

## ***Journal of Issues in*** ***Intercollegiate Athletics***

### **The Collegiate Athlete at Risk: Strategies for Academic Support and Success**

By Morris R. Council III, Samuel R. Hodge, and Robert A. Bennett III.  
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*The Collegiate Athlete at Risk: Strategies for Academic Support and Success* (2018) provides strategies based on different topics relating to support services and student success from an intercollegiate athletic perspective. Morris R. Council, III, Samuel R. Hodge, and Robert A. Bennett, III have compiled seven chapters written by a diverse group of faculty, doctoral students, and professionals in the field of athletic academic support service who provide expertise within specific topics. Topics include defining, identifying, “at-risk” and transition support, current models of academic support services, self-advocacy skill development, measuring academic success, motivation and academic resilience, response to intervention, and faculty mentoring programs.

This book begins the process of connecting research into practice by offering effective strategies to support college athletes who are considered academically “at-risk” based on numerous factors. Many professionals in the field work with students with disabilities but lack the knowledge and techniques to implement into practice in order to best support this population. This book provides innovative ways of rethinking support by providing information on current research and offering strategies, examples of current programs and support services, and is intended for reconsideration and implementation.

The first chapter offers the reader different indicators of defining or examining characteristic of “at-risk” factors. At-risk students are ones who lack basic academic skills (e.g., reading, critical thinking, mathematics, etc.), and/or present risk factors in their emotional or mental health and well-being. Additionally, the chapter identifies resources for athletic directors to consider when working and creating programs targeted towards transitioning at-risk college athletes. To best support students through transition, the authors recommend a team-based approach providing five key factors which include knowledge of common characteristics of college athlete risk factors, conducting baseline assessments on potential risk factors in a timely manner during, creating and maintaining effective communication, promoting advocacy, and conducting ongoing evaluations on prior assessments. These factors should be implemented from the beginning of recruitment through the end of a student’s collegiate tenure.

Chapter two examines the history of academic support services in relation to college athletics. The authors explain the variations within academic support center models and why they vary based on financial resources, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) divisional alignment, and institution type. There is no one structure that supports student holistic development; however, roles and responsibilities need to be redefined if personnel want to support at-risk students. The authors also call for more discussion in intercollegiate organizations (e.g., NCAA, National Association of Academic and Student-Athlete Development Professionals [NAADP]) to develop ways to support at-risk college athletes regardless of financial resources and institutional type. More knowledge, training, and resources are essential to effectively execute rethinking academic support services.

College athletes with disabilities have increased within intercollegiate athletics. Chapter three provides an overview on the services provided to this population such as an academic support staff and disability support services. The demands for keeping collegiate athletes academically eligible and the underutilization of disability services creates a developmental gap within self-advocacy skills. The conceptual framework for self-advocacy (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer & Eddy, 2005) is applied to the context of college athletics and academic support. This conceptual framework provides a way in which departments can create more support in helping students develop self-advocacy skills through knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership. This chapter also offers resources that can be used or modified within a department to understand student's strengths and challenges.

In chapter four, the authors provide an in-depth explanation of ways in which academic success is measured. The chapter explains variations between the NCAA, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) when it comes to eligibility requirements. Grades and standardized test scores are often used as indicators for measuring academic success; however, this should not be the only measurement used to consider success. The chapter outlines the history and purpose of the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate (APR), Academic Success Rate (ASR), and Progress-Toward Degree (PTD) as well as stressing the power and influence meeting these benchmarks has on professionals in the field. In order to address student-athlete burnout and improve their focus, it is recommended that motivation be placed into two categories: (a) macro monitoring and (b) micro monitoring. Macro monitoring are tasks associated with the larger goal of eligibility and degree completion. Micro monitoring determines how student academic growth is assessed, evaluated, and tracked overtime. Tacking micro monitoring can help provide informed decisions, individualistic support, and demonstrate growth that is rewarding to students and other stakeholders.

Getting college athletes motivated from the academic side of the collegiate experience can be challenging for professionals. The focus of chapter five is to present research on motivational factors regarding academic success. The first part of the content focuses on challenges college athletes encounter based on academic standards and degree attainment. The second part introduces achievement motivation theories, exploring expectancy value theory, self-efficacy theory and self-worthy theory as well as academic resilience. The final section of this chapter provides strategies to assess motivation and improve academic resilience within intercollegiate athletics.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a framework used in K-12 settings to provide tiered support for students that may need extra assistance in specific areas. Chapter six explores ways RTI can be applied within an athletic academic support programming model. Tier 1 support should meet the needs of 80% of the population, Tier 2 supports 15% through group learning, and

Tier 3 is reserved for approximately 5% of the population who need more individualized one on one assistance with developing specific skills. The authors stress RTI tiers are not a label for students as they can freely move between tiers based on their development and/or areas of strengths and weaknesses. This chapter provides an in-depth overview of RTI through screening and assessing, intervention, and progress monitoring and intertwining NCAA recommendations with the RTI model. This discussion can be helpful when assessing and implementing RTI into academic support services. The authors stress students needing assistance at Tier 3 should be interacting with professionals who are trained in special education or a learning specialist to best meet the students individualized needs towards growth and success.

The final chapter examines engagement through faculty mentoring relationships and programs. It highlights research grounded in the importance of undergraduate faculty and student engagement. The term mentoring is defined and benefits of participation are explained. The chapter proceeds to provide current examples of mentoring models for college athletes used at a variety of universities. The chapter offers recommendations for fostering mentor relationships between faculty and student-athletes. The epilogue summarizes the purpose of this book, which is meant to begin a conversation on establishing the best practices for collegiate athletic academic support. Through improved practices, the authors believe an increased focus on at-risk student-athletes will meet the overall ideal of a student-athlete.

*The Collegiate Athlete at Risk* provides innovate ideas, information based in research and theories, and current examples and resources on the topics presented throughout each chapter. After information is presented, each chapter provides tangible recommendations and ways in which the ideas presented can be placed into action within an athletic collegiate setting. The chapters flow easily and rarely do they repeat information. The major critique of this book would stem from the deficit language used throughout the chapters and within the title. Each chapter explores all topics from both a positive and critique perspective. However, the term “at-risk” is problematic and is never explored in great detail besides outlining the characteristics and the definition provided in chapter one. This book can provide great strides in positive change for athletic academic support services, but by neglecting to address the term “at-risk” as a deficit framework does not allow for acknowledgment of all aspects of social justice and the amount of change this book can have on professionals in the field.

When it comes to research in the area of college athletes with learning challenges, it is difficult to find material grounded in best practices and theory. This book attempts to bridge this by offering tools, assessments, and strategies to provide professionals different ways of organizing programs through evaluation in effort to meet their college athlete’s individualized needs. Although some of the information may be understood by professionals in the field, brief descriptions backed by research can help lay the foundation in why academic reform within athletics is crucial to some of the most vulnerable populations in higher education.

This book would be fantastic for a graduate level education or athletic leadership course. In addition, many directors of athletic academic support services who are looking to revamp their services or are considering different ways to restructure their programs to better support the unique needs of at-risk/at-promise students could find this text beneficial. This book stresses the importance of a team-based approach to supporting students, and when considering making changes within an organization, it is important to stress team-based communication and collaboration.