

I-AAA ADA



Dr. Laura Jones

UNC Asheville

Coordinator of Bulldog
Mental Health Services

UNC Asheville athletics is dedicated to fostering a culture of holistic well-being within our department. We believe that mental health should be prioritized alongside sport-specific practice, sports medicine, strength training, and nutrition. Supporting both mental and physical well-being is essential to peak performance and allows our student-athletes and coaches to be the strongest version of themselves – both in and out of competition. We work together to: promote the education of athletes, coaches, sports medicine staff, and administration; encourage help-seeking and enhance resilience among all; and break the stigma surrounding mental health in athletics. In Bulldog athletics, we see strength in focusing on mental health and encourage everyone to #BeBulldogBrave and reach out for support and support others when needed.

In addition to providing mandatory mental health trainings for everyone in the department, hosting ongoing team check-ins and workshops,

assisting individuals in getting connected to support, and implementing policies that enhance departmental well-being, we also work one-on-one with coaches to address challenges and develop ways they can be supportive of mental health, while maintaining their tough, winning coaching styles. Since the inception of our mental health program in 2016, all of our initiatives have been student-athlete driven. As such, a core component of our multifaceted approach is our Athletics Mental Health Peer Ambassadors program. Peer mentoring programs are well documented as improving the well-being, success, and retention of students across a wide range of populations. Currently in its second year, our Ambassadors program has three objectives: provide an additional avenue of support for fellow athletes; identify needed education, support, and resources regarding mental health that fit the unique needs and culture of each team; and reduce the stigma associated with mental health and mental health help-seeking. In each of its first two years, we have had 20 student-athletes volunteer their time to be ambassadors, which includes representatives from each of our teams.

Given our limited size and budget, the development of university and community partnerships and the use of technology have been instrumental in allowing us to develop and

sustain such comprehensive programming. We have built strong collaborations with our Health and Counseling Center, Dean of Students office, and faculty who specialize in wellness to ensure the support and wrap-around care of our student-athletes. However, every institution in the country understands the current strains on university counseling centers. As such, we have developed partnerships with outside companies to guarantee that our athletes have access to innovative and effective mental health and resiliency support. In 2022, we began a partnership with MindFlow to provide premiere live, online mental health and sports psychology services for our student-athletes and coaches. Earlier this year, we also partnered with TheZone, a state-of-the-art mental wellness platform, focusing on resiliency and skill building, that integrates perfectly into our department's mental health programming. Each of these companies prioritizes relationships and building partnerships that work with the athletics program and for the student-athletes they serve. As we often say in mental health, healing does not occur in isolation. Similarly, comprehensive mental health and resiliency programming is not feasible outside of partnerships. We have built a culture of strength through collaboration – with our athletes, our coaches, our administration and staff, our faculty, our university, and our technology partners.

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