

**Program Evaluation of Athletic Department Student Support Services for  
International Student-Athletes (ISA) at Virginia Tech**

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**Abstract**

The program evaluation of athletic department student support services for international student-athletes (ISA) at Virginia Tech provides insight into current support practices and provides recommendations for program improvement. ISA are likely to experience adjustment issues during their time in college, especially in first year enrollment. The transition from their home countries to Virginia Tech requires emotional, social, academic and athletic support. A survey instrument was distributed to ISA at Virginia Tech, recording 11 respondents from seven sports teams with eight different nationalities. Survey findings were presented to three athletic administrators who have been interacting with student-athletes for a number of years. Athletic administrators provided personal insight and emphasized the importance of identifying international athletes' needs. During the 2019/2020 season, ISA represented 7% of athletics at Virginia Tech and provided significant cultural diversity to the university. The program evaluation recognizes ISA ideas and thoughts presented through the survey instrument with emphasis on strengthening and individualizing student support for the ISA population. An evaluation of student support services provided by the athletic department is presented. Support services such as study hall, sport psychology, mentoring and alumni associations are presented throughout this study. Program improvement is recommended by implementing a mentorship program for ISA, creating an outlet outside of athletics and better identifying each ISA need. A copy of the program evaluation was provided to athletic administrators at Virginia Tech.

*Keywords:* program evaluation, international student-athletes (ISA), student support services, adjustment issues, athletic department, mentorship program

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## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

**Introduction**

Participation of international student-athletes (ISA) in NCAA Division 1 intercollegiate sports has increased significantly over the past few years. There were a total of 12,379 ISA during 2015/2016 and 14,155 ISA during 2017/2018 season, resulting in an increase of 14.35% (<http://www.ncaa.org>). International students represented 11% of the student body at Virginia Tech in year 2018 (<https://www.collegefactual.com>). Throughout the 2019/2020 season, a total of 51 ISA across 22 different sports teams were enrolled at Virginia Tech, representing a total of 7% of athletics (S. Armstrong, personal communication, February 1, March 4, 2020; <https://www.collegefactual.com>). Due to advances in both technology and communication the possibility to reach international athletes have expanded dramatically (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000) resulting in an enrichment of cultural diversity at US college campuses (Stewart, 2013). “The face of collegiate sport in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) competition is changing to represent the increasing diversity in the United States population” (Popp, Hums & Greenwell, 2009, p.93).

A great number of ISA come to the United States to pursue their dreams of playing collegiate sports while earning a degree at a top university. But the transition to college can be quite difficult. Homesickness, difficulties overcoming language barriers and adjusting to U.S culture are the three most prevalent adjustment issues ISA experience (Newell, 2015). Many athletic administrators across the country reveal concerns about how ISA are adjusting to their collegiate experience (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000) as the transition to college is marked by emotional, social and academic adjustments (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). Dating back to year 2013/2014, a total of 14 ISA withdrew from Virginia Tech, with 64.29% (total of nine ISA) leaving in first year enrollment (A. Conyers, personal communication, October 2-30, 2019).

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Practitioners must recognize various factors that can influence ISA transition to college and provide all international athletes with individualized advising and mentoring (Newell, 2015).

**Definition of Terms**

**Program evaluation** – A program evaluation is a method to analyze current program activities, policies and services available.

**Student support services** - Student support services provide guidance and assistance for students enrolled in university.

**International student-athlete (ISA)** - An international-student athlete (ISA) is an international student who has moved to the United States to enroll in university and participate in intercollegiate athletics.

**Student-athlete** - “A student-athlete is a student whose enrollment was solicited by a member of the athletics staff or other representative of athletics interests with a view toward the student’s ultimate participation in the intercollegiate athletics program” (<https://web3.ncaa.org/lstdbi>).

**Professional athlete** - “A professional athlete is one who receives any kind of payment, directly or indirectly, for athletics participation except as permitted by the governing legislation of the Association” (<https://web3.ncaa.org/lstdbi>).

**Study group** - An informal group of students who meet to study a specific subject and share information and ideas.

**Study hall** – Study hall provides athletes with a quiet place to study and complete assignments. Study hall hours are structured by sport, academic counselor and academic standings.

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**SAASS** - Student-Athlete Academic Support Services (SAASS) helps student-athletes with their academic requirements by “providing comprehensive academic support services such as tutoring, studying assistance, computing technology, and academic and individual skill development programs” ( <https://www.saass.vt.edu>)

**Mentorship program** – A mentorship program provides students the opportunity to connect and share personal goals with a mentor through supportive and encouraging environments.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project is to evaluate athletic department student support services for international student-athletes (ISA) at Virginia Tech. A survey instrument alongside semi-structured interviews will identify adjustment issues in first year enrollment and establish areas of improvements needed for sources of support to become stronger. This evaluation will provide insight into current practices such as support programs, mentoring and advising provided by the athletic department. The evaluation will also present opportunities for future program improvement at Virginia Tech which will be instrumental for future recruitment of ISA. Implementing suggested recommendations within the athletic department should result in higher retention levels for ISA at Virginia Tech.

### **Literature Review**

“The face of collegiate sport in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) competition is changing to represent the increasing diversity in the United States population” (Popp, Hums & Greenwell, 2009, p.93). International student-athletes (ISA) attend college to experience an alternative from the sport systems in their home countries. ISA provides universities with diversification and cultural experiences which enhances benefits for the

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university (Sullivan, 2018) and collegiate sports (<http://www.ncaa.org>). An enrichment of cultural diversity and educational experiences also help heighten the reputation of institutions in the United States (Stewart, 2013).

***Domestic vs. International Student-Athletes***

The challenges for ISA begin during the recruitment phase. Competition prior to applying to college is different for ISA as compared to domestic student athletes. Popp, Hums & Greenwell (2009) indicate that ISA develop their skill-set prior to college in various sports systems, including regional and national competition. Many of the sports systems abroad are structured in ways where young athletes play for high level clubs with professional athletes while maintaining their amateurism. Athletes who prosper in their sports are therefore given the opportunity to play in the highest league in their country or region. There are also possibilities to play for various leagues within the same club, giving young athletes a great amount of experience at a highly competitive level.

