

Student-Athlete Knowledge Community Education Plan

How to Program for Student-Athletes

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Introduction

This guide contains suggestions for student-affairs practitioners to increase and improve services offered to student-athlete populations.

Athletic administrators and student-affairs practitioners were consulted to compile the challenges and opportunities in programming for student-athletes.

Conceptual Framework: Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984)

“Students learn by becoming involved.”

The institution has a critical role in offering students a variety of academic and social opportunities to become involved with new ideas, people, and experiences.



Students also have a responsibility to capitalize on opportunities that are presented



Therefore student development is a function of the quality of student involvement and effort with the resources the institution provides

Conceptual Framework: Astin's Theory of Involvement (1984)

Challenges to Student-Athlete Involvement:

The time demands on their schedule leave little time for experiences outside of classroom instruction and athletic participation

Student-athletes often rely on athletic administrators for support in areas outside of athletics when other resources on campus are available

There may be an assumption that student athletes are "covered" and have all the resources they need within athletics

Student-athletes may have limited interaction with their non-athletic peers

Stereotypes and Stigmas assigned to student-athletes may affect interaction with faculty, staff, and other students

At-a-Glance

The guide is sorted by department and contains challenges to student-athlete development and suggestions for addressing the challenges.

Alumni Affairs

Career Center

Counseling
Center

Disability
Services

Greek Life

Health
Services

Housing/
Residence Life

International
Student
Services

Recreation/
Intramurals

Special
Populations

Student
Involvement

Alumni Affairs

- Athletic events are a primary way to keep alumni engaged in the institution, but using student-athletes for appearances and fund raising opportunities may leave them feeling exploited by the university.

Challenges

- Student-athletes make good ambassadors to donors. Consider utilizing student-athletes in development campaigns to also help them build substantive work experience in marketing, fundraising, and public speaking and not just use them for photo opportunities or to appeal to donors.
- Provide specialized leadership training for student-athletes in various sports (not just revenue sports) for those selected to interface with the public on behalf of the institution.
- Consider hosting sport reunion weekends to engage student-athlete alumni with current student-athletes.
- Engage student-athletes in meaningful participation in sport-related events such as hall of fame induction activities

Opportunities

Career Center

- The time demands placed on student-athletes make it difficult for them to engage in career exploration and participate in substantive career and professional development experiences (i.e. internships, career fairs, networking events).

Challenges

- Conduct workshops to help student-athletes understand how their athletic experiences are transferrable in work environments.
- Employers report a desire to hire student-athletes because of their work ethic. Encourage attendance or design career fairs specifically for student-athletes to explore employment in non-athletic domains.
- Remember there are more than just the student-athletes on the active roster that attend the institution. Reach out to former student-athletes who may have a difficult time considering their post-college options.

Opportunities

Counseling Center

- Athletic participation can be stressful and student-athletes sometimes deal with issues that are unique from their non-athlete peers.
- Student-athletes tend to seek support within the athletic department instead of utilizing outside resources, if they seek help at all.

Challenges

- Make counseling services a part of athlete orientation programs and highlight resources.
- Consider offering services both inside and outside of the athletic department to allow student-athletes options based on their comfort level.
- Consider developing special topic programs and services for issues such as post-competition transition, withdrawal from sport, coping with injury or post-surgery counseling, performance anxiety.
- Include NCAA resources and publications on your website and in your office that specifically address student-athlete issues.
- Address barriers for student access to university counseling services.
- Are your hours of operation at times when student-athletes can be serviced?
- Are members of your staff trained to address student-athlete issues?

Opportunities

Disability Services

- Learning disabilities may have gone undetected in high school because society often stigmatize student-athletes as not being “smart”.
- Student-athletes with documented learning disabilities in high school may not request services in college because parental involvement is reduced and the stigma that is associated with it.
- Student-athletes may not enter with a physical disability but if they become injured will require support.

Challenges

- Accessibility services counselors should work with athletic academic advisors to identify students early in their academic career if they exhibit warning signs of academic difficulty to determine if support is needed. It cannot be assumed the reason for poor academic performance is solely related to lack of time management or difficulty adjusting to college.
- Ensure student-athletes are aware of short-term and long-term the accommodations that can be made if they suffer a physical injury or concussion. Establish a relationship with the athletic department to proactively provide accommodation support for student-athletes that will undergo a surgery that may lead to temporary immobilization or loss of use of their limbs.

