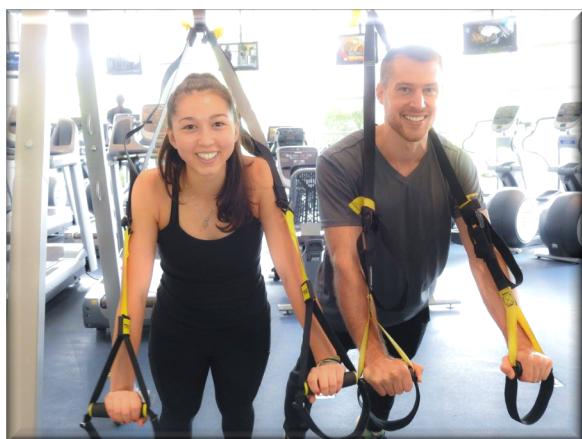


The Journey Back to the Spotlight—Traumatic Injury Inspires Careers in Health Care

How one elite athlete and Physical Therapy student discovered her desire to help patients achieve their goals.

Battling a fever brought on by the flu, then sophomore Brittany Lee, awoke in her dorm room at Boston University. Moments later, she hobbled out of bed with the grace of a newly-born fawn—a far cry from the graceful movements she was known for as a [collegiate figure skater](#). Her muscular frame just gave out. She fainted, falling head-first toward the sink. With a badly bruised and bloodied face, news of her fall reached her coach from the emergency room via text message.



After being released from the hospital, Brittany made a plan to heal her physical injuries. Despite her obvious facial wounds, the memory trouble Brittany experienced after her concussion challenged her rigorous study habits. She pressed on and completed the semester. Only a short time later, she experienced another injury—[completely obliterating her ankle](#) while skating during her first week of Physical

Therapy (PT) school. The injury also impacted her leg, resulting in a fractured [fibula](#) which left Brittany in a cast covering her entire leg. Having already completed the Undergraduate portion of her 6-year Doctoral program, Brittany's first months of PT school would force her to take on a practice patient—herself. This experience would serve as a silver-lining though. Brittany credits her knowledge and study of Physical Therapy for both her academic success and her full recovery back to skating.

Like many of her teammates, Brittany was drawn to health care through experiences in sports. Having been in and out of physical therapy through high school, her first memories of PT were as a patient. This scenario is fairly common among elite athletes, although not the only reason that athletes might be drawn to a career in health care. One of Brittany's teammates at BU, Sarah Godwin (a pre-Dental student) says that she watched a friend and training mate fall hard on the ice and lose several teeth.

“I wasn’t totally grossed out.”

“I kept talking with [my friend] about it and followed her progress,” said Godwin. The experience of sports recovery echoes through similar stories of shared training obstacles on the BU Figure Skating Team.

These obstacles often inform an athlete's decision to pursue a career in health care. Even the culture of Boston University's Sargent College—where Brittany's 6-year Doctor of Physical Therapy program is offered—centers around prior exposure to health care. She says that “the majority of people [in her cohort] had some kind of experience with PT...the whole culture of the PT department is about being active.” Brittany candidly says that the department is also fond of kale and quinoa salads.

Looking back at a recovery approach for her ankle and leg, Brittany says that she had a strong desire to get better.

“I had this fantasy that things were going to be great and not going to take a long time.”

Brittany said that she didn't realize just how far she would have to go for recovery back to the ice until she was able to walk again. “I realized that I was so weak,” she said. Using her PT training to better understand her own recovery and pain management, Brittany discovered that “a huge part of any recovery is the patient's motivation to achieve their individual goals.” Brittany had big goals beyond walking—to get back on the ice doing double jumps and competing for Boston University once again.

“I started from a place where I couldn't walk for 3-4 months. That has given me such an important perspective on my career in Physical Therapy.”

Brittany speaks of having a better understanding of what it feels like to go through recovery after a traumatic physical injury. Whether it is accessing public transportation, walking, or being active in the community, Brittany has gained first-hand experience about the difficulty facing her patients both during their recovery and in their journey back to the recreational activities they enjoy.

Typically, health insurance will cover the [medically necessary](#) components of Physical Therapy—but often, the work is not yet done. Brittany says that she “had a strong desire to get better.” Using [visualization strategies](#) (a common tool in figure skating training), Brittany imagined herself back on the ice—flying through the air, jumping, and spinning. She says that she would often find herself calculating the exact moment her cast would come off. She tracked her progress daily, and never lost sight of her goals.

“I was really motivated to get better.”

One of the core values of [Sargent College](#), according to Brittany, is evidence-based practice—that is staying up to date on the latest information in the field of physical therapy. Brittany says that “the culture [of Sargent College] instills good values of being a life-long learner and always wanting to learn more.” She adds that her strongest belief is the need to work hard both on and off the ice toward her goals.

“If you love something and are passionate about it, you can make it work.”

As a physical therapy student, one of her new responsibilities is to teach younger students through a series of lectures. Brittany says that the biggest difference between her undergraduate studies and PT school is leadership.

“You have to be confident in what you are doing.”

Brittany’s practicum project for her lecture series focuses on communication skills and patient education. She remembers feeling uncomfortable and unsure of what to say when communicating with patients in her first clinical experiences. When she asked herself how she could help her classmates and students have better interactions with their patients, she decided to focus on the [cultural humility](#) aspect. Brittany explains this as the idea that a clinician can never fully understand somebody else’s perspective because they don’t live their specific life. Brittany says that it is “something you take with you into every clinical interaction.” She stresses the

importance of not generalizing patients to your own experiences, or to the experiences of your other patients. She strongly advocates to “keep it patient-centric.”

Through hard work and a lot of training, Brittany was able to make a full and strong recovery back to the ice. She not only regained her jumps, spins, and tricks, but will be competing in the highest level of regional competition this year in a U.S. Figure Skating qualifying event, on track for Nationals. Brittany is also back to competing for the 5-time National Intercollegiate Champion Boston University Figure Skating Team. She will graduate from Boston University’s Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences in 2020 as a Doctor of Physical Therapy.

Follow the link for more information about the [Physical Therapy Program](#) at Sargent.

Check out [Figure Skating at BU](#)

Facebook Post:

Finding her way back into the spotlight: Physical Therapy student uses training to aid a miraculous recovery. Brittany Lee of @BostonUniversity shattered her ankle during her first year of PT school, but she refused to give up. Follow Brittany’s journey [HERE](#).

Statement of Purpose:

The intended audience for this online feature story is a student publication like BU Today. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the unique reasons why students choose their career paths. An important addition to the social media campaign might include an open-ended Instagram poll on the BU Instagram account. This campaign could be further extended to the BU Alumni Instagram account asking if Alumni are working in fields for which they had a similar “lightbulb” moment.