Unfortunately, many sport clubs around the world define amateurism in numerous ways. NCAA amateurism bylaw 14.01.3.1 state “A student-athlete shall not be eligible for participation in an intercollegiate sport if the individual takes or has taken pay, or has accepted the promise of pay in any form, for participation in that sport, or if the individual has violated any of the other regulations related to amateurism set forth in Bylaw 12 (see Bylaw 12.1.1)”

(<https://web3.ncaa.org>) and bylaw 12.01.3 state “NCAA amateur status may be lost as a result of activities before enrollment in college” (<https://web3.ncaa.org/lstdbi>). Abbey-Pinegar (2010) argues that amateurism standards differ by country which results in a lack of competitive equity between domestic and international student-athletes. There is a strong need for a global standard of amateurism to be developed as it would benefit all athletes. The increasingly large number of

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ISA who continue to pursue collegiate sports only enhances the need for such a standard (Abbey-Pinegar, 2010). Failure of interpreting amateurism correctly can lead to the expense of a young athlete's collegiate dreams. Many international athletes who have a desire to play collegiate sports will take the necessary steps for their amateurism to abide by NCAA bylaws. International athletes should not be punished by given opportunities in their home countries to play in high level competitions and leagues while surrounded by professional athletes if they remain an amateur. "In a system that sponsors equality and diversity as virtues for the student-athletes, the NCAA lives up to neither criterion in the treatment of international prospects" (Stewart, 2013, p.223).

It is also known that the purpose behind ISA collegiate attendance and engagement differs from domestic student-athletes. Stokowski, Huffman & Aicher (2013) state that domestic student-athletes value opportunities for financial aid, academics, location of the institution, the prospect of playing time, and the reputation of head coach when selecting a college. "Several top factors for domestic student-athletes' college choice seem to stem from academic rather than athletic considerations" (Stokowski Huffman & Aicher, 2013, p.135). International athletes focus more on the overall collegiate experience, including academic achievement, while participating in NCAA sports compared to domestic student-athletes who prioritize their athletic success (Popp, Hums & Greenwell, 2009).

Two different studies on ISA college selection were presented in Stokowski et al. (2013) work. The first study presented by Stokowski was conducted by Berry in 1999 and found that male and female ISA are both motivated by athletic factors. Motivational factors were also influenced by the international athletes' region of origin. The second study presented by Stokowski et al. was conducted by Garant-Jones et al. in 2008 and revealed that ISA are

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motivated by four factors when selecting a college; attractiveness of intercollegiate athletics, attractiveness of the school, desire for independency, and attractiveness of the environment. “In conjunction, these two studies corroborated the notion that international student-athletes are motivated differently based on the sport they play and the global region of their respective native country” (Stokowski, 2013, p. 135).

***Adjustment Issues***

The process of ISA transitioning to college can be quite complex and entails various adjustment issues. “In general, adjustment is defined as the process of bringing a situation into a more satisfactory state” (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000, p.34). Many ISA experience adjustment issues in first year enrollment in three prevalent areas: homesickness, adjusting to U.S culture, and overcoming language barriers (Newell, 2015). Encountering cultural concerns can also act as an added stressor and therefore initiate adjustment difficulties (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). It is clear that ISA face a variety of factors that can cause adjustment issues as the transition to college can be characterized by feelings of disorientation due to cultural differences (Rodriguez, 2014). Micoogullari, Odek & Beyaz (2017) emphasizes athletes' role of mental toughness and being able to overcome adversity while obtaining a high mental toughness level which indicates a positive response to critical feedback as contributing to positive adjustment well-being. A study conducted by Ridinger & Pastore (2000) suggested that ISA adjusted to college at a higher rate than international non-athletes as well as domestic students and student-athletes. In fact, ISA had the highest mean score among all subgroups for overall adjustment to college.

The support ISA receive is imperative to the satisfaction and overall experience of attending university and competing in collegiate athletics. Numerous structured support groups are a necessity in the pursuit of achieving desired goals academically, athletically, and socially.

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Newell (2015) identifies a high need for increased advising, mentoring, and support practices for all student-athletes. These support services can be composed of athletic academic coordinators/advisors, coaches, team members, psychologists, and athletic administrators.

***Support System***

Student-athletes view counselling outside the athletic department as negative. They feel that non-athletic counselling does not sufficiently meet the needs or demands of student-athletes (Watson, 2005). If a student-athlete shows attitudes of help-seeking behavior, such as asking for personal guidance or help, it may minimize their chances to succeed due to weakening of self-efficacy and ability to perform by jeopardizing trust built between teammates and coaches. It can also lead to reduced playing time or confidence in one's performance, contributing to the means of having a negative attitude towards counseling in comparison to non-athlete students (Watson, 2005). The athletic department must recognize and meet the needs of student-athletes by providing expanded support (Etzel, Ferrante & Pinkney, 1996). It is imperative that ISA receive the necessary advising and support guided through the athletic department. This can be increasingly helpful to their careers and of great magnitude when overseeing the adjustment needed in ones' academic, athletic, personal/social, and general areas of life. Successful counseling and advising programs must have support of well-trained staff, coaches, and athletic department personnel, and campus community (Watson, 2005).

***Demands***

A critical component that affects ISA experiences and adjustment to NCAA athletics is the amount of publicity one could experience. Student-athletes are placed on a platform where everything they do gets magnified by the public eye and at times publicized by the media (Lu et al., 2012). Student-athletes also experience additional demands of adjusting to and participating

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in collegiate athletics (Ridinger & Pastore, 2000). “Today’s student athletes are presented with

complex personal challenges in three major areas (i.e., personal, academic, and athletic),

challenges that many often lack the ability to meet” (Etzel, Ferrante & Pinkney, 1996, p.4).

Student-athletes are viewed as a special at-risk group which stems from the physical and mental distress they are susceptible to as well as the unique demands they experience (Watson, 2005).

However, attempts to control or protect student-athletes have shown to be detrimental to their well-being (Etzel, Ferrante & Pinkney, 1996). Student-athletes are also at risk of suffering

athletic injuries and are vulnerable to physical impairment and limited function. Etzel et al.

(1996) advocated a partnership between the athletic department and student affairs to provide

student-athletes with expanded assisting and outreach services.

Bridget Brugger-McSorley, associate athletics director, strategic planning and special projects at Virginia Tech, expressed that there is a lack of research regarding the adjustment issues ISA experience at Virginia Tech (personal communication, April 2-September 19, 2019).

It is important to increase awareness among the athletic department regarding ISA retention and the experience they gather through college, especially in first year enrollment. Student-athlete success and retention are affected by one’s ability to balance academics and athletics. It is also directly correlated to what happens after arriving on campus (Hobneck, Mudge & Turchi, 2003).

