



Simon Gray

Niagara University
Director of Athletics

The headlines that dominate our profession can be daunting. The complex concepts that have been, continue to be, and will be for the foreseeable future are all-consuming for those of us charged with building the future for our department and our industry. In these tumultuous times, it is easy to lose sight of the number one priority that we should all have for our dedicated student-athletes: earning a degree.

We cannot be naïve to the fact that priorities have changed. Even those that are new to college athletics are experiencing seismic shifts that rival the speed of technological advances. We are facing questions that could significantly alter how we approach business. It feels like the challenges are coming from all angles.

With so much change and uncertainty, what do we use to center our efforts? At Niagara University, we recently completed a comprehensive strategic planning process. Our athletics administration,

coaches, and student-athlete leadership collaborated and developed goals that will carry us through 2025. As a university, we focus on our core strengths. For athletics, we contribute to the core by excelling in academic metrics. A student-athlete centered focus enables Niagara to achieve in retention, eligibility and graduation rate.

National outcomes in the Academic Progress Rate (APR) report are at an all-time high. According to the NCAA, student-athletes are graduating at a record rate. Our collective Graduation Success Rate (GSR) has never been better. While these academic excellence headlines don't draw the same level of attention as other developments, we should not be any less proud of these achievements.

Now that a revenue distribution based on academic success is being implemented, I can only surmise that athletics departments are diverting more resources to academics. At Niagara, we have added personnel in our Academic Success Center and continue to urge our coaches to recruit academically-minded student-athletes. When we have an opportunity to grow, we are looking for holistic initiatives that can develop the entire student, not just in competition. Improvements in nutrition offerings and mental health resources will directly impact academic excellence.

I'm not alone, I'm sure, in writing that conversing with student-athletes can be the highlight of our

work day. Sometimes we talk about athletics accomplishments, but more often our interactions are focused on academic progress and career pathways.

It is easy to get lost in the national discourse that is altering college athletics. While change is imminent, I ardently hope that student development, academic success, and graduation remain our top priorities.

Niagara University Strategic Plan 2018-2025: What Must Be Done

Objective 1: Elevate academic excellence and reputation through student-centered, collaborative, experiential and integrative approaches to learning in preparation for 21st century careers.

Department of Athletics Strategic Planning

Goal: Meet established benchmarks that define academic excellence and provide support to lead student-athletes to the primary objectives of personal development, graduation and a successful career path, throughout the extent of the planning cycle.



Degrees for Modern Sports Professionals

Earn your sports management degree from the only American institution focused on sport. Our courses are taught by sports professionals to prepare you for work in the sports industry.

- 100% online
- flexible
- affordable
- sport focused
- enroll any time

Get started today!
1-800-223-2668
www.ussa.edu



only
America's Sports University

