

INTRODUCTION



We have written this book to support the academic success of each and every college student athlete. We want them to succeed academically and athletically in college and to graduate so they can realize their life's hopes and dreams.

College athletics is very popular in the United States. As the authors of this book, our love of college athletics goes beyond the thrill of athletic accomplishments to the personal well-being and academic success of each and every college student athlete. While all college students must learn to negotiate the complicated transition from high school to college, there are unique and layered challenges for student athletes.

At the time this book went to press, athletic programs at a number of major universities were facing highly publicized scandals for alleged rules violations involving student athletes, coaches, boosters, and businesses. College athletic programs are under enormous pressure to demonstrate academic success by their student athletes. In order to maintain eligibility, schools and athletes are required to comply 100 percent with very specific and technical NCAA regulations that

govern progress toward degree completion and academic achievement on a term-by-term and yearly basis. This is a high-stakes enterprise. We believe the current environment makes it even more urgent that student athletes, their parents, coaches, and advisors read this book carefully and completely. The consequences of not understanding the tips in *College Knowledge for the Student Athlete* could prevent student athletes from realizing their academic and athletic dreams.

We hope this book will serve as a road map and tour guide for a successful college experience and education. Each of the tips and vignettes is based on our own scholarship and experience as well as the wisdom and advice of our current and former students. The tips are also grounded in an extensive and substantive body of research about success in college. While many of the suggestions are relevant for all college students, they are directed specifically to the kinds of situations that are particular to the student athlete. We encourage student athletes to read the book from beginning to end the first time through. However, our experience has been that the most useful guidebook is one that readers can return to repeatedly, and we urge student athletes to keep this book in easy reach so that they can refer to it when facing new or unexpected challenges and opportunities during college.

We have written this book primarily for student athletes at large colleges and universities, but we believe that student athletes in other types of institutions will find most of the tips and vignettes applicable to their experiences as college athletes as well. While the characteristics, culture, and sport of each school will obviously affect the overall experience of each student athlete, the tips and vignettes in this book will resonate with any student who identifies himself or herself as an athlete

and shares that common experience. This book will also serve as an excellent resource for parents, coaches, and mentors of student athletes.

There is wide diversity of experience among student athletes at the same school, regardless of the size of their college or university. Some student athletes compete as a member of a team while others participate in individual competitions. Some sports have dozens on their team while other sports have a smaller group. Some sports have historically attracted students of different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds so that the demographic composition in any given sport may vary widely. There are often differences in the culture and dynamics of a women's team as opposed to a men's team. Some student athletes play in the limelight of national public attention and their sports attract large crowds while others may play before a crowd comprised mostly of devoted family and friends. There are scholarship athletes and non-scholarship athletes whose experiences differ based on their financial situation. Different sports compete at different times of the year, and some athletes compete in more than one sport. There are differences, too, for those athletes who compete in sports typically considered revenue-generating, like football, basketball, ice hockey, and baseball, and those who compete in sports like golf, tennis, wrestling, or lacrosse.

In writing this book, we have attempted to address the tips to fit as many student athletes as possible in this rich array of diverse experiences, but readers will find that a specific sentence, paragraph, tip, or vignette may apply more to one set of athletes than to another. We urge readers to continue reading to learn more about the experiences of other student athletes and to identify the commonalities across the experience of all student athletes.

For more than 30 years, we have been fortunate to have college students share their academic and personal successes, challenges, and life stories with us. We have been first-hand observers of what has helped them learn, grow, excel, and graduate. We have also heard and seen which approaches to college have not worked so well. We hope all of our students have learned from their time with us, and we are heartened by the many students who remain in touch with us long after their college experience. Just as they have learned from us, we now want to thank all of our students for all that we have learned from them. In writing this book, we pass along their wisdom to future generations of student athletes.

Shelly Kovacs has worked with college students for more than three decades. She is the Director of Student Services at the University of Michigan School of Kinesiology and has worked with student athletes throughout her career in higher education. She is well known and highly regarded for her commitment to providing the best possible educational experience for her students.

Shelly has received particular recognition for her success working with student athletes, including graduating athletes who left college before finishing their degrees. She has been instrumental in the development and implementation of several cutting-edge initiatives for student athletes at Michigan, including an academic support program for student athletes with learning disabilities and the evolution of an academic support staff using collaborative models of academic advising.

Shelly's work with athletes has been an outgrowth of the first model of academic skills assessment for student athletes at the University of Michigan, which she developed in 1976. While she has served on many

task forces and committees addressing issues that have shaped the infrastructure of the student athlete experience at Michigan, Shelly takes greatest pride in her ability to change the lives of her students, one by one and day by day. She has presented workshops and seminars to audiences at the national, state, and university levels covering a wide range of higher educational issues and has served on the boards of national and state organizations in academic affairs administration. As the recipient of various awards and honors over the years, Shelly's most coveted awards are the endowed scholarship established in her honor in 2010 by former students and the Honorary M Letter she received in 2003 from the Michigan Varsity Letter Winner's Club in recognition of her service and commitment to athletes at the University of Michigan. At that time, she was one of only a handful of women to receive this prestigious award.

David Schoem is a first-generation college student, holding degrees from the University of Michigan, Harvard University, and the University of California at Berkeley. As a graduate of Overbrook High School (a large, public, urban high school in Philadelphia known for its championship teams and future NBA stars), David is deeply committed to the promise of public education and an educated public, to educational equity, and to giving back to all of those promising and capable individuals, like the many he attended school with, who either didn't graduate high school or who never continued their studies beyond high school. (David's one regret is not having made the basketball team at Overbrook High despite his great success playing street ball in the alley behind his house.)

David is the Director of the Michigan Community Scholars Program at the University of Michigan and has spent his entire career there

teaching sociology and mentoring college students as a professor, dean, and vice president for academic and student affairs. In these various roles, he has been involved in almost every aspect of undergraduate education, ranging from curriculum committees to student life, focusing on diversity issues and undergraduate education and spearheading initiatives such as learning communities, intergroup dialogues, mentoring programs, and student academic success and retention.

David is a nationally known scholar of higher education and intergroup relations, and has been on the faculty at the University of Michigan teaching in areas of K–12 and college education, diversity and intergroup dialogue, social identity, civic engagement, deliberative democracy and social change, and the American Jewish Community. In addition to his professional life at Michigan, he has been a teacher in some respect since age fifteen in day-care and nursery schools, elementary and secondary schools, teaching the armed forces at Alameda Naval Base, and serving on dissertation committees. He has given talks and led seminars with faculty and campus leaders at more than 50 colleges—large and small, private and public, urban and rural—and is active in national associations devoted to higher education and the improvement of undergraduate education.

Most of David’s and Shelly’s time, commitment, and effort throughout their careers have been focused on working directly with college students as their teacher, advisor, mentor, and friend. We have benefited enormously from our relationships with our students, growing and learning from each outstanding individual we have met. We hope this book in some small way expresses our gratitude for all that they have given us. If you would like to contact us about this book, please email us at dschoem@umich.edu and skovacs@umich.edu.