### ***Future Implementation at Virginia Tech***

The athletic department is responsible for providing student-athletes with resources enhancing their academic and athletic performance (Hobneck & Mudge, 2003). Following is the mission statement of the Virginia Tech athletic department, “Virginia Tech Athletics is committed to excellence, both academically and athletically, and to the personal development of our student-athletes. In the spirit of *Ut Prosim*, we stand together to serve and represent our

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university and community with integrity and respect” (<https://hokiesports.com/>). Student-athletes experience unique demands and challenges which require special services targeted for personal growth and development (Etzel, Ferrante & Pinkney, 1996). Weiss, Visher, Weissman & Wathington (2015) have found that learning communities (groups of students who begin their academic curriculum at the same time) have a positive effect on student engagement, retention, and academic progress.

**Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

Lottes (1991) proposed a holistic type of assistance program for student-athletes. Providing a “whole-isite” model expands the focus of many already existing programs on college campuses. The service model is composed of four main categories:

- Academic - academic advisement/ skills, tutorial assistance and career counseling
- Athletic - counseling about injuries, health issues and athletic transition issues
- Personal/Social - personal/career counseling and values clarification
- General - administrative issues and staff changes

Lottes (1991) argued that the model can be implemented using support services already existing on college campuses. The service of support would also depend on the particular need of the individual athlete. Providing a “whole-isite” model would benefit both the university and the student-athlete population (Amundsen, 2008; Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Schwartz, 1994).

I developed a pathways model related to programming for ISA at Virginia Tech using the Cornell Netway Tool (<https://core.human.cornell.edu/research/systems/netway.cfm>). This is used as a theory of change for the program evaluation (Figure 1). It identifies student support services

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available for ISA at Virginia Tech. The pathways model in combination with the framework created by Lottes (1991) and served as a grounding model for my evaluation. The pathways model (Figure 1) was used as a guided graph to evaluate short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes based on the inputs available. The framework of Lottes (1991) was used to formulate my survey questions. The pathways model in combination with survey findings was used to evaluate the existing program of athletic department student support services and help determine what resources hold great value and where gaps exist. The conceptual framework used the pathways theory of change in agreement with Lottes (1991) four categories: academic, athletic, personal/social, and general (Figure 1).

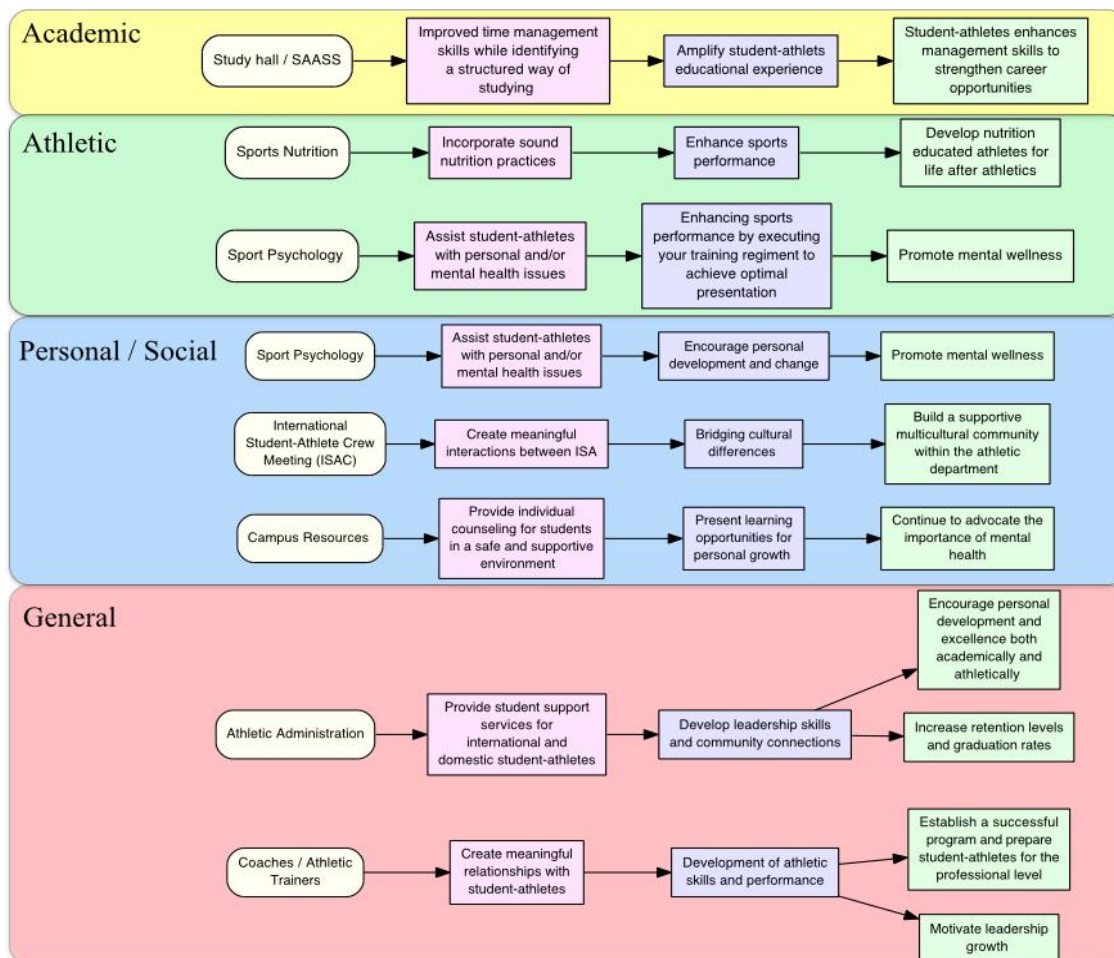


Figure 1 - Pathways model theory of change. A guided graph to evaluate short-term, medium-term and long-term outcomes based on student support services provided by the athletic department at Virginia Tech.

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**Methodology**

Prior to conducting this evaluation, I received a letter of exemption from Virginia Tech Human Services Protection (Appendix A). The evaluation of the existing program was conducted by collecting information through a census survey which was distributed to current ISA at Virginia Tech (Appendix B). An initial recruitment email was sent to all athletic academic advisors at Student Athlete Academic Support Services (SAASS) via email on February, 25, 2020 (Appendix C). A follow-up email was sent to all advisors by the morning of March 3, 2020 (Appendix C). However, a total of 10 of 51 ISA responded by the deadline of March 4, 2020. The lack of respondents required additional methods to be taken. A third email was sent to athletic academic advisors on March 6, 2020 asking for their willingness to send a text message to their ISA with the survey link, in hopes of recording a higher response rate. (Appendix C). A total of 11 of 51 ISA responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 21.57%. The survey gathered data related to student support services at Virginia Tech, specifically ones' provided by the athletic department. The survey also gathered data on adjustment issues in first year enrollment, mentoring, alumni associations and future recommendations (Appendix B).

