

# I-AAA ADA



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Normalcy is a word you rarely hear in the ever-changing world of intercollegiate athletics. Now, factoring in the COVID-19 pandemic, the appropriate descriptive term to use is chaotic. The abrupt ending of the spring semester, and the uncertainty of summer access and moving into the fall semester has provided even more unpredictability in the lives of student-athletes, coaches and athletics administrators than ever before. Despite these challenging and uncertain times, student-athlete well-being and academic success must remain a top priority.

As the landscape of higher education evolves, trying to “navigate the new normal” is

challenging not only for athletics departments, but institutions are struggling to identify what learning platforms meet the needs of their students.

While technology remains an integral part for many throughout these unprecedented times, even the highest achieving, most tech-savvy students have struggled to adapt to digital learning platforms and online instruction. The changes to the virtual learning environment not only pose challenges to student-athletes, but also the academic support systems within athletics departments are adapting to this new learning environment as well. The need for academic support services is at an all-time high; therefore, the importance in staying ahead of the curve is critical to academic success.

With two academic advisors for nearly 300 student-athletes, learning quickly, and strategically, how to adapt in order to provide an advanced level of academic support was challenging while factoring in the new virtual environment. The changes brought on by the pandemic significantly disrupted the system many student-athletes and advisors are accustomed to having in place and thrived in prior to COVID-19. While these difficult times call for attention to areas lacking resources, the positive side of technology provides some reassurance. Our academic team took full advantage of the virtual engagement

opportunities via Zoom, FaceTime and email, by scheduling virtual academic meetings and tutoring sessions.

Staying true to our core values remains at the forefront of our efforts during our transition to an almost exclusive virtual learning environment. There is no blueprint or textbook to prepare our athletics department in navigating the new normal of higher education. Respecting the academic core values that we have in place as an institution and department continue to serve as our guiding principles.

**1. Attitude** – Athletics administrators, support staff and coaches must remain optimistic and uphold a culture of positivity.

**2. Communication** – Frequently interacting and connecting with not only student-athletes, but also coaches and administrators is critical for the highest level of academic success in the era of COVID-19. Implementing creative solutions to replace the lack of in-person interaction is also imperative to maintaining the structure student-athletes are accustomed to.

**3. Consistency** – In order to achieve academic success throughout times of uncertainty, it is even more important now than ever, to ensure the student-athlete has structure and stability. Technology and communication platforms are giving athletics departments and student-athletes the consistency and connection needed to create the new standard.

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