

**The Academic Support Program for Student-Athletes**  
**Strategic Plan**  
**Narrative: Annual Review 2019–20**

2020 was an unprecedented year for the nation given the pandemic, the shift to remote learning in the spring, and national unrest. The ASPSA staff demonstrated resilience and adjusted successfully to support student-athletes in their completion of spring courses. Concurrently, the staff prepared to welcome a new class of incoming student-athletes by redesigning its summer transition program. Although departmental priorities changed midyear, ASPSA succeeded in making progress toward the initiatives and objectives identified in the Strategic Plan. Some of the accomplishments are identified under each initiative.

**Strategic Initiative 1:** Academic Support Initiatives. Identify, develop, and assess innovative academic support initiatives for the student-athlete population.

Summer programming that focuses on academic and personal development has always been an important initiative to help incoming students transition from high school to UNC. The move to remote learning meant that the 2020 programming needed to look differently than the previous year's programming. Summer 2019 programming consisted of a Friday/Saturday conference style event for all the incoming students. Incoming football student-athletes joined UNC's START Strong program offered for underrepresented males and enrolled in EDUC 130: Navigating the University. Summer 2020 programming shifted to an all online format as a result of the pandemic. ASPSA, along with the UNC sports psychologists and Student-Athlete Development staff, created a series of recorded sessions for student-athletes. These sessions covered topics such as campus resources, succeeding in math courses, communication essentials, and mental health and wellbeing. In addition, a student-athlete panel discussion was a highlight. The majority of the incoming student-athletes enrolled in EDUC 330: The Science of Learning. This three-credit hour course focuses on cognitive psychology, educational psychology, and the learning sciences to maximize student learning.

In partnership with the Arts and Sciences Advising Program (AAP), ASPSA launched an updated advising model for student-athletes in fall 2019. Under the previous model, student-athletes in the College of Arts and Sciences met with a university academic advisor every semester. Recognizing that academic advising occurs in many contexts over the course of a student's time at UNC, ASPSA and AAP proposed to expand the list of options to satisfy the once a semester requirement so as to include meetings with counselors from University Career Services as well as academic workshops and transition courses. This was approved in 2018-19, and fall 2019 was the first semester students were presented with the options. In both the fall 2019 and spring 2020 semesters, approximately 20 students satisfied the expectation through the expanded options. With this change, ASPSA and AAP acknowledge the diverse ways in which students experience the university and afford student-athletes the agency to choose the

interaction that will most benefit them in terms of major exploration, career selection and preparation, and academic planning. These options will continue to be offered in 2020-21.

**Strategic Initiative 2: Value and Awareness.** Advance and promote the high-impact value of the student-athlete experience, both internally and externally.

The second floor of Loudermilk now houses a new trophy celebrating the academic success of our student-athletes. A trophy celebrating the history of national championships for UNC has stood in the lobby; now a new trophy that recognizes the male and female teams who earned the highest academic performance for each year joins it. The two trophies visually represent our commitment to the term “student-athlete,” demonstrating the importance of sport together with learning and academic success. The inaugural recipients of the new award helped design the trophy, and we believe they will be excited to see the new addition.

We were delighted to be able to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual ASPSA Academic Excellence dinner in early spring. Women’s Cross Country and Men’s Fencing were recognized for having the highest academic performance for the 2018-19 academic year. Dan Rupp, a 1998 UNC graduate and research director for Overlook Investments, initiated the annual celebration. Joining us from Hong Kong as the featured speaker, Rupp shared his experiences at the recognition dinner, and student-athletes enjoyed the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments.

**Strategic Initiative 3: Relationships.** Build partnerships, collaborations and strategic alliances to enhance outcomes in the following areas: success of minority males, student-athlete retention, success of first-generation students, academic support/tutoring, and faculty/TA relations.

ASPSA staff members strengthened relationships with campus partners and contributed to the campus’s Strategic Plan by participating on several new committees. Staff members participated on the Operational Excellence committee focused on student registration as well as other campus committees including ones prioritizing student retention and identifying policy barriers to student success.

Designing services that were responsive to the remote learning environment required cross-campus collaboration. ASPSA worked closely with the Registrar’s Office, Academic Advising Program, the School of Education, and the Center for Student Success and Academic Counseling. Campus partners worked jointly to identify and design responsive support and programming for incoming students in the Summer Bridge and student-athlete summer programming.

An ASPSA staff member now serves as liaison to the newly formed University Approved Absence Office (UAAO) within Student Affairs. Throughout the year, the ASPSA staff member facilitated conversations between the UAAO, ASPSA, and Sports Medicine to create a process to

ensure that absences due to injuries and surgeries were communicated in a timely manner and managed effectively. This included the development of documents outlining the guidelines regarding student-athlete medical absences in relation to the UAAO process. Together the UAAO Coordinator and the ASPSA staff member, began evaluating the protocol for documenting student-athlete travel, now managed by ASPSA through travel letters, to determine whether the process could be incorporated into the UAAO system in the future.

**Strategic Initiative 4: Staffing and Personnel Development.** Assess, analyze, and implement staff and personnel hiring and training strategies to best support our student-athletes and allow for continuous growth and development of the ASPSA staff.

ASPSA conducted a national search for a new Associate Director/Learning Specialist. The new Associate Director brings expertise in working with students with disabilities and the use of technology to support student learning. The structure of the department was reorganized with the Tutor Coordinator and tutoring services moving under the direction of the new Associate Director in the renamed Learning Support Services unit. With this move, learning specialists and the tutoring program now are housed in one departmental unit.

ASPSA continued to focus on the development of its intern program. Intern training was deepened, with bimonthly training offerings that included professional development opportunities, such as a job interview preparation session. Of the 2019-20 interns, one was hired as a Student Success Advisor at a college, one remained at ASPSA as an intern for a second year and one has become a full-time academic counselor for ASPSA.

**Strategic Initiative 5: Infrastructure.** Adopt the best digital and technology infrastructure to support daily operations, improve access to information for key stakeholders, and provide academic support for students.

ASPSA created a new transfer evaluation form to evaluate transfer credit hours for prospective transfer student-athletes. A new workflow process allows Compliance, ASPSA, the Office of the University Registrar, and Admissions to complete this form through a shared communication platform, affording improved communication and collaboration across departments. The form was piloted last year and will be launched in fall 2020.

In 2018-19, ASPSA worked with Information Technology Services (ITS) to improve the technological infrastructure and move the ASPSA database to a new platform. This year, the pivot to virtual tutoring meant additional adjustments needed to be made to that platform. Our partnership with ITS continued with their timely response to our technological needs, facilitating the communication of accurate information to students and streamlining processes in an already challenging environment for students.