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Technology and the Student-Athlete

The mission of every Office of Student-Athlete Support Services is to offer a comprehensive array of support programs and services, integrated within the university's resources, which empowers all student-athletes to achieve academic success while balancing the demands and rigor of athletics participation and everyday college life.

Most departments, large or small, require most or all incoming freshman and transfer student-athletes spend a minimum amount of hours per week studying in a Learning Assistance Center when they arrive on campus. Student-athlete support services staff collaborate with university advisors to provide student services, including time management, degree program selection, course planning, progress towards degree and career readiness initiatives.

Student-athlete support services staff also serve as liaisons to faculty by providing team travel letters,

proctoring services, academic progress reports from faculty to coaches and administration, as well as collaborating with compliance and campus administration to determine NCAA eligibility. Technological platforms are game-changers for student-athlete support services, as appointment scheduling features can easily book one-time or weekly appointments, track attendance, keep appointment session notes, and schedule meetings with coaches to report on the overall academic progress.

How do you manage all of the daily activity of your student-athletes? Busy schedules and evolving time demands require a centralized tool to manage and report out on weekly activity. This includes automated reports for coaches, grade alerts for staff, and tutoring reminders, assignments and objectives for student-athletes.

Most platforms now have mobile app capabilities via Apple or Android applications to help student engagement and communication, which means real-time communication via email, text, push notifications, etc. that are built-in for those pertinent reminders or announcements. These mobile platforms can help curate student-athlete schedules and weekly objectives, allowing your student-athletes convenient access to view course schedules, appointments, weekly hours, etc. They can also generate on-demand progress reports, help identify at-risk students and attendance issues, track study

hall hours, department events, workshops or even card swipe enabled check-in kiosks.

Can you effectively increase student engagement and accountability by procuring a centralized task manager, which can generate individual and team tasks, notifications for due dates, to-do lists, handle bulk import, and export these tasks lists into an Excel or PDF format at the push of a button? The NCAA has always evaluated athletics departments on their ability to retain student-athletes, meet eligibility requirements to stay eligible to compete, and eventually graduate, but in my mind, that is the minimum we should be doing as student-athlete support services professionals. Is it too much of a stretch to evaluate athletics departments on career development and placement (i.e., student-athlete outcomes)? Many unique platforms in the market highlight the need for continued investment in student-athlete development. Skills cultivated on the field, in the arena, or on the court are incredibly valuable in the workplace, so providing a platform to connect student-athletes with that skill set to organizations looking for talented professionals who understand teamwork, collaboration, discipline and hard work is just one example of how technology can positively impact student-athletes.



Makenzie Zinger
Cal Poly
Director of Business
and Finance

Since its establishment in 1998, the John McLendon Minority Scholarship Foundation has awarded over 100 postgraduate scholarships, making a profound impact on the landscape of athletics administration and the lives of young men and women. To showcase the achievements of past John McLendon Minority Postgraduate Scholarship recipients, the Foundation presents "Where Are They Now?"

A native of Visalia, Calif., Makenzie Zinger received the McLendon Scholarship in 2015-16. A former softball student-athlete at Cal State Bakersfield, she earned a bachelor's degree in business with a concentration in human resources and a minor in psychology in 2016. Zinger went on to earn a master's degree from the University of Washington in 2017.

Zinger currently serves as the director of business and finance for Cal Poly athletics.

How has the John McLendon Scholarship impacted your career?

The moment I found out that I had been selected as a recipient of the John McLendon Scholarship was unforgettable. It was such a privilege to be rewarded for my hard work and dedication. The scholarship led to various opportunities to further my career. I was able to complete internship hours as the graduate assistant for the University of Washington men's basketball program and a part-time tutor. This led me to the opportunity to work for the BIG EAST Conference office as the men's and women's basketball operations assistant. Receiving this scholarship gave me more courage. Leaving California was a big deal for me. I was fortunate enough to experience different cultures, parts of the country, ways of life etc. because I was given that extra courage that I could do anything I set my mind to through the John McLendon Scholarship.

Why did you pursue a career in athletics administration?

I pursued a career in athletics administration because as a student-athlete I had incredible

mentors and coaches who supported me through the best times and the worst times of my life. I look up to them to this day and I know if I can be anything like them, I will impact several student-athletes' lives in a positive way throughout my career.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

The most rewarding aspect of my job is being able to work with great people and students. I am proud to say that I work at Cal Poly because our student-athletes, coaches and administrators take pride in our academic and athletics excellence. It is a great privilege to wake up every morning and be excited to go to work and know that I have the potential of impacting someone else's life in a positive way by doing work that I love.

What career advice would you give your younger self?

Always be willing to re-locate, smile through the good times and the bad times, and always remind yourself of your "why."