

Evaluation of Academic Support Services
for Student-Athletes of
California State University, Northridge

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2008, Dr. Jose Abara, Dr. Tina Kiesler, and Dr. Mario Lopez evaluated the academic support services for student-athletes at California State University, Northridge. Areas covered in this evaluation include the eight areas required in the NCAA and National Association for Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) *Academic Support Services Evaluation Guide*.

The evaluation committee concludes that the academic support services for student-athletes at California State University at Northridge is moving forward towards excellence, and is underway to meeting the goals identified in the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2006. As recommended in the report, the Office of Undergraduate Studies is currently overseeing Academic Services for Student-Athletes (ASSA). The office of ASSA and the Athletics Department have emerged with key programs that this committee believes, with the appropriate support, will propel academic standings of student-athletes to a competitive national level. The ASSA has formally called upon the collective support of academic advisors, the student-athlete academic specialist (SAAS), coaches, Athletics administrators, the Learning Resource Center (LRC), and peer mentors with the development of a responsibility grid for academic support activities.

Under the directorship of Mandie McConkey, a program has been implemented that requires each student-athlete to have an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP). Other developments in the office of SAAS, and with the leadership role of Brett Sanders, the Student-Athlete Academic Specialist (SAAS), are the recently restructured peer mentoring and peer tutoring programs. The office of ASSA has also increased academic aid instruments such as laptop computers and voice recorders that student-athletes may take with them to class and in their travel. The Athletic Department has recently developed the Matador Academic Success Hour (MASH), teaching student-athletes about University life such as time management, test taking skills, professor-student relationships, and academic integrity and excellence. The faculty of the University is also summoned to partake in the academic success of student-athletes by cooperating in the progress report program. The program entails a hard copy progress report that is initially submitted to faculty, and followed-up by the SAAS with e-mail communication that has significantly increased faculty response. Another program that has recently been implemented at the campus is The Early Warning System (TEWS). This system aids in monitoring attendance, grades, and student conduct, and allows communication among advisors and faculty. In view of the dedication of staff in both the Athletics Department and the office of Academic Services for Student-Athletes, the evaluation committee finds promise in these programs. This evaluation committee also finds that the roles of the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Maureen Rubin and the Faculty Athletic Representative, Dr. Akiko Hirota, were and are instrumental in the emergence of the above programs. The observed dynamics among the participants in the Athletics Department, the Office of Undergraduate Studies, the office of Academic Services for Student-Athletes and the Faculty Athletic Representative suggest that the academic standing of student-athletes is being fostered in capable and committed hands and with great promise.

INTRODUCTION

The 2008-09 academic year marks California State University, Northridge's 50th anniversary. With a total student population exceeding 35,000, the sole four-year public university in the San Fernando Valley region of Southern California has a regional focus and, with its commitment to excellence,¹ aims to be nationally recognized.² The campus commitment to student success and excellence informs our evaluation of academic support services for student-athletes.

Student-athletes play a unique role on college campuses. While striving for academic excellence as individual students, they also serve as ambassadors of the campus as student-athletes. Their goals are two-fold, to excel academically and athletically. While academic success is paramount, their athletic success may enhance the spirit of the campus community and the surrounding environs, increasing pride and loyalty among current students, alumni, employees, and the community at large. Outstanding athletic performance brings national recognition to the athlete, his or her team, and the campus. The national recognition provides a platform to further showcase campus commitment to academic excellence and success, enhancing the brand equity of the university.

Cal State Northridge recognizes the unique role our student-athletes play on our campus. Many parties are invested in the academic success of our student-athletes. Although funding for our Matadors Athletics Program is among the lowest 10% of Division I programs in the country, the collective commitment of the Athletics administration, coaches, the office of Academic Support for Student Athletes, and the Faculty Athletics Representative, is palpable and inspiring.

The academic support for California State University, Northridge student-athletes was evaluated during the Fall 2008 semester by the following faculty members: Dr. Jose Abara, Lecturer (Psychology), Dr. Tina Kiesler, Associate Professor (Marketing), and Dr. Mario Lopez, Director, Student Services Center/EOP (Health & Human Development). Areas covered in this evaluation include the eight areas required in the NCAA and National Association for Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) *Academic Support Services Evaluation Guide*. The report is organized by focal area, as follows, covering the eight areas.