ISA were recruited to participate in the survey by their athletic academic advisor in SAASS, guaranteeing their anonymity and encouraging full participation by all ISA. After surveys were completed and data collected, findings were summarized using descriptive statistics. The summarized data from the census survey was shared with three administrators who have worked in the athletics department for a number of years. They continue to be an active participant in student-athletes' collegiate careers at Virginia Tech. Interviewees will remain anonymous throughout this evaluation. They were contacted via email to schedule a time for the interview and made aware of the parameters of the project (Appendix D). The key informant

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interviews were used to gather future recommendations and improvements for the program based on survey findings. Interviews were audio recorded. Data from key informant interviews were transcribed and developed into narratives (Appendix E). Narratives from the interviews were created by transcribing the interviews and editing out the questions. This process was chosen following the method used by Peters, Alter & Schwartzbach (2010). The method of listening to and interpreting firsthand stories and experiences aided in identifying new patterns and provided additional meaning to the program evaluation (Peters, Alter & Schwartzbach, 2010, p.63-67). Narratives were provided back to the interviewees via email for confirmation that all information captured was correct through member-checking. There were no revisions.

The reviewed narratives were thereafter used to identify recommendations from the interviewees that could be used to develop strategies and strengthen student support for ISA.

**Findings**

The survey instrument provided insight into ISA personal experiences, thoughts and ideas regarding the student support services available at Virginia Tech, specifically ones provided within the athletic department. Unfortunately, there were some difficulties recruiting international athletes to conduct the survey, much due to spring break followed by COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a small sample size. After multiple emails were sent to athletic academic advisors in SAASS a total of 11 of 51 ISA participated for a 21.57% response rate. Of these seven were female and four were male. They represented seven sports teams with eight different nationalities. 81.82% respondents did not live in the United States prior to college. The survey presented questions covering nine areas - general information, study hall, orientation,

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International Student-Athlete Crew (ISAC) meetings, adjustment issues, resources provided by the athletic department, campus resources, alumni associations and mentors.

The findings from the survey instrument identified a significant need for a mentorship program for ISA at Virginia Tech. All of the international athletes reported that they do not have a formal or informal mentor in their life. The majority of students did however think a mentorship program for incoming ISA would be beneficial for their adjustment to college and give them opportunities to make new connections and meet fellow ISA. One respondent stated the following in relation to benefits of a mentorship program, [It would help to] “meet new people, give suggestions and advice how to integrate to easier, educate about available resources and share personal experiences”. International Student-Athlete Crew (ISAC) meetings serve the purpose of creating intentional and meaningful interactions between ISA. Meetings are held once or twice a semester and international student handbooks are distributed to all ISA. The handbook provides a guideline of information necessary for international athletes enrolled at Virginia Tech (R. Mitchell, personal communication, January 16, April 1, 2020). “The club exists to advocate, educate and support international student athletes throughout their time at Virginia Tech” (R. Mitchell, personal communication, April 1, 2020). However, only 27.27% of ISA take advantage of this support service which is designed specifically for them. International athletes who participated in ISAC meetings reported benefits such as meeting fellow ISA from different cultures while learning new skills and information from them.

Orientation serves as a milestone to care for students and set them on a path of having a positive college experience at Virginia Tech (<https://vtnews.vt.edu>). All survey participants reported that orientation is a good way to meet ISA. Whether or not orientation has a significance on the relationship one makes during college is unknown. 63.64% of ISA use

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Cranwell International Center as a campus resource while 72.73% take advantage of their college academic advisor. Survey findings also presented a strong incentive to create meaningful connections between alumni and ISA. Eight of the eleven respondents believe alumni associations are important when creating a positive collegiate experience. However, eight athletes also said that they do not have a personal connection with alumni associations.

ISA reported that the resources provided by the athletic department are beneficial because they serve as sources of support, help giving advice and solutions to the problem while offering the athlete multiple perspectives. One participant emphasized that SAASS and sport psychology are extremely helpful support services allowing athletes to talk through their struggles and finding different approaches and solutions. [...] “sport psychology provides personal counseling, performance enhancement and psychological skill training, psychological rehabilitation from injury, assessment, and consultation with coaching, medical, training, and administrative staff. Mental skills training and team building activities are also available for teams”

(<https://ucc.vt.edu>).

In regard to study hall, which purpose is to provide a structured way of studying, 72.73% reported that study hall has not helped them develop stress management techniques. However, 63.64% believe that study hall has helped improve their time management skills.

Three adjustment issues in first year enrollment were prevalent in the survey findings: homesickness, cultural barriers and language barriers. ISA also presented strategies that helped them overcome their adjustment to Virginia Tech. A great deal reported that giving yourself time, making new friends and learning the language by initiating conversations with domestic students, as well as facetimeing and talking to people from home, were the main objectives in which helped them acclimate to college life in America. All participants found resources

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provided by the athletic department as helpful when reaching their individual goals. Only one respondent considered leaving Virginia Tech to transfer to another university, this due to social aspects. There were a few recommendations presented to implement programs and services of support for ISA to meet new people and expand their community and friends' network, as well as strengthening resources and making them more personalized. Suggestions of having a buddy system, creating a mentors program, providing a host family, expanding ISA interactions, and living with students of the same nationality were presented in the survey findings.

The data from the survey instrument was presented to three athletic administrators at Virginia Tech during semi-structured interviews. Personal thoughts, ideas and suggestions were brought forward to compose the following emerging themes. It is imperative for the athletic department to identify international athletes' needs. Creating a personal connection with consistent communication throughout the 4-5 years ISA are enrolled at Virginia Tech is a key attribute that must be implemented. It is especially important to provide adequate support and resources when ISA arrive on campus and continue a consistent check-in throughout their time at the university, especially during the first weeks and months. Improving communication between the athletic department and international athletes will open the gateway in making ISA feel more comfortable to approach the department with possible recommendations, struggles or concerns. It is also a necessity to provide support in time efficient ways. Athletes do not have a lot of spare time and must feel as though their time is spent enhancing their athletic, academic and personal development. Virginia Tech has developed various student support programs in order to assist academic and athletic performance as well as increase student-athlete retention. The athletic department offers support services such as student-athlete development which focuses on leadership development, career development and community outreach commitment

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH (<https://hokiesports.com/student-athlete-development>). The athletic department should continue to promote student-athlete growth and development through numerous programs and support services. It is also significant for the department to explore various options of how to provide more opportunities for their ISA to connect with an outlet outside of their team, such as domestic students, international students and community members.

