

NAIA-ADA



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Mike Safford Jr.

College of Idaho

Director of Athletic Communications

Online and distance learning has been prevalent at many schools across the nation for years, but not for many residential liberal arts colleges. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the nation this past spring, it set into motion a tidal wave of events for both K-12 and university campuses.

How do we educate? How do we keep the ball rolling for our future leaders?

The College of Idaho, a 1,100-student campus near the Oregon-Idaho border, was like most schools nationally – transitioning from in-person to remote learning students in the span of two weeks.

It wasn't easy, as the only remote learning that had occurred was in C of I's physician assistant program, in partnership with Idaho State University (ISU).

"We had full distance learning capabilities with ISU's MPAS program, but even they normally gather together in three different physical classrooms," said Alan Price, C of I's assistant director of information technology. "The challenge was to take our undergraduate face-to-face competency and make it functional, entirely remotely and online, in barely two weeks. We had a few digital tools ready to go and slowly gaining popularity, so we were able to quickly scale those and deliver a good outcome in a real worst-case scenario."

For student-athletes, however, remote learning wasn't a new endeavor. C of I's football team has partnered with Hudl for video sharing services, with remote learning through chat groups. Basketball, volleyball and soccer teams also used similar platforms. Despite the issues with the pandemic, coaches have taken the ball with virtual learning and run with it.

Extensive summer workouts for each sports team – instead of in person or in groups – was now conducted through a virtual sense, with athletes able to track their progress along with their teammates.

Instead of in-person meetings, Microsoft Teams

meetings are now the norm – as playbooks and installation of plays, formations and defenses are completed in a virtual sense.

Swimming and diving has joined the online world, sanctioning "virtual" meets for the 2020-21 season – as teams will compete at the same time in the same events in their home aquatics center to minimize exposure to the virus.

The familiarity of online learning has given student-athletes an opportunity to succeed both in training and in the classroom – with the over 400 athletes combining for a 3.22 grade point average.

Though the return to normalcy – dorm life, meals in cafeterias with friends, packed stadiums and arenas – is still up in the air at the current time, the ability for students across the nation, both athletes and non-athletes, to adapt, has been amazing to see.

These are our future leaders and these trying times will only give them the courage when they are the ones calling the shots.

Experiences that those of us in the profession remember from yesteryear.

NATYCAA



@NATYCAA2



Christina Hundley

Paradise Valley Community College

Director of Athletics

Hello from NATYCAA! It is my pleasure, and honor, to serve as NATYCAA's 3rd Vice President this year. What a time to take on new leadership roles! That can be read as sarcastic or sincere, I mean it as both. No matter the intonation, most importantly, I believe we are in a prime position to perfect how we do business, out of both necessity and resilience.

In a "COVID world" with so much uncertainty, ever changing rules and regulations, and that perpetual feeling of "are we doing the right thing," it can feel as if we are playing a game we will never win. The pressure to perform in this environment is beyond any training we have ever endured. And that is just how we as administrators feel. Imagine how our student-athletes are feeling. Their consistent drive to pursue their athletic and academic dreams have all but hit a brick wall, or several.

I echo NATYCAA President Joe Jennum's question, posed in our last Corner Article, "Would I have been able to overcome the challenges our young students are currently facing with the resources, support and guidance our institutions are providing during this difficult time?" Although we will never truly understand what our student-athletes are dealing with during this time, we, as athletics administrators, do understand how to work together and throw everything we have at supporting each and every one of our students, while doing the same for one another.

Many of our institutions have been able to pursue athletics activity this fall. At the same time, many of our institution's programs are on hiatus. Either way and athletics activity aside, our student-athletes are navigating a variable focus on academics and its various modalities in a way they may not have previously experienced. Each student's journey has been different, but each brick wall has proven difficult to surmount.

As we continually learn and perfect how to support our students in this moment, we must remember these important factors. Our academic support programs are in place,

however, they may need tweaking and bolstering in the virtual environment. Our mental health initiatives are in place, albeit most of us may need to ramp up efforts given changing climates and concerns. Our everyday student-athlete support structures are in place, however, there is no doubt we are needing to deploy efforts more than ever and, perhaps, differently than we have in the past. Bottom line, we have put in the work, previously, to successfully support our students and staffs in the present.

Our charge as athletics and collegiate administrators is vast. This is apparent in today's world more than ever. It goes without saying, we are putting in the work to support our students and staffs the best we can. In times of doubt, do not forget – and this is something I have had to continually remind myself over the past several months – what we have done previously stands as the foundation for all that we have to do now. Our foundations are strong, as are we, and so are our student-athletes.