1. Academic Counseling and/or Advising Resources and Services
2. Tutoring
3. Academic Progress Monitoring and Reporting
4. Assistance for Student-Athletes with Special Academic Needs
5. Assistance for At-Risk Student-Athletes
6. Academic Support Services Facilities
7. Academic Evaluation of Prospective Student-Athletes
8. Student-Athlete Degree Selection

¹ "Mission, Values, and Vision," retrieved from <<http://www.csun.edu/academic.affairs/csunmission.htm>>

² Koester, Jolene (2007, Aug 21), "California State University, Northridge: Regionally Focused, Nationally Recognized," President's Eighth Annual Convocation, retrieved from <http://www.csun.edu/studentaffairs/pdfs/president_convocation_fall2007.pdf>

The committee collected information through a variety of methods. The committee examined multi-year academic progress rate (APR) and graduation success rate (GSR) data to determine the historic and current student-athlete academic circumstances on the campus. We also examined various academic support materials (such as the mentor manual, tutor manual, individual learning plan for student athletes and its associated weekly report, tutor reports, and more) as well as academic support locations (such as advisement, the computer lab space where student athletes meet with tutors and mentors, and the equipment room from which student athletes check out laptop computers and related educational equipment). A great deal of valuable information was acquired from interviews with the many interested parties involved in the academic success of student athletes at our campus. Among the information we reviewed during the evaluation were the following:

- NCAA Graduation Success Rate (GSR) Data
- NCAA Academic Progress Rate (APR) Data
- The Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics* (2006)
- Mission Statements
- Academic Advising and Support for Athletes Plan for 2008/09
- Responsibility Grid for Academic Support of Student-Athletes
- Student-Athlete Handbook
- Student-Athlete Tutor Manual
- Tutor Report Form
- Student-Athlete Mentor Manual
- Individual Learning Plan for Student Athletes
- Mentoring Program Evaluation (by Mentees)

The committee also interviewed the following people:

- Coordinator (Mandie McConkey), Advisors, and staff in the Office of Academic Services for Student Athletes (ASSA)
- The Faculty Athletics Representative (Dr. Akiko Hirota)
- The Athletic Director (Rick Mazzuto)
- The Associate Director of Athletics/Internal Operations (Ashlie C. Kite)
- The Associate Director of Athletics for Student-Athlete Services (Janet Pinneau)
- Coaches
- A sample of Student-Athletes, Tutors, and Mentors (n=18)
- A sample of Faculty

The 2006 *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics* informed much of our evaluation. The Blue Ribbon Report was conducted in Fall 2005 under the charge of California State University, Northridge President Dr. Jolene Koester and with the goal to “build on the successes of the earlier efforts to enhance Intercollegiate Athletics by developing a road map for excellence for the next five years” (para. 5).³ The Blue Ribbon Report⁴ includes two key recommendations and eleven more specific recommendations relevant to academic support for

³ <http://www.csun.edu/~presofc/athleticscommission.html#charge>.

⁴ The full report can be found at <http://www.csun.edu/~presofc/athleticscommission.html>

student-athletes. Although we don't specifically *address* each of these recommendations in our evaluation, as that is not our charge, we shall refer to them where warranted. To enhance our readers' understanding of our discussion, we list the relevant 2006 findings of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics here:

Key Academic-Related Recommendations of 2006 Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics:

1. "Additional academic advising/compliance staff is paramount to the program's success" (page 6)
2. "An academic center facility for student-athletes should be established as part of athletics" (page 6). The desired facility "should be in proximity to Athletics Department administrative and coaches' offices, and would house academic, compliance, and life skills support staff" (page 11).

More Specific Academic-Related Recommendations of the 2006 Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics :

1. "Academic advisors should attend compliance seminars" (page 11).
2. "Hours for advisement should include evenings and other times compatible with student-athlete schedules" (page 11).
3. "Staff vacation scheduling should accommodate admission, class registration, and the eligibility review calendar" (page 11).
4. "Develop a method for identifying at-risk student athletes" (page 12).
5. "Provide study halls staffed by tutors and laptop computers for student-athletes when they travel" (page 12).
6. "Identify a section of University 100...to address the specialized needs of student-athletes" (page 12).
7. "Expand the NCAA Champs/Life Skills Program [and]...create graduate assistantships dedicated to enhancing this program" (page 12).
8. "Provide Supplemental Instruction sections...for courses in which student-athletes often have difficulty" (page 12).
9. "Participate in a new state program that will give selected student-athletes financial aid eligibility for summer session attendance" (page 12).
10. "Provide financial aid to fifth-year student-athletes who have exhausted athletic eligibility but have a realistic chance of timely graduation" (page 12).
11. "Develop academic recognition programs for student-athletes and teams" (page 12).

