



# JMU Task Force on Racial Equity

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## Athletics Subcommittee Recommendations

### **Working Group:**

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# SHORT TERM GOAL:

## ***Providing Additional Support for Athletics Academic Advisors***

### **Problem:**

Additional training and support is needed for our athletic academic staff to be fully equipped to support student-athletes. Student-athletes spend a lot of time with their advisors and often confide in them when they are experiencing racial bias, stress related to mental health, and/or issues related to academic success. JMU Athletic Academic advisors noted they need additional help working with students who present education impacting disabilities, who struggle academically and/or mentally to help them be successful in and out of the classroom.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Provide additional training for academic advisors regarding diversity, inclusion and mental health.

- For example: Mental health QPR training for suicide prevention - [Click Here for Website](#)

2. Support students of color.

- For example: RISE leadership program - [Click Here for Website](#)

3. Hire a learning specialist in Athletics who is trained in how to assist students who present education impacting disabilities or who struggle academically.

- For example: Learning Specialist potential position description - [Click Here for Website](#)

### **Posting Title: Learning Specialist**

To support the academic endeavors of all student-athletes by implementing educational measures, targeting specific at-risk, including those diagnosed with mild to moderate learning disabilities. Duties will include, but are not limited to:

- Assisting in implementing a systematic but individualized approach to student-athlete academic development.
- Meeting regularly (weekly, biweekly or tri-weekly) with at-risk student-athletes to monitor their academic progress and employment of educational strategies.
- Collaborating with Student-Athlete Academic Services staff members to ensure transparency and develop a holistic approach for student-athlete academic development.

- Presenting educational workshops for student-athletes.
- Assisting student-athletes in receiving educational accommodations as awarded through the Office of Disability Services.
- Assisting student-athletes in developing short and long-term goals, improve coping skills, and develop intrinsic motivation.
- Assist in developing protocol and standards related to educational testing and student-athlete use of the Office of Disability Services.
- Performing educational screening for learning disabilities, scheduling educational testing for learning disabilities, attending educational testing feedback sessions, and educational plans based on test recommendations.
  - Responsible for the assessment of the student-athletes ID in Reading, Writing and Math
- Assisting in the training and continuing education of the tutorial staff and academic advising staff
- Maintaining detailed records and paperwork associated with the educational plans for at-risk student-athletes.
- Develop a working relationship with the College of Education to develop an internship program where a finite number of master level students serve as mentors to student-athletes to continue to grow their knowledge and share their specialty areas before they graduate and enter the workforce

### **Rationale:**

Athletic academic advisors are regularly confided in or presented with a myriad of issues by student-athletes. They work with students of different ethnicities and from a variety of backgrounds. Providing additional training to staff would assist them in helping students more; and also hiring an additional staff member to focus on those with education impacting disabilities and those who struggle with specific areas would help students be successful. Athletics Learning Specialists will work directly with a caseload of student-athletes in conjunction with their athletic academic advisor. This team will provide individual academic plans each semester for students involving tutoring, academic strategies, and academic mentoring. The goal is to enhance academic strategies through mentorship programs and content tutorials. It would also be advantageous to develop a partnership with the school of education to provide opportunities for students that are interested in becoming teachers. We must insure we have resources in place to support the student-athletes before they arrive to campus. With practices, games, and school responsibilities, student-athletes need to have accessibility to resources within athletics. Athletics Learning Specialists will learn and develop through their research, teaching, and services to the athletic community and overall campus community. Each student-athlete affects the program and institution APR (Athletics Performance Rate) which is very important to the overall success of athletics.



**Success:**

Academic advisors will feel more confident they have the tools necessary to assist and direct students when presented with issues.

Student-athletes will feel they are getting the appropriate academic support that they are currently not receiving from someone who is trained/experienced to do so based on their needs and circumstances.

Overall success will be measured by the retention of students and the academic success of student-athletes which will be reflected in the Academic Progress Rate (APR) with the NCAA. Each NCAA Division I institution must submit APR results of student-athletes to the NCAA each academic year to determine their eligibility for funding and eligibility for championships with the NCAA.



# MEDIUM TERM GOAL:

## *Safe Space for Athletes*

### **Problem:**

We are looking to expand the current support of JMU student-athletes through initiatives that are sustainable and easily accessible. Currently JMU student-athletes have access to real response, which is an anonymous reporting platform that provides a space for athletes to share their experiences. We would like to expand on this outlet to provide opportunities for support within the current athletic department staff.

### **Recommendation:**

Safe Space defined: A place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm.

