

Guide to Strategic Athletics Communication on Campus

NCAA

Division III

DISCOVER | DEVELOP | DEDICATE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION..... 2

STUDENT-ATHLETE PERSPECTIVE 7

DATA 8

BEST PRACTICES 16

RESOURCES..... 22

INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The competition in Division III athletics is fierce. Student-athletes give their all every day to excel in the classroom and win championships. The competition on campuses is just as intense. Presidents and chancellors compete to attract the best and brightest students and faculty to keep their institutions thriving in an ever-challenging higher education landscape.

These two competitions are indelibly linked. As athletics is integral to the higher education experience for students, so is it integral to promoting the institution, bolstering enrollment and staying ahead of competitors.

Ask college and university presidents about their priorities for communication, and they'll likely say, "To better tell our story." Ask those same presidents whether the institution's athletics program has a place in that story, and the response invariably is, "Absolutely." People don't refer to the athletics program as "the front porch" of the institution just because it sounds catchy. They do so because it's true. What component of a college or university interacts most with the community? What galvanizes campus constituents and alumni? What shapes public opinion regarding the institution's reputation? In many cases, the answer is athletics. And who contributes



most to telling the athletics story, and in turn the college's or university's story? The president? The provost? The athletics director? While all play a role, there is someone else who is vital to telling this story.

Thousands of talented, dedicated communications professionals tell those stories and advocate for their institutions. Their titles may differ — directors of sports information, media relations or athletics communications — but their mission is the same: to promote and protect the institutional brand by telling the student-athlete story and extolling the value that athletics brings to the campus and community. That's not just an athletics mission, but an institutional one that any college or university president would consider a priority.

The NCAA Division III Strategic Communications Working Group provides this resource as a way to emphasize why athletics communicators in Division III are so valuable and to show how colleges and universities can better understand and equip their staffs to obtain optimal results. In a world that constantly seeks better, faster, brighter and bolder, it makes sense for colleges and universities to invest in their greatest resource — the people who tell their stories.



THE EVOLVING CHALLENGES

While the title “sports information director” remains widely used, the duties it connotes are often underestimated and underappreciated. The roles of historian, record-keeper, statistician and media contact are still very much present, but evolving responsibilities such as media producer, strategic communicator and multiplatform social media content manager are as important in today’s more aptly titled athletics communication director’s daily work.

While there is no denying that technology impacts every aspect of the athletics department, athletics communication directors are asked to flex their muscles regularly. Social media has revolutionized information dissemination, and new products and services are ever-changing and expanding. Athletics venues now routinely serve as broadcast studios producing livestreaming video of a multitude of events.



NCAA Division III institutions are particularly stretched by fast-paced technology growth because nearly half of the athletics communication offices are staffed with just one full-time professional who is challenged with everyday responsibilities while keeping up with the latest technological demands. The offices with assistants are facing the challenge of athletics departments adding sports programs and packing an already busy schedule. Also, the number of student workers, interns and graduate assistants varies widely, and those individuals are in constant need of training.

But these inherent limitations do not reduce demands upon institutions or expectations by a public that wants immediate information.

In short, the myriad challenges facing today’s athletics communication offices include the following:

- **Staffing and Resources.** Demands on time, technology knowledge and breadth of experience have increased, but the allocation of resources has lagged. Results from a 2018 survey of Division III athletics communication



and sports information directors highlight staffing challenges in the face of increased expectations and demands.

- **Strategic Integration.** The athletics communication director at both the departmental and institutional level continues to be a key piece in promoting institutions, including serving on the athletics senior administrative team, collaborating with the game scheduler, regularly engaging with the campus Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and serving on the institution's campus-wide communications team.
- **Technology.** The ever-changing, fast-paced growth of social media and website content, coupled with the instantaneous demands of students, prospects, spectators, parents, alumni, etc., have multiplied the expectations of athletics communication departments.
- **Workload.** All of the above have added to workload, often without a commensurate increase in resources and staffing. Survey results indicate 78% of athletics communications directors work an average of 50 or more hours weekly.



STUDENT-ATHLETE PERSPECTIVE

THE EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES AND STUDENT-ATHLETE ENGAGEMENT

Given those challenges, athletics communications personnel are nonetheless blessed with a significant advantage: They are able to tout a broadly accomplished demographic, Division III student-athletes, to support their cause.

Regardless of the category used to rank a student body — be it academic achievement, community engagement, campus leadership or university ambassadorship — student-athletes traditionally populate the top tier. Athletics communication directors who interact with student-athletes know this firsthand and are able to celebrate and advocate the positive influence student-athletes have not only on athletics but also on the university as a whole.

