

# How Academic Advisors Can Support Student Athletes Navigate Name, Image and Likeness Rules

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## Abstract

This piece looks at the ways Academic Advisors can help student-athletes navigate their higher education experience now that they are navigating the new name, image, and likeness rule (N.I.L.). The paper looks at creating partnerships, collaboration, advocating, and mental health. As N.I.L. expands so does the roles of student affairs professionals that surround them.

## Keywords

Academic Advising, Athletics, NIL

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### **Introduction**

There are more than 460,000 student athletes in the United States today who are playing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) at various institutional types (NCAA 2014). Student athletes have a distinctive higher education experience; one that is full of practice, lifting, study tables, classes, games or meets in addition to their classes, extracurriculars and personal lives. On top of their hectic schedule, they are also navigating a new world where they have the ability to profit off of their name, image, and likeness (N.I.L.). While balancing N.I.L. on top of the obligations of being a student and being an athlete comes with challenges for these student athletes, there can also be challenges for those working with the student athletes. Throughout this piece I will be providing tools for academic advisors to help their student athletes find success while balancing their new role.

170,000+ students are affiliated with division one programs within the NCAA and it is these students who are the most likely to be able to capitalize these new N.I.L. opportunities. These division one students are transitioning from a student athlete identity to student-athlete-brand identity given that they are now being presented with the opportunity to turn their collegiate careers into profit (NCAA 2014). This newfound opportunity for athletes also adds a new dynamic to the role of the academic advisor. The traditional advising duties of helping these students balance their practice schedule, course schedule, the registration process, practices, and sport related travel still holds. However, these new rules present a new challenge: how to remain focused on academic success when commercial success is competing for attention.

### **Creating Partnerships within the Athletic Department**

Academic advisors, especially those working in athletics programs, will want to maintain a partnership with the NCAA compliance office on the campus. This office's job is to make sure that all rules and regulations set by the NCAA are being followed allowing for student athletes to maintain eligibility to participate in their sport. This partnership will enable advisors to make more effective and timelier student-athlete referrals to compliance officers in order to help these student athletes navigate the new N.I.L. rules. The compliance officers can best educate student-athletes on what they can and cannot do as well as how to make sure that any offers, they receive are legitimate. Athletic academic advisors, in particular, are one of the few groups on campus that meet with this student population regularly, do check-ins on course work, arrange for tutors, and make sure their G.P.A. is high enough for them to continue participating in their teams' activities. Due to this relationship, these academic advisors, unlike the compliance officers, already have a window into the lives of these students and can act as a sounding board for them as they navigate the N.I.L.

### **Collaboration**

Although academic advisors for student athletes now have added pressure, they must continue their traditional role. In order to help these students be successful in everything they need to accomplish throughout their time on campus, collaboration is essential. Coaches, administrators in athletics, NCAA compliance, and academic advisors in degree seeking programs need to work together to help students stay on track to graduate and reach all accomplishments that the NCAA requires of the students as well as what the team requires. This collaboration will help athletes excel with the 40/60/80 rule as defined by the NCAA as "40 percent of required coursework for a degree must be complete by the end of the second year, 60 percent by the end of the third year and 80 percent by the end of their fourth year" (NCAA n.d.). The N.I.L. provides students with more drive to follow the 40/60/80 rule and stay eligible, academic advisors can help students collect their paycheck. Paige Bueckers, a basketball player for the University of Connecticut, made an estimated \$63,000 from a single Instagram post during March Madness thanks to her N.I.L. deal (Cash, M. 2022). If Paige was not eligible to play due to her grades, she would have missed out on the opportunity to make that \$63,000.

### **Advocating for your Students**

Academic advisors act as advocates for their students. Therefore, the students have the freedom to gain knowledge and insight into what they want to do. These advisors also make it feasible for the students to accomplish those goals rather than having them simply choose a degree for the sake of maintaining eligibility and the team's and their own brands. Academic advisors for student-athletes can help their students study what they want. At times, student athletes are pressured from coaches, staff, as well as their team, to choose an academic path that will not affect their team requirements rather than the degree the student genuinely wants to pursue. Academic advisors are vital in these situations as they can show how the desired degree's courses can fit into the student's schedule without interfering with practice. They can also point out that students tend to do better in courses that they are truly interested in. Additionally, athletic academic advisors can provide their student athletes with travel notices to share with their professors so that they can receive notes or make accommodations for test days. Academic advisors for this student group must be able to help advocate for their students as well as assist the students in staying adequately focused on their academic success.

### **Mental Health**

Finally, academic advisors should be aware of signs of burnout, stress, depression, and other mental health ailments. From making sure that they are eligible academically, working to create a brand for themselves so that they can secure partnerships and brand deals, to chasing national championships, student athletes are under a lot of pressure. There is an insurmountable amount of pressure that can affect a student athlete's mental health. Advisors should have resources on hand about where to send students who are showcasing these signs so that they can receive help, whether that is a sports psychologist within the athletic department or a referral to the on-campus counseling services.

Academic advisors are well positioned to help student-athletes face an identity crisis. These student athletes may feel a sense of doom once they become "regular" people if they become unable to perform to their standards due to an injury or fail to perform well enough to transition to the professional level of their sport. These students spend much of their lives as incredible athletes who have been able to attend higher education institutions to play a sport they love and excelled at, only to one day graduate and no longer live this extraordinary life. Less than two percent of college athletes are able to go on to play professionally and very few sports offer the chance to play post-collegiately on a team other than their national team for the Olympics (NCAA 2014). This means that a majority of the students an academic advisor works with transition from college athlete to a normal student. This realization among student athletes can cause a loss of sense of self and belonging as well as elicit questions about all their life choices. The academic advisors who work with this student population should be prepared by providing students with information on what to expect and to provide a space where student athletes can be open with their thoughts. By allowing students to be open with what is going on in their lives and providing a space where they can share their feelings, academic advisors are able to help student athletes when they begin to experience the change.

### **Conclusion**

Student-athletes need their academic advisors to help guide them through the complex world of higher education. Pursuing a degree while essentially working a full-time job as an athlete, navigating a new legal world with the N.I.L., and handling the pressure they are faced with while chasing a national title is a lot to handle. Academic advisors are with these students for the entire time they are on campus, working with them weekly and building up a relationship so that they can be supported outside of their team. Having an academic advisor working with a group of departments on campus, knowing resources to share with their students, and checking in with them to make sure they are on track to graduate are all essential to a successful student-athlete experience.

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