

# 15 Tips on the Basics of Advising Student Athletes

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Some first-year students are also student-athletes. All student-athletes begin by also being first-year students. As the chairs of the Advising First-Year Students Interest Group and the Advising Student-Athletes Commission, we would like to offer some tips for advisors who may be new to working with student-athletes.

From the perspective of the chair of the **Advising First-Year Students Interest Group** and a long-time advisor of student-athletes, **Holly Martin**:



- Advisors should be knowledgeable about basic NCAA regulations even if NCAA compliance is not a part of their formal duties. The NCAA regulations are complicated and far from intuitive. Advisors can help their students by being aware of the essential rules. They can discover the basics from their institution's compliance officer.
- Remember that student-athletes are frequently making a huge transition to the often extremely demanding world of college athletics as well as to the challenging demands of college academics. They need understanding and support during this difficult transition in order to get off to a good start and not become discouraged or sell themselves short.
- To be credible, advisors need to know their campus and the demands and pressures it places on student-athletes so that they can give advice that makes sense in their students' situation. On some campuses the demands on student-athletes are minimal, and on others the demands, both physically and emotionally, are tremendous. To be effective, advisors need to know the details of their student-athletes' typical day: when does it begin, how much conditioning occurs and when, what kinds of meetings and practices are part of a normal week? Are they hurt or injured and how much time is rehab taking? When do they have time to do their academic work, meet with professors, work in groups with other students, etc.? Keeping up with this information is essential to being effective as an advisor.
- To be helpful in an immediate and practical way, advisors need to know their students and their needs. In addition to being student-athletes, advisees may be first-generation students, science majors with complicated schedules, minority students on a majority campus, students with disabilities, high achievers, etc. Get to know the students as individuals and have ready access to the support systems all students need and any special support systems created for student-athletes.
- Be respectful and help students to value both their athletic gifts and efforts and their intellectual progress and opportunities. Take students' athletic hopes seriously, and take them seriously as people with careers and lives beyond athletics. Help them think about and prepare for their second career, their life, and plans outside of athletics.
- Advisors always need to keep in mind that they are working with young people in transition. The students need patience and plenty of support and encouragement as well as information,

organization, and clear directions.

From the perspective of a former Olympic athlete and the chair of the **Advising Student-Athletes Commission**, **Sherwin James**:



- Be patient with student-athletes. Advisors need to listen to what they have to say and assist them to the best of their ability. Advisors should make clear that they care about the student's purpose for being in college and that they are willing to help the student achieve their goals.
- Help student-athletes identify their goals. Emphasize the importance of academic success and what it can do to help student-athletes reach beyond being viewed only as athletes. Suggest a GPA goal and have the student-athlete go for it.
- Encourage student-athletes to make the right choice of friends. Encourage them to spend time with students who are serious about their academics and future plans and who set high goals on and off the field.
- Assess student-athletes based on their results. Ask questions about why a student-athlete did poorly or well, and work with them on finding the best ways to be successful. Help student-athletes avoid being overwhelmed by the combined demands of academics and athletics.
- Inform student-athletes about essential techniques for juggling classes and sports. Provide resources and insights on how to manage their time. Also advise them on when to rest as well as when to practice and study.
- Teach them how to communicate appropriately with the professors and other staff members. To be successful, they must communicate effectively with the right group of individuals.
- Be especially persistent with international student-athletes who need to be reminded of additional NCAA policies and regulations such as the signing of the I-20 form when traveling.
- Advisors have an opportunity to be a lifelong mentor as well as an advisor. They should make certain their student-athletes know that they care about them as people. Take time to talk with the student-athletes about something of interest to them aside from academics and athletics, and don't focus solely on office meetings. Advisors should demonstrate to student-athletes that they are an advisor outside of the office as well as within it.

For more information on working with student-athletes and first-year students, see the **NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources** and the **Commission and Interest Group web pages**.

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