The main theme during the semi-structured interviews was exploring the option of establishing a mentorship program for ISA at Virginia Tech. The athletic administrators were surprised to learn that none of the survey respondents had an assigned or self-selected mentor in their life. A mentorship program for ISA would be developed to provide international athletes with encouragement, empowerment and guidance through college while helping them on the path of reaching their academic, athletic and personal goals. Such a program could also help reduce adjustment issues and lack of support or belonging one might feel, resulting in a more positive collegiate experience.

## **Discussion**

It was more difficult to recruit ISA to participate in the survey than initially thought. I believe it was a combination of students not reading their emails, not wanting to spare their time, followed by spring break and the COVID-19 epidemic. This resulted in a smaller sample size than ideal, with 11 of 51 respondents. However, when I presented the survey findings to the athletic administrators they did not seem worried about the low response rate. Although 11 ISA represents a smaller number of the total ISA population who is enrolled at Virginia Tech, the athletic administrators made it clear that every voice counts and can help make a difference in a system and program. The justification for conducting this program evaluation became

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transparent after my three interviews with athletic administrators. I was encouraged to share the final program evaluation alongside recommendations to them. This is a great step forward in having ISA voices heard and identifying their needs as reported through the survey. The administrators have been an active participant in student-athletes' lives for a number of years and can continue to make an impact within the athletics community at Virginia Tech. My hopes are that they will forward the program evaluation to additional athletic department personnel and continue to explore numerous options to develop stronger support for ISA.

I was surprised to learn about the lack of mentorship within the ISA population, including both informal or formal mentors. I found this as significant and believe it is an area the athletic department must address. Implementing a mentorship program would be very valuable, both for the ISA population and for the athletic department as they continue to recruit international athletes. The program would provide a mentor type figure in ISA lives and help them navigate through college. During my interviews the administrators presented new ideas and thoughts on how to help ISA adjust to Virginia Tech and enhance their college experience. Alongside a mentorship program it is important for the line of communication between international athletes and the athletic department to become stronger and more consistent. Making student support services stronger by implementing recommendations based on survey findings and interview narratives would be a great upside for the department when recruiting ISA.

Connecting the interview findings and narratives to the pathways model outcomes a few patterns appear related to successful structures and areas in need of improvement. The inputs presented in the pathways model represents athletic department student support services for ISA. Same inputs were used in the survey instrument to gather significant findings and develop a pattern of emerging themes. The pathways model, which was created after Lottes (1991)

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH assistance model, in combination with the survey instrument showed main findings in three areas; academic (study hall/ SAASS), personal/social (ISAC) and general (athletic administration).

All available inputs in the pathways model are expected to reach the short-term outcomes. Further development is needed in certain areas to provide better assistance for ISA at Virginia Tech. ISAC is an input in need of instant improvement. This resource is specifically designed for ISA but unfortunately participation is quite low. Implementing new ways of attracting ISA can be done by creating a partnership with Cranwell International Center. This will also allow ISA to connect with international students and serve as an outlet outside of their team. Increase in ISAC participation will help build a supportive multicultural community within the athletic department, resulting in the long-term outcome.

Athletic administration is a resource that is reaching the short-term outcome by providing assistance for ISA and domestic student-athletes. They are also in the process of reaching the pathways model medium-term outcome by developing community connections through numerous events. However, in order for athletic administration to achieve the long-term outcomes they must implement new programs or strengthen the already existing programs to benefit current ISA and future prospects. It is important to understand that the athletic department and athletic administrators are interdependent. As the athletic department continues to provide stronger student support services, it will allow athletic administrators to create personal connections with ISA and provide guidance by promoting growth and excellence. This should hopefully result in an increase in retention for ISA within athletics and lead to the desired long-term outcomes.

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Successful structures that are already established are sports psychology, sports nutrition and SAASS. These student services of support are predicted to reach their short-term, medium-term and long-term outcomes. They are connecting with athletes and promoting personal development - helping ISA achieve success both in and out of the classroom. The reason they are further along compared to other resources is because they have established a well-structured relationship with teams and individual athletes. They provide guidance for international athletes to achieve their personal-and athletic goals. Their actions help contribute to the success of ISA at Virginia Tech.

Two inputs that the pathways model did not gather significant research on were campus resources and coaches/athletic trainers. Creating more partnerships between the athletic department and campus resources is essential because it will continue to promote campus resources and encourage ISA them to take part of all student services available to them. It is especially important for coaches/athletic trainers to enact a well-grounded relationship with their athletes during their time at Virginia Tech. The relationship ISA have with their coaches can have a tremendous impact on their athletic performance.

I was an ISA myself and spent five years on campus. I did encounter a few adjustment issues along the way. My first year was extremely difficult. I was sidelined with an injury and needed surgery. Being away from my family did not make the matter any easier. At that time I felt as though I was alone and did not have sufficient support. Part of the problem was that I did not take advantage of all resources available to me provided by the athletic department. Looking back on my first year of enrollment I should have identified the benefits of student support services such as sport psychology and sports nutrition. However, I was fortunate to be surrounded by great athletic trainers and coaches who helped me face the difficulties of not being

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

on the basketball court with my teammates. Having support from members in the community, especially the Hokie Hardwood Club, which is a booster club consisting of donors and fans supporting the women's basketball team, was extremely beneficial. They gave me an outlet outside of my team and helped me overcome my homesickness and the cultural barriers I was experiencing. Throughout my time in college I created everlasting relationships with my teammates which I am grateful for. As I am looking back on my journey I want to stress the importance of taking advantage of all student support services available and for ISA to feel as though they have ample support within the athletic department, their sports team and the community. My hopes are that this program evaluation will shed light on areas in need of improvement, followed by the athletic department developing more services of support that are individualized based on international athletes' needs. Some ISA might need more assistance through student support programs, while others are in desperate need of identifying a mentor or having an outlet outside of their team and athletics. Strengthening support to benefit all ISA at Virginia Tech would be monumental.

**Recommendations**

For athletic department student support services at Virginia Tech to become more effective for ISA there must be a few changes. Program improvement is needed in order to better identify each international athlete's need and desire when arriving on campus. A consistent line of communication between both parties is vital. By implementing a check-in protocol within the athletic department each administrator will be responsible for reaching out to their international athletes. This will help in the process of creating consistent communication throughout the

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

athletes' time at Virginia Tech. Any small change can make a huge impact on the experience and satisfaction ISA have during their time in college.

