



March 2, 2015

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**RE: Community Connectors Proposal Support**

Dear Community Connectors Review Committee,

I was delighted to learn of your Community Connectors proposal to provide a mentoring program to Children on the Near East Side of Columbus and I eagerly submit this letter of support for the proposal. As the Director of the Athletic Training Division in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, I believe that this program is important and valuable on several fronts, both for the children of the Near East Side as well as for the healthcare community in the greater Columbus area.

In Athletic Training as in most healthcare professions, we face a conspicuous shortage of diverse professionals and students. Nationally, 16.9% of the membership of the National Athletic Trainers Association is diverse while 83.1% identify themselves as Caucasian/White, 2.3% are African American and 2.8% are Hispanic. Similarly, student data from the 2013-14 Accreditation Annual Data Report for our profession reveal that 83.7% of the nation's Athletic Training students identify themselves as White/Caucasian while only 6.4% are African American and only 5% are Hispanic/Latino. Developing cultural competence and recruiting and nurturing a more representative diversity within the population of providers are identified priorities for our profession and Dr. Chaudhari's proposed program is a way that we can begin to address these goals at the local level.

At Ohio State, we enroll 64 students in the professional phase of our Athletic Training major and every one of these students will complete multiple clinical fieldwork placement both within the university and in the local community. Our students are very comfortable with their patient interactions at the university where they see patients who are very similar in age and perspective to themselves. When they see patients who are external and who are different than themselves, it takes them a little while to become comfortable and to find the most effective pathways for communication and meeting their patients' needs. Participation in this program would afford them opportunities to begin developing and refining those skills to a greater extent than they currently struggle to find. At the same time, our students, many of whom are first generation college students, can provide mentorship and role modeling in life and academic skills and help instill a sense of purpose and achievability of goals for the students of the Near East Side.

In short, I believe that this is an excellent program and a wonderful opportunity to connect and make a difference that benefits both my own students and the students of the Near East Side. I am eager to explore this program and share it with our alumni and program affiliates who may be able to help expand these opportunities even further.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Merrick, PhD, AT, ATC, FNATA  
Director and Associate Professor, Athletic Training Division  
President-Elect, Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education