Division III student-athletes are committed to academic achievements, community outreach and athletics success — three values that are fundamental to Division III institutions. Athletics communication directors help student-athletes share their stories as the institution and its athletics program seek to align with the Division III philosophy.

In turn, the relationships between directors and student-athletes not only support the Division III strategic platform of portraying the division's mission, but they also allow student-athletes to form a professional connection that may lead to a mentor, increased internship opportunities and/or a future career path. That collaboration ultimately benefits both the student-athletes and the directors, and it builds the foundation of an affirmative and comprehensive communications strategy for the institution and the community it serves.



DATA

SURVEY RESULTS

In 2018, the NCAA surveyed athletics communication/sports information directors from the 494 Division III members (institutions and conference offices) about their athletics communication operations. The survey garnered a 57% completion rate (283 responses), and, compared with results from a 2012 Division III Sports Information Directors of America survey, it confirmed that Division III athletics communication/sports information directors have assumed greater responsibility for institutional and conference outreach through the years beyond the traditional tasks of writing news releases and keeping statistics.

Demographics

Approximately **83%** of respondents reported that their institutions **sponsor 16 or more varsity sports**, up from 70% in 2012.

70%
2012

83%
2018

Approximately **91%** of directors are **employed full time for 12 months**, up from 80% in 2012.

80%
2012

91%
2018

A recent review of the Division III institutions' directory of athletics communication directors indicates that more than **82% are men**, down from more than 85% in 2012.

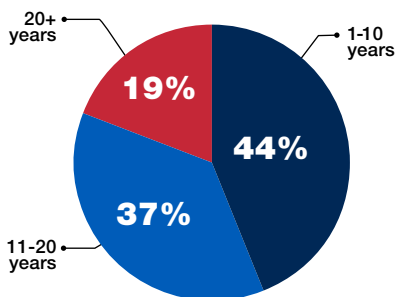
85%
2012

82%
2018

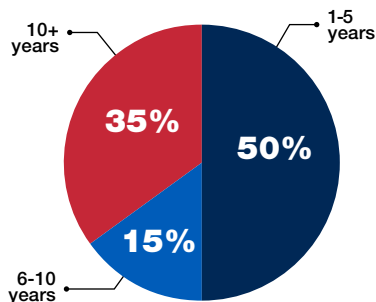
Nearly **43%** of Division III athletics communication directors hold the traditional title of **director of sports information**, and **24%** use the primary title of **athletics communication director**. A significant number (approaching **44%**) perform secondary duties as an **associate or assistant administrator**, while 12% hold a secondary title/role as coach/assistant coach.

Almost **60%** have an **advanced degree**.

As for experience in the profession, the percentages are as follows:



As for experience at their current institution, the percentages are as follows:





Job Responsibilities and Workload

In all, **66% percent of respondents** from the 2018 survey said they are part of the **senior management team**, with **79% reporting to the director of athletics**. Sixty-one percent said they meet regularly with the AD (either weekly or biweekly), and **89% said they feel their opinion is valued**.

Respondents rated **these four areas, in priority order**, as most needed to be a successful sports information or athletics communication director:



**Statistics
Inputting**



**Social
Media**



Writing



**Photoshop
Experience**

Regardless of title, a slight majority of **51% said they have an assistant** in some capacity, and of those, **63% are in a full-time role**. The assistant role has surpassed a graduate assistant option, as only 23% have a graduate assistant.

Student help continues to be imperative, as **46% responded their office employs 10 or more student workers**, who primarily handle game-management duties.

Work-life balance continues to remain challenging, as **78% said they work an average of 50 or more hours a week**, and only **45% said they felt like they had an adequate work-life balance**. Social media continues as a primary factor, as 46% said they spend six to 10 hours a week on this platform and 18% reported spending more hours than that on social media.



Social media, media relations, video content, livestreaming and website management are now the top job responsibilities, morphing from the traditional responsibilities of media guides, game programs, statistics and press releases as indicated in the 2012 survey. Despite the influence of advanced technology, 80% print media guides or game programs for home competition events. However, 49% use print only for select sports.

Up to 30% of directors also perform duties such as selling advertising or venue sponsorships, serving as radio or television broadcasters for games, overseeing taping of games for coaches and hiring game officials. Forty-eight percent said they also perform other duties not related to sports information, such as event manager and compliance officer.

For game-day management, **39% of respondents said they use a combination of announcers to operate the public address system**, whether it be themselves or their assistants. Twenty-nine percent use students to assist, 26% hire professionals, and 5% use institutional staff. As for inputting statistics, 46% said they are responsible for doing so, 30% said they use student workers, and 13% said they hire freelancers.



