who has worked with Bonacci for the past nine years, added, "Dr. B embodies such a desire to help others and would do anything for his students. The program is set up for a strong future in large part because of the work that he has put into the program."

Bonacci said retiring from the U of A is bittersweet, but he's looking forward to giving back as a healthcare provider and educator as a next chapter.

"What I appreciated most is developing the minds of future athletic trainers in and out of the classroom and collaborating with truly the best faculty in the country," he said.

Prior to joining the U of A, Bonacci was an assistant professor and Clinical Coordinator of Athletic Training at Illinois State University and an athletic training education instructor at Lincoln Memorial University. Before he began teaching, Bonacci served as assistant athletic trainer at the University of Notre Dame, West Point Military Academy and Lehigh University.



## University of Virginia's Luzita Vela Hired to Lead AT Program

**D**r. Luzita Vela has been hired to lead the athletic training program in the Department of Health, Human Performance and Recreation.

She will join the University of Arkansas on June 21, 2021. Dr. Jeff Bonacci is retiring after 20 years as program director.

"I look forward to teaching and leading the athletic training program at the University of Arkansas," said Vela, who will be leaving her position as a faculty member and Clinical Education Coordinator for the University of Virginia's athletic training program. "The program has a long, rich history and I look forward to building on its current momentum. I'm committed to giving our students top-notch academic preparation that will equip them to work as integral team members in healthcare."

Matthew Ganio, head of the U of A Department of Health, Human Performance and Recreation, said, "We are very excited to have Dr. Vela joining us. She brings a wealth of experience that we are confident will take our Athletic Training program to the next level."

Vela's academic endeavors in scholarship, teaching and service are all founded upon a strong belief in patient-centered strategies that focus on timely clinical decision making. She said her teaching practices are influenced by her various clinical experiences as an athletic trainer as well as her research interests

in enhancing the clinical reasoning of young professionals.

"I want to sustain a culture where students become reflective healthcare practitioners and lifelong learners. I believe that engaging students in the learning process, making them accountable for learning, and fostering a relationship in which I can serve as an active mentor are all educational practices that produce mature clinical athletic trainers," she said. "I also want students to engage in service to the profession and advocacy for our patients."

Prior to her position at the University of Virginia, Vela was a faculty member in the CAATE-accredited athletic training program at the University of Texas Arlington. She coordinated the Standardized Patient Lab and facilitated interprofessional education activities. She also worked at Texas State University, serving as the Clinical Education Coordinator of the Post-Professional Athletic Training Program and in the Pre-Rehabilitation Sciences program. Vela has also worked clinically as an athletic trainer at West Chester University and Hope College.

Vela will continue to be an active member in the profession. She currently serves as the chair of the CAATE Standard Committee and on the editorial board of *Athletic Training and Sports Health Care*. She also reviews manuscripts for the *Journal of Athletic Training*, *Journal of Sports Rehabilitation* and *Athletic Training Education Journal*.