Policy change is also recommended by implementing new strategies to present ISA with an outlet outside of their sports team or athletics. International students enhance the cultural diversity of a university. It is important that they feel as though they are valued and are making a difference in their environment. Allowing ISA to connect with one another through program driven events gives them various opportunities to create ongoing relationships and seek further connections to international students and community members. In order for this to be successfully implemented the athletic department must become more involved and provide increasingly more opportunities for ISA to recognize and connect with other international athletes and members of the community. Huml, Hancock, Bergman, & Hums (2019) reported that "student-athletes have been found to participate in limited university-related events outside of varsity athletics (p. 1919). The athletic department has a responsibility to provide programs, outlets, and events as a leeway for ISA to broaden their community network. Implementing alumni events exclusively for ISA would provide a platform for both parties to connect and for ISA to create post-graduation ties.

The need of identifying a mentor is significant within the ISA population. Developing a mentorship program is strongly suggested. However, more research should be conducted by looking at ways to develop the program and implementing it in the best possible way. It is imperative for international athletes to benefit and take advantage of the resources available to them. Developing such a program would result in the athletic department promoting the mentorship program and finding ways of maintaining a core structure. The department must also answer questions in regard to funding and who is going to be responsible for driving the program

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

forward; international student-athletes, members of the athletic department, graduate students or interns. It is extremely important for the mentorship program to identify mentors who are going to provide guidance and empowerment to international athletes during their journey at Virginia Tech.

Following is a list of future implementations recommended for the athletic department based on survey findings and interviews with athletic administrators at Virginia Tech.

1. Develop a mentorship program for incoming ISA.
2. Offer a host family to ISA in Montgomery County.
3. Create a buddy-system for incoming ISA
4. Provide ISA the option to live with another ISA upon request.
5. Incorporate alumni events exclusively for ISA. This presents opportunities for ISA and alumni to connect on a personal level. Encourage former ISA who are now alumni to be present at these events.
6. Start an ISA orientation held in summers for incoming international athletes.
7. Create a partnership between the athletic department and Cranwell International Center to connect international athletes with international students.
8. Provide organized study groups for ISA
9. Flexible study hall hours for all athletes during a trial period of X amount of time. It is the student-athletes responsibility to uphold good academic standings.

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## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

## Appendices

## Appendix A - Human Research Exemption Approval Letter



Division of Scholarly Integrity and  
Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-3732  
irb@vt.edu  
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** February 20, 2020  
**TO:** Karen Vines, Regan Ayleen Magarity  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Program Evaluation of Athletic Department Student Support Services for International Student Athletes (ISA) at Virginia Tech  
**IRB NUMBER:** 20-063

Based on the submitted project description and items listed in the Special Instructions section found on Page 2, the Virginia Tech IRB has determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by HHS and FDA regulations.

Further review and approval by the Virginia Tech HRPP is not required because this is not human research. This determination applies only to the activities described in the submitted project description and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately submit an Amendment to the HRPP for a new determination. Your amendment must include a description of the changes and you must upload all revised documents. At that time, the HRPP will review the submission activities to confirm the original "Not Research" decision or to advise if a new application must be made.

If there are additional undisclosed components that you feel merit a change in this initial determination, please contact our office for a consultation.

Please be aware that receiving a "Not Research" Determination is not the same as IRB review and approval of the activity. You are NOT to use IRB consent forms or templates for these activities. If you have any questions, please contact the Virginia Tech HRPP office at 540-231-3732 or [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu).

**PROTOCOL INFORMATION:**

Determined As: **Not Research**  
 Protocol Determination Date: **February 20, 2020**

**ASSOCIATED FUNDING:**

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

IRB Number 20-063

page 2 of 2

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:**

This activity does not meet the definition of research as defined within the Federal Policy for the Protections of Human Subjects. The primary goal is to evaluate student support services for International Student Athletes (ISA) at Virginia Tech, during their first year of enrollment. The activities consist of administering a survey to ISA and engaging in semi-structured interviews with Virginia Tech athletic department administrators. This activity does not meet the definition of research since the information collected will be focused on Virginia Tech ISA and will not be generalizable.

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the HRPP office (irb@vt.edu) immediately.

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

**Appendix B - Survey Instrument**

Program Evaluation of Student Support Services for International Student-Athletes (ISA) at VT

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Dear International Student-Athlete,

Thank you for participating in this survey. This data is being collected as part of my graduate project in conjunction with my academic advisor, Dr. Karen Vines (kvines@vt.edu).

Data collected from this survey will be used to identify areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed to strengthen support services for international student-athletes (ISA) at Virginia Tech. I estimate you can complete this survey in approximately 10 minutes. Your responses are being collected anonymously. Findings will be provided on a summary basis that will not identify any of the participants in the study.

Should you have questions about the survey, please contact either me or Dr. Vines using the contact information listed below.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Regan Magarity, magarity@vt.edu

Dr. Karen Vines, kvines@vt.edu, 540-231-1264

Please provide the last 4 digits of your student ID and initials. (i.e. mine would be 8722-RM)

---

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

What is your academic standing at Virginia Tech?

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)
- 5th Year (5)

What is your intended graduation date?

- Spring 2020 (1)
- Fall 2020 (2)
- Spring 2021 (3)
- Fall 2021 (4)
- Spring 2022 (5)
- Fall 2022 (6)
- Spring 2023 (7)
- Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other (specify) (3) \_\_\_\_\_

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

What sport do you play? Check all that apply

- Baseball (1)
- Men's Basketball (2)
- Women's Basketball (3)
- Men's Cross Country (4)
- Women's Cross Country (5)
- Football (6)
- Men's Golf (7)
- Women's Golf (8)
- Lacrosse (9)
- Men's Soccer (10)
- Women's Soccer (11)
- Softball (12)
- Swimming & Diving (13)
- Men's Tennis (14)
- Women's Tennis (15)
- Men's Track & Field (16)
- Women's Track & Field (17)
- Volleyball (18)
- Wrestling (19)
- Spirit Squads (20)

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

What country are you from?

---

Did you move to the US prior to college?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Display This Question:

If Did you move to the US prior to college? = Yes

How many years have you lived in the US?

---

Has structured study hall helped improve your time management skills?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: Study hall has helped me develop stress management techniques

Strongly Agree (1)

Agree (2)

Undecided (3)

Disagree (4)

Strongly disagree (5)

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

How can study hall be improved for international student-athletes (ISA) to achieve their academic goals?