78%

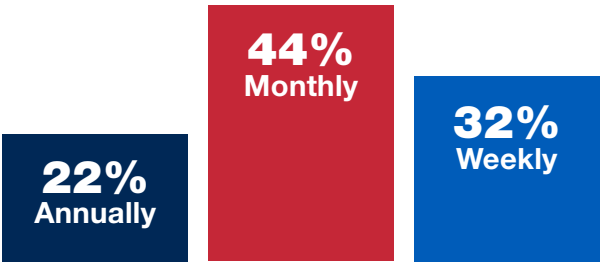
said they
work an
average
of **50 or
more
hours a
week**



Campus Collaboration

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said they are not consulted when master schedules for contests are made, and an even higher percentage (93%) said they are expected to cover multiple games/events at the same time.

Just under half are part of the campus communications team. Meetings range from annually (22%) to monthly (44%) to weekly (32%).



Just **less than a quarter** meet with their campus Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

Almost **60%** conduct an annual review of athletics communication trends and reassess best practices.

Impact of Technology

With the emergence of new technologies, directors indicated they spend approximately **20% of their time on website maintenance**. In all, 51% spend 10-20 hours per week on the website, and 31% spend 20-30 hours per week. The 2012 survey indicated 50% spent at least 16 hours per week on the website.

Ninety-nine percent of Division III athletics communication directors oversee a social media platform. A similar percentage manage multiple accounts, with equal emphasis on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Sixty-four percent of athletics communication directors devote six or more hours to social media functions weekly. **This task is one of the top five duties GAs and student workers perform.**

Ninety-six percent of Division III athletics communication directors report producing athletics video content for online use and live web-based streaming of competition. Excluding livestreaming, 66% said they produce their own video content for their website, and 86% are responsible for their own content. **The leading types of videos, aside from livestreaming, include athlete/coach interviews (29%), highlights with music (22%) and season highlights (16%).**

With 96% of Division III institutions livestreaming events, 66% of those institutions livestream for more than 10 sports. **Sixty-three percent stream more than 75 events per academic calendar year.** Sixty-seven percent of athletics communication and sports information directors said they are responsible for managing livestreaming events.



99%
of Division III
athletics
communication
directors
**oversee a
social media
platform.**



92%
CoSIDA
Members

86%
Attend
CoSIDA
Conventions

CoSIDA Involvement

Ninety-two percent of respondents said they are a **member of the College Sports Information Directors of America**, with a similar percentage saying that their institutions pay the annual membership dues.

Eighty-six percent have **attended the CoSIDA convention within the past five years**. Eighty percent indicated convention costs were covered between institutional support and grants/self-funded.

Fifty-eight percent said their **institutions paid the full cost/partial cost** of attending the CoSIDA convention, up from 45% in 2012.

Conclusions

Results from these surveys and from other sources point to the following conclusions:

- **The desired work-life balance continues to be a moving target.**

Most directors have workloads of 50-60 hours weekly, while only 2% work fewer than 40 hours per week. Due to the large number of sports sponsored at Division III institutions (in comparison to Divisions I and II institutions), about 30% of directors work 60 or more hours weekly. Social media continues as a primary factor, as 46% said they spend 6-10 hours a week on this platform. The long work hours coupled with minimal time off results in an undesirable work-life balance. This problem is partially due to a lack of staff and resources to assist in their duties.

- **Increased job expectations, combined with stagnant or reduced staffing, create challenges.** Fifty-one percent of Division III institutions employ only one athletics communication professional, and this individual has a wide array of responsibilities — from management of athletics websites, social media and video to noncommunications duties including hiring of game management personnel and oversight. Approximately half have either a full-time or part-time assistant who is not a graduate assistant.

- **Increased involvement in strategic decision-making.** Despite devoting many hours per week to communications duties, two-thirds of athletics communication directors believe they are also involved in strategic decision-making within the institution's athletics department. Forty-four percent now hold a secondary title of assistant or associate athletics director.

- **More emphasis on professional development.** More than half have been at their institution for five years or less. Due to time required for learning and using new technologies, as well as strategic planning and supervision, they cite professional development opportunities as critical to being more proficient in their responsibilities. More than 90% are a member of CoSIDA, and nearly as many have attended the annual CoSIDA convention, including Division III Day, in the past five years. The lack of funding for professional development activities no longer appears to be a barrier, as only one-third said that's why they didn't attend professional development programming.

BEST PRACTICES

SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION

Based on feedback and survey results, the NCAA Division III Strategic Communications Working Group provides the following best practices that will positively impact not only the athletics communication/sports information director but also the athletics department overall.

