

## Academic Support Program for Student-Athletes (ASPSA)

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Planning Process  
September 1, 2011

During the 2010-2011 academic year, a strategic planning process for the Academic Support Program for Student-Athletes (ASPSA) was led by John Blanchard, Senior Associate Athletics Director for Student-Athlete Services and Bobbi Owen, Senior Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Michael R. McVaugh Distinguished Professor of Dramatic Art. The relocation of ASPSA scheduled for August 2011 into a new 30,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art Center for Student-Athlete Excellence where student-athletes will have access to the space, technology, and support needed to excel in Carolina's increasingly competitive academic environment, was the prime motivator for undertaking a planning process. In addition, the July 2010 NCAA investigation into agent-related activities of several student-athletes on the football team was expanded in August 2010 to include an investigation into alleged academic misconduct. This alleged misconduct involved student-athletes on the football team as well as a tutor/mentor employed at one time in the ASPSA making an assessment of the program, focusing on its mission, staff, and resources including space and budget even more timely.

The committee (see Appendix A) met on November 5 and December 3, 2010, and February 15, March 1, March 29, and April 19, 2011. Two sub-groups also met: Eileen Parsons led a group focused on support services and Harold Woodard led one focused on staffing patterns in this and similar programs. In addition, senior undergraduate Jordan Allyne consulted with fellow student-athletes and shared information she received from them with the group. The notes and draft reports from each of these areas may prove useful as implementation of recommendations by the planning committee is considered and explored in more depth.

Student-athletes play an important role in the University, but the time demands of participating in athletics and representing the University are significant. The University has both a responsibility and an obligation to provide student-athletes with access to high quality academic support services. In our discussions, we have recognized that there is wide variation in the academic backgrounds and preparation of student-athletes and that the services needed by them differ. Thus, one of our recommendations is that the ASPSA consider whether services should be delivered based on academic preparedness, rather than exclusively on a team-by-team basis. Some student-athletes require more attention than others and when that focus is needed may vary.

The following recommendations are meant to include student-athletes who are well-prepared for college as well as those less well-prepared for college and to strengthen an already strong program staffed by professionals whose goal is academic success for every student-athlete at Carolina. Our goal in setting forth these recommendations is not to be too prescriptive, but rather to suggest areas where we believe beneficial changes could be made. In our view, ASPSA would benefit from the following:

1. **Develop and share the vision.** Developing a vision for the academic development and success of all student-athletes that is shared by ASPSA staff, team coaches, the Department of Athletics, and student-athletes, among others;
2. **Collaborate with other units serving undergraduates.** Actively participating in the University's network of academic support services to supplement what can be provided within ASPSA;
3. **Revitalize the Faculty Advisory Committee.** Utilizing the ASPSA advisory committee which should be revitalized with a commitment to systematic and on-going program evaluation and assessment, serving as a sounding board for programming, and providing advice on day-to-day issues as well as long-term planning;

4. **Increase the ASPSA Staff.** Increasing the size of the current staff and considering the unit structure to be consistent with University guidelines and to more effectively support the academic development and success of student-athletes at all levels including special admission cases and services for those student-athletes who find themselves on academic probation or below some other academic performance threshold; developing a new approach to coordinating and supervising tutoring and mentoring;
5. **Conduct a Program of Assessment and Evaluation.** Developing and conducting annual assessments of all programming provided to student-athletes in coordination with the ASPSA Faculty Advisory Committee;
6. **Review Admissions.** Clarifying and strengthening the role of the ASPSA in the admission of student-athletes as well as the relationship between ASPSA and coaches during the recruiting process.

## Recommendations

1. **Develop and share the vision.** Developing a clear and shared vision for the academic development and success of all student-athletes irrespective of sport is important. Degree completion, development of academic skills, attainment of learning goals, and the realization of each student's academic potential is the University's goal for each student-athlete. A shared vision for the academic development and success of all student-athletes involves a commitment by all parties in the University community, including faculty, staff, administrators, coaches, family members, fellow students, advisors and counselors, ASPSA personnel, and even fans.