BACKGROUND

The current circumstances of the Cal State Northridge student-athletes are evaluated in the context of the historical development of the Athletics program at the campus. The California State University, Northridge Matadors became a Division I program in 1990/91. The 1990s saw an expansion of Women's Athletics at Cal State Northridge. During that time the Athletics Program experienced shifting conference alignments across teams. The football team was dropped after the 2001 season, resulting in a loss of many eligible student-athletes who

transferred to other universities. The majority of our teams joined the Big West conference in 2001/02. (Women's water polo competes independently while men's and women's indoor track and men's volleyball are members of the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation.) Relevant to our evaluation of academic support for student-athletes was Student-Athlete Advisement's move from Student Affairs to Academic Affairs in 2003. The aforementioned Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics presented their report in 2006. Presently, our campus is going through the NCAA recertification process.

CURRENT ACADEMIC SITUATION

During the Fall 2008 semester we have 412 student athletes competing on 18 teams.

Graduation Rates:

Graduation rates⁵ are determined by the NCAA based on an evaluation of freshmen athletes receiving aid. The freshman-cohort graduation rate is the percentage of all student-athletes who received athletics aid during their freshman year who graduated within six years. Many Cal State Northridge students enter as transfer students, not as freshmen. Transfer students are not considered in the freshman-cohort graduation rate. Thus, the student-athlete graduation success rate (GSR) is a more appropriate measure for our campus because it includes mid-year entrants and transfer students.

A comparison (See Table 1) of the freshman-cohort graduation rate for students entering in the 2001-2002 academic year shows student-athletes who entered as freshmen graduated at a much higher rate in six years (48%) than the overall freshman-cohort at Cal State Northridge (13%). Female athletes graduated at a higher rate (57%) than male athletes (37%) but both genders graduated at higher rates than their overall student body comparison group (13% and 12%, respectively).

The GSR data, which include transfer students and mid-year entrants, paint a more favorable picture of our student-athletes' graduation success. Female student-athletes experienced a 71% graduation success rate and male student-athletes experienced a 46% graduation success rate. In comparison, the GSRs of the 1998-1999 Freshmen-cohort of student-athletes were 42% for female student-athletes and 25% for male student-athletes. This positive progress is admirable, especially since the total funding for the Athletics program at Cal State Northridge is in the lowest 10% of all Division I programs.

⁵ http://web1.ncaa.org/app_data/inst2008/101.pdf

TABLE 1
Student Athlete Six-Year Graduation Rates
& Graduation Success Rates
California State University, Northridge
2001-02 Freshman Cohort⁶

Overall:

	All Students	Student-Athletes (on athletics aid)
2001-02 Freshman-Cohort Graduation Rate	13%	48%
Four-Class Average	30%	35%
Student-Athlete Graduation Success Rate (GSR)		56%

Females:

	All Female Students	Female Student-Athletes (on athletics aid)
2001-02 Freshman-Cohort Graduation Rate	13%	57%
Four-Class Average	34%	45%
Student-Athlete Graduation Success Rate (GSR)		71%

Males

	All Male Students	Male Student-Athletes (on athletics aid)
2001-02 Freshman-Cohort Graduation Rate	12%	39%
Four-Class Average	25%	27%
Student-Athlete Graduation Success Rate (GSR)		46%

Academic Progress Rates:

The academic progress rate (APR) is a measure of each team's retention of athletes and the student-athletes' progress towards graduation. To calculate APR, each athlete can receive two points per semester. One point is earned for continued academic eligibility and the other point is earned for retention. For instance, if a student-athlete falls below eligibility standards but stays in school that student's team loses one point towards the APR. A perfect team score is 1000. Teams that score below 925 may be penalized.⁷ The multi-year APR is based on four years of annual APR data by team.