We would like to establish a safe space for student-athletes at JMU. The safe space program would be built on the premise that athletes have access to JMU Athletic staff to discuss issues regarding race, religion, discrimination, sexual orientation, and more. Initially, the safe space program would be offered through a few designated JMU Athletic Staff members that would be available to meet with students at an agreed upon location. However, we recommend adding a designated physical space for athletes to utilize for safe space discussions, affinity groups, and SAAC meetings. The designated JMU Athletic Staff member will have gone through training sessions that will equip them with the tools to support student-athletes and prepare them for any situation by providing the necessary resources. The JMU Athletics safe space program will be handled with confidentiality and will aim to provide support to marginalized and underrepresented students.

- Example: [Boston College Safe Space](#)

### **Rationale:**

We feel strongly that a safe space opportunity would be an essential addition to JMU Athletics. In order to provide the highest-level of support for our student-athletes, we need to have boots on the ground resources that are accessible and easily identified.

### **Success:**

Achieving success in our safe space recommendation would be implementing at least three full-time athletic employees as resources and also establishing a physical safe space location for current Dukes LEAD affinity groups.

- [Click here for JMU Athletics Affinity Groups](#)

# LONG TERM GOAL:

## *Orientation Class for Incoming Student-Athletes*

### **Problem:**

Many students are not prepared for the transition to college and being independent. To add to this, being a student-athlete brings additional stresses and demands that a non-athlete student does not necessarily encounter. Athletes are not afforded much free time outside the demands of their sport to learn about resources on campus, connect with each other, develop personally and professionally, and are impacted or held to certain standards that the general student population are not.

### **Recommendation:**

Our subcommittee had the opportunity to speak with leaders at Georgia State University Athletics. It offers a course for all incoming and transfer student-athletes. The class is taught by an Athletics staff employee and provides direction for student-athletes to be successful on and off the field. We propose JMU develop a one-credit hour, mandatory incoming student-athlete first-semester seminar. We believe this course would help with retention and transition for all student-athletes; but in particular, our black, brown, international and first generational student-athletes that attend the university. It would provide them with a body of knowledge and resources to help navigate a community they are not familiar with while forging alliances on campus. It will create an opportunity to remove internal biases that exist between student-athletes of different backgrounds and allow students from different walks of life a chance to connect and learn from one another. The Athletics department would use its resources to best assist student-athletes in finding success, recognizing that they do not all enter college with the same skills and experiences. It is our goal to afford every student-athlete an equal opportunity to flourish in their chosen profession.

Information to be covered in the class:

- What it means to be a student-athlete at JMU
- History of JMU
- Interesting facts
- How to write emails and communicate with professors
- Social media use and training
  - How to have social media work in a positive way for you and avoid negative pitfalls
- How to be successful in school
  - Developing time management/prioritizing skills
  - Goal setting
  - Stress management

- Career advice with on-campus resources
- Assistance in picking a major – major exploration
- Career planning and decision making
  - Choosing a major
  - Professional dress/etiquette
  - Personal skill identification
  - Matching majors and jobs
- Financial series
  - Budgeting based on your salary, saving money, credit card use, checking account use, etc.
- Diversity and inclusion
- Multicultural issues
  - Increasing awareness and understanding
  - Discussions on racism/sexism
- Compliance – Eligibility, Registrar, Financial Aid
- Title IX – It would be healthy to have discussions about the area(s) of dating violence, talk about what a healthy relationship looks like, getting consent, making smart decisions, etc.
- Health and wellness issues
  - Nutrition
  - Alcohol/drug abuse
  - Mental health
  - Body image
  - Seeking help: how and where?
- Identity discussions – what is your why, who are you outside of an athlete, etc.

### **Rationale:**

Student-athletes have exorbitant demands on their time through their sport making it difficult to find ways to cover important information with them. Having a class for credit would assist athletes with the transition to college, help them connect with other students and staff, all while learning pertinent information in a safe space.

Currently, it is difficult for athletes to find time for personal and professional development due to their demanding practice and competition schedules. This course would build in time each week during their first semester at JMU to ensure they acquire important information to help them be successful in and out of the classroom while building relationships with other athletes and staff across campus.



## Success:

Success can be defined by students feeling they are prepared or more prepared for their collegiate experience and for life beyond. A pre- and post-class survey could be implemented to get feedback from students on how the course has helped them and/or gain insight into areas they feel would be beneficial to add.

Additionally, the NCAA holds all NCAA Division I institutions accountable for the academic progress of their student-athletes through a team-based metric that accounts for the eligibility and retention of each student-athlete for each academic term. The Academic Progress Rate (APR) system includes rewards for superior academic performance and penalties for teams that do not achieve certain academic benchmarks. Data are collected annually, and results are announced in the spring. Rewards include monetary payments from the NCAA and penalties may include withholding from postseason play.

This course could assist athletes in being successful and, in turn, provide monetary compensation for the institution from the NCAA along with providing students with necessary tools they may not otherwise be able to acquire.