Academic success for student-athletes must continue to reflect Carolina's tradition of excellence (including but not limited to retention and graduation) when student-athletes are studying for class as well as when they are on the field. Coaches and members of ASPSA's professional staff should have the same definition of academic success and recognize that it may be necessary at some specific times for some individual student-athletes to be *in training* for classroom purposes instead of for their sport. Put another way, in appropriate cases ASPSA-sponsored academic activities may be required, even if they occasionally interfere with athletic-related activities. Coaches and ASPSA staff must be partners in this effort and reach mutually agreeable decisions. In rare circumstances when this does not occur, the Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education and the Senior Associate Athletics Director for Student-Athlete Services will be involved.

This shared vision will be articulated in a policy that informs academic expectations and subsequent decisions with respect to student-athletes. For example, some athletic departments in other research universities have instituted a point system. If student-athletes accumulate a certain number of points for actions that undermine their academic progress (e.g., missed tutoring session, failing grades on assignments) then time is made available in student-athletes' schedules for them to rebound academically before such actions lead to undesirable academic statuses (e.g., academic probation).

A shared vision for the academic development and success of student-athletes might also involve the development of a completion-to-degree plan but also an individualized academic development plan that evolves with the student-athlete's progress. A formal developmental plan could be created by generating semester, monthly, and weekly calendars to help student-athletes manage and monitor academic workloads over the course of four (or more) years. Working with their academic advocate – their ASPSA academic counselor – who has adequate authority to negotiate with their coaches what is in their best academic interests, the academic success of student-athletes could be enhanced.

2. **Collaborate with other units serving undergraduates.** The ASPSA should utilize University services when and where possible to create a *system or network* of academic support services that could supplement services provided by ASPSA. The University has numerous offices and programs that provide academic assistance and support including the Writing Center, Disabilities Services, the Learning Center and its Academic Success Program for Students with LD/ADHD, an Academic Advising Program, the North Carolina Health Careers Access Program, the Carolina Center for Public Service, and University Career Services, among many others.

When time allows, student-athletes should avail themselves of the numerous opportunities provided to all students. The professional staff of ASPSA should be actively engaged with these offices and centers to supplement what can be provided within ASPSA. The demands placed on student-athletes make access to these other programs difficult, but changes could be made to help student-athletes become even more effectively integrated into the University environment.

- a. The Summer Bridge Program could be explored for ways in which it might be adjusted so matriculating student-athletes from small and/or rural communities in North Carolina could benefit from it during the summer before their first year.
  - b. The SCORES program for football student-athletes is conducted during the second summer session for first-year students. The ASPSA and the Office of Student-Athlete Development could collaborate on ways to focus the program more on academic skills, rather than on life skills.
  - c. The ASPSA, coaches, and the Department of Athletics should embrace the importance of student-athletes participating in other University programs for undergraduate students, such as undergraduate research and international experiences, which are part of the Carolina culture. The participation of student-athletes in these experiences should be tracked and publicly celebrated. In so much as it is possible, the University commitment to having undergraduates participate in First Year Seminars, undergraduate research, international activities, experiential education, service learning opportunities, etc. should extend to student-athletes.
  - d. The Office of Disability Services, the Academic Success Program for Students with LD and ADHD (housed in the Learning Center), and the ASPSA staff should work together with student-athletes to develop creative ways for them to advocate for themselves when a documented disability provides them with access to the services mandated under federal law.
  - e. The professional staff members of the ASPSA are not academic advisors by job description or training which means that making use of the Academic Advising Program on a regular basis is critical. As with all undergraduate students at Carolina, the primary academic advisor in Steele Building is assigned based on intended major, along with secondary advisors (in their major departments, for their minors and related activities). The professional staff in the ASPSA has related responsibilities to document academic progress for NCAA compliance purposes, but this responsibility is distinct from that provided by the primary academic advisor.
  - f. The ASPSA staff and coaches should encourage student-athletes to take full advantage of other programming provided by the Department of Athletics (for example, the Carolina Leadership Academy, Career Development, Life Skills Seminars, and compliance activities).
3. **Revitalize the Faculty Advisory Committee.** There has been a faculty advisory committee for the ASPSA since the late 1980s which has been an important resource for the professional staff in the program. In recent years, it has met less often and new members have not been appointed when departures have occurred. A vigorous advisory committee, consisting of tenure-track and fixed-term faculty, as well as some appropriate full-time professional staff (EPA non-faculty) members would be a useful asset. The committee meetings should be posted and open as is the case for all other University

