

FOREWORD

College is a grand opportunity. It is a chance to explore new worlds, some unimagined. New perspectives, new ideas, new cultures will offer themselves. If the college or university is residential, there will be new living environments. The degree and kind of change undergone by entering college freshmen is rarely, if ever, duplicated in latter life.

The excitement about entering college is palatable. For many, it is the beginning of adulthood, of separation from routines and persons familiar, of developing new lifestyles and making new friends. But it is also a time of increased accountability. Becoming one's own master means taking responsibility for one's actions.

For student-athletes, it is both easier and harder to adjust to and succeed in college. It is easier because there is an already existing framework in which one fits; there is already a network of like-minded future friends, namely, teammates, and there is already a routine for the use of one's time. But it is also harder for student-athletes. Participating in sports is not the problem. Each student-athlete entering college knows how to do that, and do it well. Rather, the challenge is integrating sports into one's new life. The time pressures and other challenges faced by student-athletes are more intense than for most other students. Creating a balance in one's life between sports and school is essential for success, but not easy.

And it is easy to fail. Very easy. Most students who have a difficult time in college, including those who play sports, begin their downward spiral early in their college careers – indeed often during the first-half of the first semester. It is critical that a new student get off to a good start if he or she is to succeed in college.

Success is measured, of course, not only athletically, but also academically. Very, very few student-athletes have an opportunity to become professional athletes. For almost every student-athlete entering college, the best option for a happy and secure life depends on academic achievement. Playing sports in college is an extraordinary opportunity, but receiving one's degree, gaining a basic knowledge 'toolkit' and learning how to learn are the real benefits of going to college.

Wouldn't it be great if instead of each entering student having to discover for him or herself the best path toward success, there was a guidebook to show the way? Wouldn't it be useful to have easily accessible the wisdom of students who have themselves succeeded and even of faculty members who see students' struggles from an objective point of view? The good news is that now there is just such a guide.

Professors Nathanson and Kimmel have developed an invaluable guidebook for student-athletes, The College Athlete's Guide to Academic Success: Tips from Peers and Profs. This is not a Cliff's Notes version of the courses taken by typical freshmen. It is, rather, a compilation of sage and tested advice on how to succeed in college.

The best way for student-athletes entering college to use this book, it seems to me, is to read it in the last half of their senior year in high school or in the summer before college. Then, and importantly, it should be reread in part or whole during the freshman year. Waiting until the freshman year is underway may be too late.

College is not wholly about reading textbooks, going to lectures and taking tests. It is an opportunity to form and solidify values, explore and establish life goals and plans, and develop habits of mind and body that take one through life. It is a time, too, to enjoy oneself. Participation in athletics contributes to these out-of-classroom experiences. But college is – lest

we forget – also about reading textbooks, going to lectures and taking exams. Indeed, college is first and foremost about learning and becoming educated! Success in college depends on academic success, not just athletic achievements. Professors Nathanson and Kimmel’s guide tells how – explicitly and directly – to do both well, how to succeed academically and how to set the conditions for athletic success.

Succeeding academically, just as succeeding athletically, is hard work. Even for those with significant intelligence and natural talent, success is the result of persistence and concentration. Mistaken dead ends can be avoided. Knowing how to study, how to take advantage of what college has to offer, how to balance sports and schoolwork are all learnable skills. The College Athlete’s Guide to Academic Success is an excellent way to learn these skills.

The NCAA is an association of universities and colleges focused on sports. Its primary mission, I have emphasized as president of the Association, is the success of those who participate in college sports, the student-athletes. “Success” here is defined in this context in terms of success both in the classroom and on the field of play. As far as the NCAA is concerned, a student who fails academically but is a star on the field is simply a failure. That is why the NCAA has strict rules about who is initially eligible to play in college. These rules assure that those who attend college as athletes are prepared academically. That is also why we have strict rules about continuing eligibility to play throughout one’s college career. If a student-athlete is performing poorly academically, they will lose their chance to play.

College can be a life-changing opportunity, one in which knowledge is gained and athletic goals achieved. By preparing well for this opportunity, students can achieve greatly and

have fun doing so. Failure is no fun at all. Professors Nathanson and Kimmel have taken the mystery out of success in college by providing a most useful and readable guide.

Enjoy this guidebook and enjoy college!

Myles Brand
NCAA President
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