⁶ http://web1.ncaa.org/app_data/inst2008/101.pdf

⁷ Scores below 925 may result in up to 10% loss in scholarships. Second-year historical sanctions may include restrictions on scholarship and practice time. Third-year historical penalties (below 900 APR) may result in the

The Matador women’s cross-country team earned the highest multi-year APR among Cal State Northridge teams, with a score of 992 (Division I average for women’s cross-country was 970.) The highest scoring men’s team was the swimming team with an APR of 974 (Division I average for men’s swimming was 967). Please see Table 2 for Cal State Northridge APR results⁸.

However, four men’s teams (baseball, basketball, golf, and soccer) and two women’s teams (indoor and outdoor track) fell below the NCAA minimum standard of 925. According to the NCAA, all six teams are “performing better than the institution’s general body, or based on institutional, athletics, and student resources.”⁹ In its *NCAA Division I 2006-2007 Academic Progress Rate Public Report*, the NCAA noted that golf was not subject to penalty due to a squad-size adjustment and the baseball team had demonstrated academic improvement over the time period. The Cal State Northridge men’s basketball team, however, received a public notice.

TABLE 2
Multi-Year Academic Progress Rate (APR)
By Team
2003-04 to 2006-07⁸

	Women’s Teams	Men’s Teams
Baseball	N/A	893
Basketball	969	860
Cross Country	992	953
Golf	959	871
Soccer	961	900
Softball	944	N/A
Swimming	959	974
Tennis	941	N/A
Track, Indoor	924	939
Track, Outdoor	920	940
Volleyball	981	950
Water Polo	927	N/A

This committee feels that positive organizational changes are currently being implemented as a direct result of the 2006 *Blue Ribbon Commission Report on Intercollegiate Athletics*. The 2003-2007 multi-year APRs will not reflect those changes. Yet, the necessary progress our campus must make with our teams’ Academic Progress Rates underscores the importance of academic

addition of post-season restrictions on competition. Four consecutive years of APRs below 900 will result in restricted Division I membership for the University’s *entire* Athletics department.

⁸ http://web1.ncaa.org/app_data/apr2007/101_2007_apr.pdf

⁹ “NCAA Division I 2006-2007 Academic Progress Rate Public Report,” May 21, 2008.

support for our student athletes and the urgency of adequate support and funding for programs that foster student-athlete retention and academic success.

EVALUATION

Academic support activities are shared among academic advisors in the office of Academic Services for Student-Athletes (ASSA), Athletics, the Learning Resource Center (LRC), the student-athlete academic specialist (SAAS), coaches, Undergraduate Studies (UGS), and peer tutors and mentors. The relevant parties have constructed a grid of the primary and secondary responsibilities of the departments, centers, and individuals.

1. Academic Counseling and/or Advising Resources and Services:

Academic advisors have multidimensional roles when counseling student-athletes. Student athletes are juggling academic and athletic responsibilities. The students' time management skills must be honed. NCAA eligibility must be monitored. Additional challenges may exist if student-athletes miss classes because of competition schedules. And since coaches don't communicate directly with faculty, academic advisors (in collaboration with the Faculty Athletics Representative) may serve as liaisons between coaches and faculty, monitoring academic achievement in every course and progress towards a degree. Further, academic support staff attends monthly compliance meetings. Because of the multidimensional nature of academic advisement for student-athletes, including the necessary emphasis on NCAA eligibility and compliance, the advisors' role is best described as academic support rather than academic advisement.

Observations:

At the time of this evaluation (Fall 2008), three advisors (including the coordinator) counsel 412 student athletes. Each advisor is assigned to 5-7 teams. Advisors first meet with student-athletes when the student arrives for a recruiting visit. The advisor introduces the student-athlete to the campus services and academic (general education, major, and university) requirements. Various majors are discussed. And NCAA rules and regulations are described. Once the student is admitted, an appointment is scheduled with the academic advisor at which the advisor reviews academic requirements and helps to plan the student-athlete's first-semester courses.