---

Orientation is a good way to meet other international student-athletes (ISA)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: Orientation has had a significant impact on the relationships I have developed during my time in college

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

What leadership skills have you developed and/or strengthened during your time at Virginia Tech?

---

Have you ever attended an International Student-Athlete Crew (ISAC) meeting?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

Display This Question:

If Have you ever attended an International Student-Athlete Crew (ISAC) meeting? = Yes

In what ways has participating in ISAC meetings been beneficial for you?

---

Display This Question:

If Have you ever attended an International Student-Athlete Crew (ISAC) meeting? = Yes

How can ISAC improve to better benefit your needs as an ISA?

---

What were the biggest adjustment issues you faced during your first year at Virginia Tech?  
Check all that apply

- Homesickness (1)
- Language barriers (2)
- Cultural barriers (3)
- Sense of not belonging (4)
- Difficulties with coaches (5)
- Difficulties with teammates (6)
- Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

What strategies did you use to overcome your adjustment issues?

---

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

Did you ever consider leaving Virginia Tech?

- No (1)
- Yes, to return to my native country (2)
- Yes, to transfer to another university (3)
- Other (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Display This Question:

If Did you ever consider leaving Virginia Tech? = Yes, to return to my native country

Or Did you ever consider leaving Virginia Tech? = Yes, to transfer to another university

Or Did you ever consider leaving Virginia Tech? = Other

Why did you consider leaving?

\_\_\_\_\_

Which sources of support have you used at Virginia Tech? Check all that apply

- Academic advisors (SAASS) (1)
- Nutrition staff (2)
- Sports psychologists (3)
- Coaches (4)
- Athletic trainers (5)
- Administrative department (6)
- Study hall (7)
- ISAC (8)
- Other (9) \_\_\_\_\_

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

How did the sources of support help you?

---

What additional sources of support would be useful for you?

---

What university sources of support have you used outside of what is provided by the athletic department? Check all that apply

- Academic Advisors for your major (1)
- Cook Counseling Center (2)
- Cranwell (3)
- Dean of Students (4)
- Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) (5)
- Virginia Tech Women's Center (6)
- Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: The sources of support provided by the athletic department are helpful to be successful and reach your individual goals

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

In your opinion, are alumni associations, such as the Monogram Club, important when creating a positive collegiate experience?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If In your opinion, are alumni associations, such as the Monogram Club, important when creating a po... = Yes

How would you describe your relationship with the alumni association?

---

Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: The relationship you build with alumni associations are helpful when overcoming adjustment issues at college

- Strongly agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Undecided (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Do you have any mentors (formal or non-formal)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If Do you have any mentors (formal or non-formal)? = Yes

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

What are the most important qualities you value in your mentors?

---

Display This Question:

If Do you have any mentors (formal or non-formal)? = Yes

How did you identify your mentors?

---

Display This Question:

If Do you have any mentors (formal or non-formal)? = Yes

How have your mentors assisted you in your adjustment to college?

---

In your opinion, would a mentorship program for incoming ISA be helpful?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If In your opinion, would a mentorship program for incoming ISA be helpful? = Yes

In what ways would a mentorship program help ISA adjust to their collegiate experience at Virginia Tech

---

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

Display This Question:

If In your opinion, would a mentorship program for incoming ISA be helpful? = Yes

Would you be willing to be a mentor to a new ISA?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

What are some ways to provide stronger support for ISA? (i.e. have a host family or buddy-system for each ISA at Virginia Tech)

---

Thank you for your responses!

Please let me know if you have questions or would like access to the final report that is developed from this project.

Sincerely,

Regan Magarity, magarity@vt.edu

End of Block: Default Question Block

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

**Appendix C - Recruitment Emails**

*February 25, 2020*

Hello everyone,

My name is Regan Magarity and I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech. I am in the process of completing my graduate degree in the education option in the Agricultural and Life Sciences (ALS) program. For my graduate project, I am conducting an evaluation of student support for international student-athletes at Virginia Tech. This will help to identify both strengths of the program as well as areas where improvement might be needed. The survey is located at:

[https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9oeNrhJYiatcMyV](https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9oeNrhJYiatcMyV)

Please provide this survey link to all of the international student-athletes (ISA) that you work with at Virginia Tech. I would like to have the student responses by March 4th, 2020. Thank you for your support.

Also, I extend a special thank you to Sarah Armstrong who has helped me throughout this process and taken on the responsibility to make sure all academic advisors at SAASS receive this survey link.

Please let me know if you have questions or would like additional information about this project.

Best,  
Regan Magarity  
[magarity@vt.edu](mailto:magarity@vt.edu)

*March 3, 2020*

Hi,

I just wanted to send out a reminder that the survey is due Wednesday. If you could pass that along to your international student-athletes that would be great.

Thank you!

Best,  
Regan Magarity

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

*March 6, 2020*

Hello,

I want to thank everyone for your continued help with my project!

Only 10 of the 51 international student-athletes have taken the survey (mostly women's golf and tennis, and a few swimming and diving). I realize that students might not read emails frequently and was wondering if you would be willing to send a text with the survey link to your athletes?

The responses I have received so far indicate that the survey takes less than 5 minutes to complete.

Thank you,  
Regan Magarity

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

**Appendix D - Interview Script for use with athletic professionals****Program Evaluation of Student Support Services for ISA at Virginia Tech  
Semi-structured Interview Protocol****PROTOCOL**

The interviewer will follow a standard protocol for each interview session that includes:

- Welcome and opening remarks
- Interview Guidelines
- Questions and answers
- Wrap-Up

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Hi, thank you so much for being here and agreeing to proceed with this interview. My name is Regan Magarity and I will be conducting the interview. My graduate project is a program evaluation of student support services offered to international student-athletes (ISA) at Virginia Tech. The purpose of my program evaluation is to improve student support services for ISA by identifying what adjustment issues they face in first year enrollment and what possible improvements are needed. The interview will focus on your personal experience and recommendations for program improvement and future implantation.

**INTERVIEW GUIDELINES**

Entirety of the interview will be recorded and transcribed for data collection and analysis. All responses will remain anonymous. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability.

The interview is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the interview at any time. Do you have any questions about your participation in the interview?

I will now continue to turn on the recording device.

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS****WARM-UP QUESTIONS**

1. How much involvement do you have with ISA on a weekly basis?
2. How long have you been working in positions where you have been interacting with ISA?

SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

**STRUCTURED QUESTIONS**

1. Based on the survey results, what needs to change for sources of support to become more effective for ISA?
2. What can the athletic department do differently to make changes that will benefit the ISA population?
3. Based on the survey results, what improvements should be made in the next few years to come?
4. What do you see as the biggest challenge for ISA coming to Virginia Tech?
5. What do you see as the biggest challenge for providing support to ISA?
6. Can you share anything you expected to see in the survey related to ISA support that was not present?

**WRAP-UP**

You have now completed the interview questions. Sincerely thank you for taking your time to help with this program evaluation. Do you have any additional comments you would like to add?

Once again, thank you! I will provide a written transcript within a few weeks. Please review it and let me know if any revisions are necessary. Thank you for your support of my project.

## SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETES (ISA) AT VIRGINIA TECH

**Appendix E - Transcribed Narrative Interviews****Interviewee #1**

Most of my interaction with ISA is virtual. I work a lot with them as they start their journey at Virginia Tech, as I specifically help evaluate international transcripts. My face-to-face communication with ISA is limited due to my administrative type of tasks which entails a lot of indirect and virtual interaction. I have been working in positions where I interact with international athletes for 23-24 years. As I graduated college I went into sports medicine working as an athletic trainer. I was working with athletes in a different capacity then. Now it is more administrative versus back then it was more support service in the health-care field.

It is always nice to provide the necessary resources within athletics, but the athletic department must also make sure that ISA has time to connect with resources outside of athletics. It is very important to have an outlet outside of the team. I believe that it starts with orientation from Cranwell International Center. We as a department have to figure out how to create more time and opportunity for international athletes to onboard with their international peers from the institution. ISA have to acclimate to their team and there is an onboarding process for that as well, but it is equally important to have a peer group outside of athletics and perhaps being able to identify with other students from their particular country. A lot of it comes down to time.

The athletic department focuses a lot of the team dynamic which is good, but must also start identifying what requirements are needed to help bridge the gap. We have been working closely with student-athlete development and SAASS to evaluate what we are doing with orientation and how much time students are afforded to be with their international peers. I believe we have the people and resources necessary but must figure out how to utilize time to best benefit our athletes. I love the idea of implementing a mentorship program for our international athletes.

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Anything new is always a bit harder to get started but once it is in place and to where it is not a heavy time commitment it could really be a successful transition and very beneficial.

It is very important what the athletic department does in the immediate week an international athlete steps onto campus, especially if they arrive in early August and is an out-of-season sport (winter or spring). Fall season sports integrate their onboarding with the team. The athletic department must evaluate how we are helping our out-of-season international athletes navigate throughout their first week and month on campus. I believe there should be a dedicated check-in that stays consistent throughout the athletes' time here.

The biggest challenge ISA experience when coming to Virginia Tech is acclimating to a different educational system and a different sports culture. When you combine a new educational system, which is unlike anything you have overseas with a new culture of sports, you are putting a lot of change into a young person's life. You essentially have two major systems to learn, acclimate and adapt to while you are away from your family.

The difficulties the athletic department experiences when providing support for international athletes is carving out time, because our student athletes' time is so precious. We have to figure out what is most important for each young person's professional development. The athletic department has people and resources in place but must find adequate time to help benefit our athletes in the best possible way. Any small change can help make an impact in our international student-athletes' lives.

**Interviewee #2**

I have very little involvement with international athletes on a weekly basis. I work with women's basketball, men's basketball and baseball. But I have been working in a position where I interact with ISA for 34 years at Virginia Tech. To be able to provide more effective sources of

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support for ISA at Virginia Tech there must be a better line of communication between the athletic department and international athletes. I think a mentorship program is a great idea and believe that developing such a program would be most effective for our ISA. The athletic department must work with the university to identify these students and what countries they are from, and thereafter start developing the program which would take approximately one year.

It is important that the athletic department communicates with international athletes to discover exactly what their needs are and how the department can improve to better benefit the ISA population. A better line of communication which stays consistent throughout the athletes years in college is therefore imperative. Part of the solution would be by starting the mentorship program previously discussed and have it last throughout your four or five years at Virginia Tech.

The biggest challenge I believe ISA experience when coming to Virginia Tech is not feeling comfortable in this environment, because it is a rural setting in southwest Virginia. The location can play a factor in their adjustment. The biggest challenge the athletic department experiences in terms of providing adequate support for ISA is to first and foremost identify the student-athletes' needs. It is also important to be able to support that need with both personnel and financially. If a mentorship program develops, the athletic department must find someone to manage the program and calculate how much it is going to cost. At the end of the day, everything gets back to money, people and time.

**Interviewee #3**

I interact with international athletes at least once a week. I have been interacting with ISA for the duration of my time at Virginia Tech which is 11 years. There is a glaring lack of mentorship for our international athletes and that must change for sources of support to become

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more effective. To develop such a program would not be difficult at all but we must ensure that our athletes will be taking advantage of the mentorship program to its fullest. The international presence on our teams is significant, it is roughly 8-10% of our student athletes. I do think there is a way we can help our international students connect.

There are simple ways to recognize international athletes at the same time, something as simple as sending out a tweet highlighting all athletes from France. This population could represent three different teams and help connect them. The athletic department could also organize for all international athletes to be recognized together at a basketball game for instance. It is not so much for the fans as it is for the students themselves to feel like they are being pulled together and part of something bigger because they all come from different countries. ISA can be connected in simple ways and the athletic department can give them the platform to do so.

I believe that the biggest challenge for ISA when coming to college is traveling. There is always a cultural adjustment. The United States is such a big country with different cultures within (east coast vs. west coast). I have personally traveled enough to know that you experience different challenges based on the country you are visiting. So all that to say, it probably depends on what country and area your ISA are coming from. If a student moves from Barcelona to Blacksburg it can be challenging adapting to the landscape and scenery. But if an athlete is coming from a country or area that is really under-resourced and does not have facilities, they can think they are in heaven because they have all the resources they need within the community. I therefore think it is particular to the context someone is coming from.

The main adjustment issue we cannot solve is homesickness. Our ISA are away from their family so homesickness is unavoidable. It is also difficult for them to go home because as an athlete you do not have very many opportunities to take a weeklong trip. Due to the travel

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time, jetlag and expenses you want adequate time with your family and this is just something we cannot provide. It is hard to resolve homesickness.

I think a host family is a great idea and could be implemented easily. When I was a swimmer at South Carolina there was a family in the community that had me and three other swimmers over to their house at least twice a month. Implementing that to our ISA at Virginia Tech would be easy to do and I think it is a great idea. International athletes are a big part of the school's success here at Virginia Tech.