



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

November 14, 2019 ♦ Vol. XLI, No. 43

Supporting Community College Student Athletes

Athletics are an important part of the community college experience. There has been a nine percent increase in the number of sports offered at community colleges and a 20 percent increase in the number of student athletes since 2005[i]. There are roughly 84,000 students competing in community college athletics between the California Community College Athletic Association, the Northwest Athletic Conference (representing community colleges in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (representing over 500 two-year colleges in 43 states). These students are part of the mosaic of diversity that characterizes the community college student body.

We all know that community college students face many obstacles. They may have to work a part- or full-time job to support themselves and their family while in college. Student athletes face these same obstacles and more. They have additional time pressures such as practice, competitions, and team functions. These compounding factors impact the ability of these students to be successful. However, unlike many four-year universities, most community colleges have limited resources to help support student athletes. Fortunately, there are strategies that can be implemented to help support these students. These interventions can be at an institutional level through the athletic and enrollment service departments, or at the classroom level through faculty assistance.

Institutional Interventions

- Assign academic counselors to specialize as athletic advisors. These advisors understand eligibility requirements and can assist student athletes in scheduling classes that do not conflict with their team schedules.
- Set up mandatory study tables for athletes. Ensure that a consistent schedule is in place so student athletes get into the habit of blocking and managing study time. Coaches can oversee the study tables so there are no additional financial drains, and the study tables can be scheduled during practice time to ensure students attend. These study tables are a great opportunity for tutors to assist student athletes.
- Find mentors to help support student athletes

with time management, school concerns, and life issues. These mentors can be upper-level students, especially in counseling, psychology, or social work, or former athletes who have completed their two years of eligibility.

- Grade and classroom behavior checks performed by coaching staff or other athletic department personnel are an excellent way to monitor grades, attendance, tardiness, and missed assignments. These checks can be done through the college's learning management system or through communication with faculty. This should be in collaboration with the athletes so they can learn what it takes to be a successful student.
- A speaker series can educate and inspire student athletes. These speakers can be alumni, community leaders, faculty, or administrators from other areas of the college, as well as professional athletes who can serve as role models for the players.
- Athletic learning communities have become a great way for a cohort of students to support and collaborate with each other. Traditionally, learning communities have been grouped by academic interests, but an athletic learning community allows student athletes to support one another.

Classroom Interventions

- One of the easiest things faculty can do for students is find out where they come from and what activities they participate in. Arrive to class early on the first day and get to know your students as they come into the room, or for large classes, have students fill out index cards with preferred name, year in school, and extracurricular activities.
- Some students are hesitant to tell faculty they are athletes because they may have been negatively prejudged in the past. The majority of student athletes put the same energy into their studies as they do with their sport. Get to know your students and take an interest in activities outside of the classroom. Care should be taken to treat all students similarly, while keeping in mind the time constraints student athletes encounter.
- Ask your student athletes for their upcoming schedule so accommodations can be made if necessary. The athletic department should have

permission slips for students to present to professors.

- Faculty should provide as much detailed structure as possible when developing their courses. Syllabi and learning management systems can specify class policies, grading criteria, dates of assignments and tests, and class expectations. This format will benefit all students, but is especially helpful to student athletes who are budgeting time and work constraints.
- Some athletic departments do routine academic checks throughout the semester. If a student athlete or the athletic department personnel request information on the status in the class, provide this information in a timely manner.
- Because most community colleges are commuter schools, poor attendance at athletic events is common. If time allows, attending competitions is a great way to support your students and your college. Engagement with students outside the classroom setting is a key factor for academic success.

These relatively easy measures will help support student athletes and allow them to realize their academic and athletic goals. Incorporating strategies that integrate a support system at the institutional and classroom levels is the key to greater student success!

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[i] National Junior College Athletic Association (2018). Student athlete participation statistics. Retrieved June 27, 2019 from www.njcaa.org/about/history/SA_Participation/index.