There is one group-advisement meeting with each team each semester during which the advisor reviews deadline dates, university policies and procedures and any recent changes in university academic-related rules. NCAA academic eligibility rules are reviewed and discussed at the team meeting. During the team meeting, student-athletes schedule individual meetings with the advisor. The advisor then meets with each student-athlete individually to monitor course selection and progress towards a degree. When a student reaches junior standing, and has declared a major, a graduation plan is constructed. In sum, the academic support staff keeps sufficient track of student progress and provides constructive guidance throughout the student-athlete's tenure on campus.

Student-athletes must have three registration holds removed before they can successfully complete priority (early) registration. Each student-athlete has two advisement holds, one with their student-athlete academic advisor and the other with an advisor in the student's major department. The departmental advisors are housed in eight satellite advisement offices, one in each of the major campus colleges. The student-athlete also fills out an advising contract that requires the signature of the student, the athletic advisor and the major advisor. When the student returns the signed contract to the ASSA advisor, the athletic advisor removes the third (final) registration hold. The student-athletes we interviewed indicated a very high level of satisfaction with their advisement from the office of academic support for student athletes and they said the students' resulting depth of knowledge about their own academic requirements and progress led to minimal utilization of academic advisors in their major areas.

The office for Academic Services for Student-Athletes has been enhanced with the addition of a new Student-Athlete Academic Specialist (SAAS), Mr. Brett Sanders, who oversees the tutoring and mentoring programs in addition to many other responsibilities. The department also has 29 laptop computers students can take when they travel and 4 voice recorders.

Recommendations:

The office for Academic Services for Student-Athletes is an undeniable component in the continuing academic progress of Cal State Northridge student-athletes. The coordinator and staff of the department have implemented and restructured programs in pursuit of excellence. If funding allows, the committee suggests additional professional development funding for the office personnel. The current development budget allows only 2 staff members per year to attend a regional meeting (usually the N4As meeting.) It is desirable that all advisors and the ASSA maintain professional currency through continual professional development.

The committee commends the SAAS on current interim assessment of student-athlete peer tutoring and mentoring programs (discussion forthcoming). Continued assessment may be insightful as enhancements are made in the programs. An assistant is also warranted for the SAAS. To our knowledge, a job description has been written but the position has yet to be filled.

The office for ASSA and student-athletes agree that the current supply of laptop computers fills the needs of our student-athlete population. More voice recorders are needed, however, and we recommend the current supply be supplemented as soon as funding allows.

2. Tutoring

Observations:

During the Fall 2008 semester 57 athletes sought or were directed to tutoring. Peer student-athlete tutors are athletes who have earned an A in a course and are excelling academically. Potential tutors may be self-identified or recruited by the SAAS, coaches, and/or the Associate Director of Athletics for Student-Athlete Services (Janet Pinneau).

Tutors are trained by and report to the Student-Athlete Academic Specialist (SAAS). In their training, peer tutors also learn about other academic support services on campus such as the Learning Resource Center and the Center on Disabilities. Brett Sanders, the SAAS, has put together an impressive Tutor Manual for the tutors' training. Peer tutors attend several staff meetings before the formal start of their duties. During the semester tutors and mentors attend a staff meeting with the SAAS once per month.

Tutoring sessions are goal directed, with emphasis on preparation for assignments and exams. After each student meeting, the tutor fills out a Tutor Report Form in which the tutor specifies the assignment(s) or exam(s) discussed during the tutoring session, the current grade the student-athlete has earned in the class covered in the session and any updates on grades received on prior assignments or exams in the course (a partial outcome measure of the effectiveness of prior tutor sessions). There is ample space on the form for the tutors' comments. The Tutor Report Form is then reviewed by the advisor the next day, who initials it.

Student-athletes can also pursue tutoring through their major college and other avenues.

Recommendations:

The tutoring program is progressing in a positive direction. The tutors we interviewed are enthusiastic and committed to the program. We foresee expansion of the tutoring program and suggest the program consider hiring students from the general student body when peer athletes are unavailable. Academic bonds built between student athletes and other students may further serve to build connections between the Athletics program and the student-body at large, fostering enhanced student interest in intercollegiate athletics at Cal State Northridge. Consistent with this, we suggest the Tutoring program also keep a master list of alternative tutoring options available at each college. For instance, the Business Honors students in the College of Business & Economics provide free tutoring in all the upper-division core business classes and many popular business electives.