committees. Some members of this review committee have indicated a willingness to participate on an advisory committee and it would be helpful to have them help guide the implementation of the recommendations in this report.

Committee members should be appointed by the Senior Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education to staggered terms. Organizational support should be provided by the Director of ASPSA who would be an ex officio (voting) member. The Associate Dean and Director of the Center for Student Success and Academic Counseling (CSSAC) and the Senior Associate Athletics Director for Student-Athlete Services would also be ex officio (voting) members, as would the chair of the Faculty Athletics Committee. The advisory committee should define its role and expectations and hold meetings on a regular basis (perhaps twice a semester and once each summer for a total of five times each year). This format would be consistent with other advisory committees at Carolina.

Among the items the advisory committee could consider would be ways to address the impact of curricular changes for undergraduates such as ENGL 105 which will be implemented in Fall 2012, academic standards (for example, the impact of probation on student-athletes), and the mechanisms for program evaluation and assessment.

**Increase ASPSA Staff.** It is necessary to increase the staff size in ASPSA and consider its organizational structure. The ASPSA is staffed with dedicated and accomplished professionals. Their schedules require that they rotate through study hall on nights and weekends. They are accountable to numerous constituencies: coaches, the public, faculty, staff, students, current student-athletes and recruits. They must also maintain a professional distance from the student-athletes they serve. Assigning Academic Counselors team-by-team has advantages but may also lead to duplicative services and complex reporting lines. It is clear, however, that coaches for each team need a reliable and consistent contact within ASPSA. This tension should be addressed in the light of the recent Bain report (now embodied in Carolina Counts) about efficient business processes that resulted in recommendations concerning spans and layers necessitating restructuring in many offices across campus to meet the recommendation of having 4-7 direct reports per supervisor.

In the context of ASPSA restructuring and redefining position descriptions, this approach might suggest a reallocation of staff resources based on the support needs of the students. Some student-athletes are admitted to the University with academic deficiencies (for example reading level, writing experience, and computational skills) putting them at a disadvantage in classroom settings with other enrolled students at Carolina where the average academic credentials have improved dramatically in the past 10 years. It is an injustice to these matriculated student-athletes if they are not provided with skilled professionals to help mitigate these disadvantages. The academic support services provided to those students most in need should become more specialized and use the more varied approaches that have been shown to be effective in facilitating student learning. The ASPSA staff should include Reading/Writing/Learning specialists who can assist with the development of cognitive skills.

National standards suggest that a ratio of 1 to 25 is the appropriate case-load for students who need the most academic support. Therefore, to appropriately address the needs of the 100-125 current student-athletes who fall into this high-need category, it is necessary to have 4 to 5 full-time professionals working in this area. There are some members of the ASPSA staff who are already working with this group of students, but there are not 4 full-time professionals devoted to these students. Although it may be necessary to phase in new specialized personnel over time, at least one full-time professional should be hired as soon as possible. Part-time staff may also be useful in this area. The associated costs may be

offset in part by using clerical support personnel for functions such as textbook and computer distribution, where appropriate and where advanced degrees are not required.

Professional staff members also need to participate in professional development activities as much as possible, to stay current with developments in their profession and for personal growth as well. Some of this can occur on campus and some professional development would be on a regional and/or national level.

