

The Academic Support Program for Student-Athletes
Strategic Plan
Narrative: Annual Review 2022–23

2022–2023 was an academic year marked with successes ranging from the return to pre-pandemic operations to the development of new processes. Throughout the year, ASPSA staff members remained constant in their support and guidance of the student-athletes. Student-athletes continued to perform very well academically, and we are proud of their dedication to their academic and athletic pursuits. Some of the year’s accomplishments as they pertain to the strategic plan 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. Summer 2023 programming changed slightly to respond to changes in New Students and Family Programs and the new IDEAs in Action curriculum, which includes College Thriving (IDST 101), a new required seminar for all first-year students. The ASPSA summer programming was delivered in-person on the weekend before classes started. Sessions included a current student-athletes panel (always a highlight), and workshop sessions focusing on topics such as campus resources and communication essentials. The majority of the incoming student-athletes enrolled in EDUC 330: The Science of Learning. This three-credit hour course focused on cognitive psychology, educational psychology, and the learning sciences to maximize student learning.

We are pleased that global opportunities are resuming after the pause due to the pandemic. We currently have sixteen student-athletes who are committed to a UNC study abroad program in Summer 2023. In addition, as part of the winter, spring and summer programs, fifteen students will have had a global experience with the Kenan School of Business. Over the course of the year, ASPSA staff highlighted the importance of study abroad to student-athletes, noting that there are many options to study abroad and there can be a fit for any interested student-athletes.

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

Academic recognition events, including the Scholar-Athlete Academic Banquet, the Carolina Academic Excellence team dinner, and the AD Scholar-Athlete basketball halftime event, all resumed to their pre-pandemic form after being modified for several years due to the pandemic. It was fantastic to be able to celebrate the academic success of our student-athletes in person. The Carolina Academic Excellence team dinner was moved to the fall semester for the first time.

This timely move provided us with the opportunity to celebrate the teams who had achieved the highest GPA the previous academic year in closer proximity to when they had achieved it. Moreover, this allowed us to celebrate academic achievements across the year and not just in the spring. The Scholar-Athlete Awards Banquet occurred in May, and we were able to welcome all recognized students as well as faculty guests to the event. We continued to use Twitter and GoHeels to promote and celebrate the stories and successes of our students.

ASPSA staff members had the opportunity to share with faculty members some information regarding the high-impact value of the student-athlete experience and also some challenges that student-athletes face. The Faculty Athletics Committee conducted a focus group session with the ASPSA staff this past spring. This focus group provided staff with the opportunity to highlight information about ASPSA services and explore how faculty can support both student-athletes and the ASPSA.

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.

Over the past ten years, ASPSA and AAP Advising have established an excellent partnership as they work to comply with the requirement that all student-athletes meet with a campus advisor every semester. This partnership has provided a strong multi-layer support structure for student-athletes. In the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 semesters, 99% of the student-athletes in Arts and Sciences met with their campus advisor. Also in Fall 2022, the new Thrive Hub advising model and the IDEAs in Action general curriculum began. ASPSA worked closely with Arts and Sciences Advising campus partners to prepare for these significant changes. The groups accomplish this with cross training and continuous communication. As part of this cross training, ASPSA staff attended training sessions on the new general education curriculum.

With the changing NCAA legislation landscape, we have more student-athletes interested in pursuing graduate programs. We continue to have many students who are using their additional season of competition granted by the NCAA due to the pandemic as well as graduate transfer students who are interested in UNC's programs. To garner more information regarding the graduate certificates and degrees, ASPSA staff members established relationships with new campus partners and learned about the various program options available in order to guide the students appropriately. For example, Spring 2023 marked the launch of the new Master's of Applied Professional Studies program (MAPS) and the admission of the first students into the program. We have several students who were accepted into this graduate option, and they are enjoying their designed program of study. ASPSA staff members continue to learn about campus programs so that they can refer students to learn about the options available to them.

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.

We were fortunate to acquire a new full-time academic counselor position during the Spring 2023 semester with a planned start date in Summer 2023. With this new position, we plan to realign our team assignments and reduce the caseload for some of the current academic counselors. For 2022-23, our focus remained on growing the number of interns and developing our intern program. For next year, as a result of having a new academic counselor position, we will make a shift and modify our intern program to prioritize the development of assistant learning specialists.

Attracting diverse and highly qualified candidates when conducting searches was originally identified as a strategic direction under this initiative. By focusing on recruitment, ASPSA increased its reach for a diverse candidate pool. One strategy that we added was to promote the position by announcing it on Twitter and creating a graphic that staff could pass along via their social media platforms or to their professional networks. We were able to fill this year's vacant positions, and we are very excited about our new staff members who have joined us.

One departmental goal was to return to in-person tutoring after the move to virtual tutoring due to the pandemic. Retaining a strong tutor pool is critical to the academic support that we provide to students. We were successful at raising the hourly pay for our tutors, which has been helpful in this time of national workforce challenges. We are thankful for the work our tutors do, and their return to in-person tutoring made this goal a success.

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.

The NCAA introduced new transfer portal windows this academic year. ASPSA worked with campus partners to prepare for the change, including the improvement of a site central to the evaluation of transfer work. The revisions streamlined the communication between departments as the evaluation moved from one unit to another. ASPSA staff tested the new processes during the development phase, providing valuable feedback. The end result has been an effective mechanism for transfer evaluations.

During the year, Teamworks acquired Retain, an academic support system. ASPSA currently utilizes Teamworks on a limited basis and is working with them to determine when we can move toward utilizing the academic features that have become available on their platform. We anticipate that the combination of features available to us with ConnectCarolina, Teamworks, and Retain will provide us with the opportunity to make some changes next year to how we utilize technology to provide services, operate as a department, and track and analyze data.