3. Academic Progress Monitoring and Reporting

Observations:

Beginning of the Semester: Student athletes are urged to meet with each professor at the start of each semester. During the meeting the professor learns of a student-athlete's travel schedule, the two can discuss any course schedule conflicts, and agreements can be made regarding appropriate fulfillment of missed classes and deadlines. At the conclusion of the meeting, the student-athlete requests that the professor sign a verification form that accompanies the travel excuse letter given to the professor. The student-athlete returns the form as evidence of the meeting.

During the Semester: Mailed requests for grade updates from faculty are made by the SAAS during weeks 8 and 12. If a student-athlete has already been identified as "at risk" then a preliminary grade update request may also be made during week 4. Faculty response has historically been low. Fall 2008 response to the 8-week request made via campus mail was

approximately 35%. The process was recently updated with supplemental email reminders to faculty. The email reminders have increased faculty response to 80+%, far greater than the Division I average.

The campus has recently instituted a new system called “The Early Warning System” (TEWS) through which faculty can alert advisement, via online communication, of any problems students are experiencing in class.

Recommendations:

Our interviews with faculty revealed student-athletes do not consistently meet with faculty early in the semester even though student-athletes are urged to return signed forms from their faculty to the academic support office. Since early conversations between faculty and student-athletes serve to set students’ expectations and avenues for academic success, we recommend emphasis on implementation of a system of student accountability.

Early conversations between student-athletes and faculty also inform the faculty of the need to communicate interim academic progress to the Office of Academic Support for Student-Athletes, which can help identify *early* need for academic intervention and success. Although the email reminders have increased faculty response rates, those rates increase *over time* through the semester. *Early* identification of academic progress is key to a) identifying “at risk” student-athletes and b) providing appropriate academic intervention for those in need. Thus, this committee recommends 1) accountability for student-athletes’ meetings with faculty at the start of the term, with a *mandatory* form signed by the faculty, 2) Information in the letter highlighting the importance of the interim faculty report of student progress and providing the faculty with the expected dates (weeks) of future interim progress report requests, 3) earlier reports from faculty regarding student progress, with requests made at weeks 6 and 10 (rather than weeks 8 and 12), and 4) to maximize faculty ease of reporting, move the report from paper received via campus mail (which needs to be returned via campus mail) to an online survey format.

4. Assistance for Student-Athletes with Special Academic Needs

Observations:

The Cal State Northridge campus provides many services for student-athletes with special academic needs. The student-athlete academic support team works collaboratively to identify student-athletes with special needs and to ensure the student-athletes receive the necessary services to excel both athletically and academically. For instance, a learning disability specialist with the campus Center on Disabilities (COD) meets with the Matador Academic Success Hour (MASH) workshop each semester. This serves to enhance student awareness of campus services and to associate a friendly and knowledgeable face to the center, making it more approachable to student-athletes.

Cal State Northridge is proud to be home to one of the largest mainstream populations of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the country. Indeed, three such students are Cal State Northridge

student-athletes. The campus National Center on Deafness (NCOD) provides services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Within the office of Academic Services for Student-Athletes, Larry O'Connor—the Administrative Support Coordinator—knows American Sign Language.

Recommendations:

The student-athlete academic support team has effectively considered the various special academic needs of student-athletes. We urge continued integration of specialists from other campus support areas into MASH workshops and activities that reach transfer students as well as freshmen in order to enhance student-athlete awareness of the campus services and to increase the probability student-athletes with special needs may identify themselves early in their academic career at Cal State Northridge.

5. Assistance for At-Risk Student-Athletes

Observations:

There is a strong group effort among the ASSA office personnel, the coaches, and the Associate Director of Athletics for Student-Athlete Services to identify student-athletes who may be at risk. The strong group communication among these parties is paramount for identification of students and determination of appropriate avenues for early risk reduction. “Risk” is defined generally to include not only grade-point-average, but also acclimation to college life and eligibility issues more generally. Thus, freshmen, new transfer students, and international and out-of-state students are groups automatically identified as “at risk.” Other students may be individually identified by coaches, the Associate Director of Athletics for Student-Athlete Services, the SAAS and/or an advisor. Currently, approximately 200 student-athletes have been identified as “at risk” using both categorical (i.e., new transfer student) and/or individual (i.e., GPA) measures.