In addition, the reliance on tutors for access to content-specific course material necessitates hiring a full-time tutor coordinator who is responsible for recruiting, hiring, training, supervising, and evaluating tutors. In addition, the full-time tutor coordinator could help with access to the array of services available throughout the University and conduct exit interviews when tutors leave the program to ensure continuing compliance with NCAA regulations. All full-time staff would continue to rotate through the hours of study hall with some night and weekend presence (and perhaps travel with teams) expected. Permissible assistance by tutors on subject matter learning, test preparation, and assistance with writing assignments should be clearly outlined and consistent with UNC-Chapel Hill and NCAA standards. Any disagreement over what constitutes academic fraud should not result in jeopardizing student-athletes' athletic eligibility so this is an area worthy of considerable attention.

- a. **Tutors.** Tutors should be people with relevant academic experience, such as graduate students, retired University faculty, and/or current and former public school teachers who would undergo consistent professional development. These skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced individuals would employ a variety of methods in one-on-one sessions, small groups, and whole-group instruction as well as offer targeted academic programming during summer months and during breaks. The exhaustive training and supervision needed suggests that tutors who can work more than 8 or 10 hours per week provide distinct advantages. Hiring tutors with considerable background in the science of learning as well as content knowledge would also increase the expertise necessary to work effectively with student-athletes at all stages of their development. This strategy might have an impact on the number of undergraduate students serving as tutors. The tutor coordinator should be in the best position to identify tutors making effective use of the budget allocated for this purpose. In addition, the annual assessment and evaluation process should help guide these decisions. Tutors should be hired across sports using their content expertise wherever needed. It may be appropriate to hire both subject-matter tutors as well as writing tutors. The tutors who assist student-athletes with writing assignments should receive essentially the same training as the staff of the Writing Center. Appropriate ASPSA staff can implement the Writing Center tutor training model which the Writing Center will provide.
- b. **Mentors.** Mentors assist with the development of study and time-management skills. The current program, which uses primarily undergraduate Education majors as mentors should be redesigned. It may be more appropriate to use graduate students, part-time staff, and others (for example retired faculty and staff) in this role than undergraduates. During the program's redesign, it is appropriate to consider whether these mentors should also engage in subject matter tutoring and provide writing assistance. Until a new format can be designed and implemented, many of the services provided by mentors could be absorbed by the full-time ASPSA staff, by tutors, and by the Reading/Writing/Learning specialists. Redesigning this program may also be an appropriate task for a new tutor coordinator to undertake.

4. **Conduct a Program of Assessment and Evaluation.** As with all units at the University, following the guidance of its major accreditation body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the

ASPSA should incorporate a system of program evaluation into its operation in order to retain services that work and revise those that are less effective. At present, student-athlete eligibility, team and individual GPAs, the NCAA Academic Progress Rate, the NCAA's Graduation Success Rate, and degree completion rates serve as indicators of ASPSA effectiveness. Though useful, these indicators are limited in providing information (e.g., program strengths, areas that need improvement) that will inform program decisions. Systematically collected data on program processes and outcomes are scarce making the establishment of a formal evaluation system useful. Such a system would include, but not be limited to, (a) documenting clear goals for student-athlete academic development, (b) articulating program operations with respect to these goals, (c) setting program benchmarks and criteria for success, (d) systematically collecting data on services, service delivery, and outcomes, (e) and the regular conduct of both formative (e.g., every two years) evaluations conducted by the professional staff of ASPSA and summative (e.g., every five years) by parties external to ASPSA.

In addition, the accomplishments of student-athletes should be tracked and compared to the student body. Comparisons could be made concerning entering SAT, BE (by-examination credit based on AP or IB scores) credit, and class rank scores, as well as their progress toward graduation via GPA, retention and graduation rates, participation in Study Abroad and Undergraduate Research, etc. These benchmarks would be helpful when requesting additional staff members and for legitimate celebration of the success of Carolina's student-athletes.

