College of Marin Prioritizes Academic Support For Student Athletes

For 19-year-old David Barksdale Jr. who plays point guard for the College of Marin Mariners, regular grade checks and mandated participation in study hall have helped him maintain his focus and get the kind of grades and tutoring he needs to eventually transfer to a four-year university and earn a degree in psychology.

"Not only is it a way for students to learn study skills but it is a way for them to have a family on campus and know there are people in other sports who are there to support them."

— Jillian Ruppenstein

Without the support of the new Student Athlete Academic Services Program (SAASP), Barksdale, and several other young athletes competing as Mariners say they would probably fall behind in their work.

"It shows that they care about the athletes," Barksdale says. "It's a place for us to go when we need help in school and outside of school. There is someone to help you."

In its second year of operation, the SAASP has already generated enthusiastic support from many of the 140 students who participate in mandated study hall hours, tutoring, life skills, and grade and attendance checks. The goal is to strengthen the academic culture within the College of Marin Physical Education and Athletics Department by increasing grade point averages, retention, graduations, and transfers to four-year institutions. All new students are required to participate as well as students whose grades drop below a certain level. Students with a 3.0 GPA don’t have study hall requirements. Students with a GPA between 2.0 and 2.9 are required to be in study hall four hours per week. Those whose grades fall below 2.0 have eight hours of study hall required weekly. The program is aimed at building a culture of academic support for all athletes.

"The main point of the program is to let student athletes know that the people of College of Marin care about their academic success," says Matt Markovich, director of the Physical Education and Athletics Department. "We have standards that come before our athletics. We're going to get you on the right track to transfer and we're going to help you along as much as we can."

As a result, the athletics department becomes more of a family. "It's a great rallying point for our whole department."

A part-time coordinator not only helps student athletes manage their time but also links them with faculty, tutors, and other resources they need to succeed academically. To participate in college sports activities, they are required to take math and English classes necessary to transfer, and stay in contact with academic counselors throughout the semester.

"It’s a training ground for what they’re going to have at the four-year level," Markovich says.

Community service is also part of the program. Last year, student athletes collected toys and canned foods for the Salvation Army.

"Not only is it a way for students to learn study skills but it is a way for them to have a family on campus and know there are people in other sports who are there to support them," says Jillian Ruppenstein, the SAASP coordinator who is also a former swimmer for the Mariners. Ruppenstein graduated from UC Santa Cruz with a major in psychology. "Most of them do more than their allotted hours. They like coming in. It’s a great opportunity for them to meet other athletes and build friendships."

Funding for this program was provided by the Educational Excellence Innovation Fund. Since the EEIF was launched in 2005 with funds earmarked by the College of Marin Board of Trustees and through the generosity of private donors, about 30 emerging and in-demand programs have received support such as Solar Technology, the Early Bridge to College, Medical Simulation Methodology for Nursing Education, and Project Accuplacer. For information on how you can contribute to EEIF call 415-485-9508.

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The “greenness” of a building is evaluated by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Building Rating System developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).

LEED certification is determined by a credit system, with credits given for each environmentally sound construction or operational process. The center earned a high gold designation receiving 47 total LEED credits for a number of environmentally friendly features, including: light pollution reduction, water use reduction, and using 11 percent recycled materials in construction.

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