Campus Services: The Cal State Northridge campus provides constructive services for at-risk students. The Learning Resource Center and the Center on Disabilities are two examples of campus services for the at-risk student population. Because early detection of risk and amelioration of obstacles are necessary for academic success of student athletes and for the successful future of the Cal State Northridge Athletics program, early and personal intervention is key for students who are athletes. The Athletics program has risen to the challenge. This year marks the first year Cal State Northridge has offered a special section of the University 100 course for student athletes, an introduction to university life and strategies for academic success.

Student-Athlete Individualized Learning Plan: Before each semester, an individualized learning plan (ILP) is constructed for at-risk students and first-time freshmen. The Academic Advisor and the Academic Specialist collaborate to determine a student-athlete’s needs. Study hours are determined and the Academic Specialist meets with the coaching staff to discuss the student-athlete’s ILP and the academic needs of the student-athlete.

Student-Athlete Mentoring: Freshmen and other student-athletes identified as “at risk” are also assigned peer student-athlete mentors. The mentoring program at Cal State Northridge has seen

many changes over recent years. The Fall 2008 semester marks a move to a peer mentoring system funded through a grant (written by Janet Pinneau) from the NCAA for Division I Athletics programs in the lowest 10% of funding. Eighteen student athletes currently serve as mentors. (Ten of these 18 student-athletes also serve as tutors, an important service for at-risk student athletes, which was already discussed.) These high-achieving student-athlete mentors are identified by the coaching staff, the advisors, each other, and the Associate Director of Athletics for Student-Athlete Services. They receive training, which is formalized via staff meetings with the SAAS and a new Mentor Manual that is impressive in substance and scope.

Student-athletes identified as “at risk” are assigned to one mentor with whom they meet on a weekly basis. Fall 2008 mid-semester evaluation of the mentoring programs indicates that the program seems to be having a positive influence on both mentors (as evidenced in this committee’s discussions with a sample of mentors) and the student-athletes receiving the mentoring service. The mid-semester evaluation of the program involved a series of questions in which student-athletes were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement. Highlights include the following findings (where percentages are the percent who answered that they agreed or strongly agreed with a statement):

91% say the mentor helps the athlete track his/her grade in each class

88% say the mentor motivates him/her to improve academic performance

88% say “mentoring sessions are helping me to be prepared for academic deadlines.”

84% say “mentoring sessions are helping me to develop strategies to solve academic problems.”

These are positive findings for a young program.

Matador Academic Success Hour (MASH): is a weekly workshop series for first-semester freshmen and some at-risk student-athletes. The focus is on adjustment to campus life and the foundations for academic success. Topics cover study skills, time-management skills, stress-management, reading methods, note and test-taking strategies, research/report writing, and more.

Recommendations:

The committee is impressed with the group effort put forward by coaches, Athletics administration, and the Office of Academic Support for Student-Athletes to both identify at-risk student athletes and determine the best ways to meet their needs. Ideally, the student-athletes will recognize their own needs before the risks become obvious to others (coaches, advisors, etc.). Self-identification allows for earlier intervention and problem resolution. Thus, this committee supports all efforts to provide student-athletes with comfortable avenues for early self-identification of academic and personal risk.

Student-athletes have generally responded favorably to the enhanced mentoring program, MASH, and the new section of University 100 for student athletes. In our interviews with student-athletes some indicated overlap in material covered among these services. Overlap may be warranted to reinforce the importance of concepts or issues. To the extent that overlap may instead reduce student interest in the topics, this committee suggests future monitoring of content overlap/emphasis to ensure student interest and impact.

Since student-athlete response to the mentoring program has been positive so early in the program, this committee urges exploration of further funding opportunities from the campus.

6. Academic Support Services Facilities

Observations:

The office for Academic Services for Student-Athletes is housed in Bayramian Hall room 220. Each advisor has an office off the entrance space and a separate computer lab/tutor space is attached in Bayramian Hall room 230 for the student athletes and tutors/mentors. The computer lab/tutoring room space includes 10 desktop computers and 1 printer. There is a room down the hall that can be used for overflow during times of heavy use. The current computer lab/tutoring room will soon be smaller because two additional rooms are to be built within the space. One room will be for the SAAS and the other room will be used for confidential meetings with or about at-risk student-athletes. The necessity of the overflow room is likely to increase once the computer lab space is reduced.