6. **Review Admissions.** The ASPSA is not directly involved with the recruitment of student-athletes beyond informing recruits about ASPSA services during visits to the facilities (and similar activities such as hosting a faculty breakfast on recruiting weekends). The ASPSA is involved, however, on a day-to-day basis with student-athletes once they matriculate. Given this experience and expertise, ASPSA personnel can offer a valuable perspective on whether a student-athlete being recruited is capable of succeeding academically at Carolina – both to coaches and the Office of Undergraduate Admissions - and whether the University has the strategies and personnel in place to foster such success.

To be effective, the role of the ASPSA in the admission of student-athletes should continue to be valued. The Director of the ASPSA currently advises both the faculty subcommittee on athletics admissions (a subcommittee of the Undergraduate Admissions Advisory Committee) and the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, which makes the final decision about all applicants. Partly as a result of this consultation the number of cases considered by the subcommittee and those approved by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions have declined over the last ten years. This consultative role is appropriate and the ASPSA is encouraged to continue to provide detailed and unbiased advice about the capacity of prospective student-athletes to succeed academically at the University. This advice should take into account the whole of the prospective student-athlete's personal circumstances and educational profile, as well as the priority that his or her coaches will assign to academic pursuits and the capacity of ASPSA to provide appropriate support.

Student-athletes play an important role in the University and deserve access to high quality academic support services regardless of their academic background and preparation. ASPSA provides valuable services to student-athletes and has the appropriate goal of academic success for every student-athlete at Carolina. This report provides a set of recommendations formed by a group of faculty, university and athletics administrators, academic support personnel and student-athletes to make the ASPSA even stronger and more effective in providing academic support to student-athletes.

## APPENDIX A

### Planning Group Roster

- Kim Abels, Director of the Writing Center
- Jordan Allyne, Undergraduate Student-Athlete (2011) and president of the Student-Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC)
- John Blanchard, Senior Associate Athletics Director for Student-Athlete Services (Co-chair)
- Lissa Broome, Wachovia Professor of Banking Law in the School of Law, Faculty Athletics Representative to the NCAA and the ACC, ex-officio member of the Faculty Committee on Athletics, and ex officio member of the sub-committee on Athletics Admissions of the Undergraduate Admissions Advisory Committee
- Glynis Cowell, Senior Lecturer, Department of Romance Languages, member of the Faculty Advisory Committee for ASPSA, and member of the Faculty Committee on Athletics
- Lloyd Kramer, Chair and Professor, Department of History, faculty member at large
- George Lensing, Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature, member of the Faculty Committee on Athletics
- Bill McDiarmid, Dean, School of Education, faculty member at large
- Layna Mosley, Professor, Department of Political Science, faculty member at large
- Peter Mucha, Chair and Professor, Department of Mathematics, faculty member at large
- Bobbi Owen, Senior Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Michael R. McVaugh Distinguished Professor of Dramatic Art, and chair of the Undergraduate Admissions Advisory Committee (Co-chair)
- Eileen Parsons, Associate Professor, School of Education, member of the Faculty Committee on Athletics
- Steve Reznick, Professor, Department of Psychology, Chair of the Faculty Committee on Athletics and member of the sub-committee on Athletics Admissions of the Undergraduate Admissions Advisory Committee
- Deborah Stroman, Lecturer-advisor, Department of Exercise and Support Science, faculty member at large
- Harold Woodard, Associate Dean and Director of the Center for Student Success and Academic Counseling (CSSAC) to whom the ASPSA director reports

### Ex Officio Members (Colleagues and Resources):

- Brent Blanton, Associate Director of the ASPSA
- Joe Breschi, Head Lacrosse Coach
- Beth Bridger Associate Director of the ASPSA
- Paula Goodman, Administrative Manager, Undergraduate Education
- Susan Maloy, Assistant Athletics Director for Athletics Certification and Eligibility
- Robert Mercer, Director of the ASPSA

## APPENDIX B

### ASPSA staff chart