Opportunities

Fraternity and Sorority Life

- Time demands make it challenging for student-athletes to participate in Fraternity and Sorority life.

Challenges

- There are many former college athletes and professional athletes that are members of Greek-letter organizations. Highlighting these individuals helps student-athletes see it is possible to join a fraternity or sorority if they have interest.
- Ensure notices for recruitment are in places where athletes frequent. Consider targeting off-season student-athletes for recruitment efforts.
- Sporting events are popular events for students engaged in Fraternity and Sorority life. Plan events to support the student-athletes who have joined a fraternity or sorority and include them in recognition opportunities.

Opportunities

Health Services/Wellness

- Because of their outward physical condition, there may be an assumption that all student-athletes are the epitome of good health.
- Student-athletes may exclusively go to their athletic trainer for non-athletic related medical needs.

Challenges

- Design outreach initiatives for student-athletes on non-athletic related health issues and prevention.
- Design outreach initiatives that address high risk issues for student-athletes (i.e. recognizing symptoms of concussion, rapid weight gain/loss, controlling asthma).
- Be sure to have some clinic hours available at times outside of peak periods for student-athlete practice. Hours after 5pm benefits student-athletes but other students with daytime time demands.
- Plan a health outreach day for athletes (does not have to just be for intercollegiate athletes and may include other students who are active in sports).

Opportunities

Housing/Residence Life

- Student-athletes that are clustered with other athletes do not have the opportunity to engage with non-athletic peers.
- Time demands limit participation in residence hall activities.

Challenge

- Consider residence hall outings to sporting events to support student-athletes that live in the residential community, particularly for non-revenue and Olympic sports that could benefit from increased attendance.
- Door decorating, send-offs for championships, etc. will help student-athletes feel more connected and supported by their non-athletic peers.
- Consider programming times for residence life events that do not always conflict with student-athlete schedules.
- Do joint activities with residence halls with large student-athlete populations that increase interaction with non-athletic peers.

Opportunities

International Student Services

- International student athletes are typically not as informed of the institution as domestic athletes. Domestic athletes may have heard of the institution prior to being recruited and had the opportunity to visit and explore options. Sometimes an international athlete's first experience with the institution will be when they have already committed to attending and have arrived.

Challenge

- Make special effort to ensure international student athletes are given a full orientation to the campus so they can learn resources outside of the athletic department.
- Connect them with faculty and other students from their home country or someone who speaks their native language so they can begin making connections with people other than their teammates and coaches.
- Dietary choices are important when fueling the body for competition. Provide resources and transportation to international markets so they can purchase foods more familiar to them and to give them an alternative to American cuisine.

Opportunities

Recreation/Intramurals

- Student-athletes may have interests and hobbies outside of their sport but time demands prohibit participation
- Coaches may be reluctant to allow student-athletes to participate in activities outside of their sport for fear they will get injured.

Challenge

- Athletes are experts in their sport. Engage student-athletes in the officiating program as a way to utilize their expertise without high risk of injury. It also provides an opportunity for them to cultivate an additional skill.

Opportunities

Special Populations

- Generally, student-athletes attend college immediately after high school or junior college. There are three student groups that may among student-athlete populations that may go unnoticed:
 - **Adult learners** who did not attend college immediately after high school or returned to school after leaving
 - **Veterans** who excelled in athletics in high school but entered college following military service
 - **Graduate Students** who compete in intercollegiate athletics after completing their undergraduate degree but still have remaining eligibility. This is common if a student-athlete “redshirts” his/her first year.

Challenge

- Student-affairs practitioners in these departments should be proactive in finding out whether their target students are on athletic rosters and extend support. This can be achieved by sending an information request form to the athletic department each semester to find out if any student-athletes meet the criteria.

Opportunities

Student Involvement

- Student-athletes have a hard time participating in activities designed to enhance campus life due to the time demands of their schedules.

Challenge

- Consider including a student-athlete representative on the programming board, student government, and other leadership positions so that they have a voice.
- Partner with the student-athlete advisory committee on activities. Coaches are more likely to accommodate events that have athletic department involvement.

Opportunities

References and Resources

Astin, A. (1984) Student Involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.

Gayles, J. G. (2009), The student athlete experience. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 2009: 33–41. doi:10.1002/ir.31