Academic support is a joint effort among the advisement staff and athletics, necessitating a great deal of communication. Thus, there's a desire by all the directly-involved parties that academic support be seen as a collaborative part of athletics. Currently, coach and coaching staff offices are in a separate building (Matador Hall) from athletic administration (Intercollegiate Athletics Building). And the SAAS office, in Bayramian Hall, is located across campus from the athletic facilities, the coaches, and athletic administration.

There is no study hall facility. Coaches contact Associate Athletics Director Janet Pinneau, who reserves a room. Thus, the timing of study hall depends upon room availability. Assistant coaches monitor study hall. This is not an ideal solution.

Recommendations:

In the 2006 *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics* the committee strongly recommended (as a key recommendation) the establishment of an academic center facility for student-athletes as part of athletics. Our committee concurs. This recommendation is also consistent with the actions taken by peer Athletics programs in the Big West Conference. The academic success of Cal State Northridge student-athletes is vital to the success of our individual student-athletes, to the success of the Athletics Department more generally, and thus to the image and community support of Cal State Northridge.

We recommend a facility close to the athletics facilities and one that allows for monitored study in addition to, or in collaboration with, the tutoring and mentoring programs now in place. A dedicated facility will enhance efficiencies in student-athlete time management, coaching and Athletics administration. A dedicated facility will allow coaches, Athletics administrators, advisors, the SAAS, and dedicated educators to focus on the student-athletes rather than looking for locations to do so on an ad hoc basis. If funding allows for study-hall monitors other than coaching staff, we recommend additional streaming video to allow coaches to view the study-hall room(s) as desired. Our interviews with student-athletes indicated a high need from student-

athletes to appease coaches. Some students may use their study time more effectively if they know coaches may be viewing study hall activities via streaming video. To maximize student accountability, we also recommend students sign in and out via computer and indicate the focus (assignment/exam/coursework) of their study-hall efforts. With a computerized system of study-hall records, advisors and coaching staff may all access the same records in a timely fashion, further enhancing communication efficiency among interested parties.

7. Academic Evaluation of Prospective Student-Athletes

Observations:

The academic evaluation of prospective student-athletes is made in the same manner as the general student population. Students are required to take proficiency exams before registering for their first-semester courses. Student-athletes are informed of these exams through the same means as the general population, through their Student-Athlete Handbook, and through meetings with advisors.

Recommendations:

Ample information is provided to first-time freshmen regarding the need to take proficiency exams. The committee suggests continued monitoring of the completion by senior students of the Upper-Division Writing-Proficiency Exam, a prerequisite of many upper-division electives and a requirement for graduation.

8. Student-Athlete Degree Selection

Observations:

Degree maps for the various Cal State Northridge majors are provided in the office of Academic Support for Student-Athletes. The office has monitored degree selection. Business & Kinesiology degrees are the most popular undergraduate programs among student-athletes.

Recommendations:

The committee advises continued monitoring of student-athlete degree selection to make sure athletes are aware of, and pursue, the variety of majors that best fit their interests and abilities.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation committee finds that intercollegiate athletes are unique students that add special depth in the pride of the people of the University. The *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2006 noted that a “quality student-athlete experience” is important in strengthening the Intercollegiate Athletic program and its importance in increasing the visibility of the University. Since the Blue Ribbon Report, enhancements have been made in services and programs that support the “quality student-athlete experience” and continued academic

achievement of Cal State Northridge student-athletes. Current NCAA GSR and APR data do not yet fully reflect those recent changes.

We look forward to continued enhancements in programs that allow our student-athletes to strive for excellence in their sports and in the classroom. With an Athletics program currently funded at a level within the lowest 10% of Division I programs, creative solutions and a team spirit are required of the many parties involved in the academic success of our student-athletes. The committee witnessed such team spirit and creative problem solving during this evaluation.

[The following link will open the Academic Integrity OP Gender Chart](#)

[The following link will open the Academic Integrity OP Racial & Ethnic Chart](#)

[The following link will open the Academic Integrity OP Special Admissions Information Chart](#)

[The following link will open the Academic Integrity OP Sport Group Chart](#)