- 1. Be a part of the athletics department senior staff.** As the keeper of the front porch (e.g., the athletics website, statistics, social media, marketing, communication, etc.), it is important for the athletics communication director to be involved in athletics department meetings and strategic planning. (Sixty-six percent of the 2018 survey respondents said they are part of the senior management team, with 79% reporting to the director of athletics.)
- 2. Ask to be involved with master game scheduling.** Sixty-eight percent of the 2018 survey respondents said they are not consulted when athletics departments make master schedules for contests. Consequently, multiple events are scheduled on the same day, causing 93% of directors to indicate that they are trying to cover multiple games/events at the same time. Because nearly 90% of directors from the 2018 survey said they feel their opinion is valued by the athletics director, it makes sense to voice opinions and suggestions related to the scheduling of game-day events. Additionally, make the effort to be involved on conference scheduling committees.
- 3. Evaluate staffing needs in relation to sponsored sports.** Based on the 2018 survey, institutions are at an all-time high of sponsoring varsity sports. Half of Division III institutions have an assistant sports information director, full or part time. While sports offerings and media coverage responsibilities have increased, sports information staffs have not grown at the same pace. This trend results in an excessive amount of responsibilities and a lack of staff support to execute daily tasks. Survey results indicate that workloads average 50 to 60 hours per week, and fewer than 50% of the respondents felt like they had an adequate work-life balance.





4. Encourage collaboration with campus, local community and conference counterparts.

Initiate cross-departmental communication and collaboration with a variety of campus constituents, including the following:

- Academic departments (journalism, marketing communications, public relations, etc.).
- Alumni relations.
- Communications office.
- Development office.
- Information technology office.
- Marketing department.
- Multimedia services.
- Student affairs.
- University relations.

Build and maintain relationships with local media — television, newspaper and radio — and social media outlets. Cultivating relationships with media professionals is a key component. Build relationships with local community groups (for example, Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) to elevate the institution's athletics events, engage with a potential fan base, build a better understanding of opportunities for collaboration among community members and create community service opportunities for student-athletes.

Develop a professional relationship with respective conference colleagues, including the conference communication director. Recommend an annual meeting with the conference communication director and all of the member schools' communication and sports information directors.

5. Ensure that athletics communication and sports information directors are members of the campus communications cadre that discusses strategic campus public relations and media issues.

This ensures consistent institutional branding, garners insights and input on athletics initiatives, and promotes the sharing of communication best practices. This group could include representatives from university relations, development, alumni relations, student affairs, faculty, administration, etc. A little more than half of the 2018 survey respondents said they are part of the campus communications team.

6. Use social media to your advantage. Survey results indicate that all Division III athletics communication and sports information directors oversee a social media platform, up from 50% in 2012. With the emergence of new technologies, directors said they devote approximately 20% of their overall time to social media — primarily Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube — to promote athletics. Continue to use these trending platforms to promote the athletics department and create new relationships. Using social media for athletics program promotion not only provides an alternate base for marketing, but also a platform for directors to monitor and protect the athletics program's reputation/brand.

7. Regularly engage with the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. The student-athletes are the story. The recent survey indicates that more than three-quarters of athletics communication and sports information directors do not meet with their campus SAACs. It is beneficial to interact frequently with the student-athletes to learn about possible feature stories and special events. These stories also will foster connections with other campus constituents. Consistent communication and engagement provide an opportunity for student-athletes to learn more about the athletics communication role, which can often lead to future assistance.





8. Partner with campus-wide and academic departments to enlist graduate assistants, interns and student workers.

Athletics communication offices provide a wide array of intern opportunities including feature story and press release writing and editing, compilation of statistics, game announcing, social media maintenance, and marketing. If partnered with academic departments, interns could receive academic credit, exposure to the entire student body, resume building, and real-world experiences. Forty-two percent of survey respondents said they have at least two or more student workers, on average, providing 6-10 hours of work in the office a week. Nearly half of the directors employ more than 10 student workers to handle game-day management duties. Graduate assistants can be solicited internally or from neighboring institutions. (Results from the 2018 survey indicate that fewer than 25% of Division III sports information offices have a graduate assistant.) Directors also are encouraged to emphasize a commitment to diversity and inclusion in hiring practices when building a staff of student workers, graduate assistants and/or interns.

9. Attend the CoSIDA convention, including Division III Day, at least once every three years.

More than 90 percent of survey respondents said they are a member of CoSIDA. Conference offices, with the assistance of the NCAA conference grant program, have funding to support professional development opportunities. For events such as the annual CoSIDA convention, including Division III Day, 58% of survey respondents said their institutions pay full cost/partial cost for directors to attend.



RESOURCES

Technology

- Personal computer(s) – laptop(s), tablet(s)
- Smartphone(s)
- Remote internet access - wireless air card(s)/hot spot
- Professional camera/video camera
- Flip camera(s)
- Video-editing software
- Design software (InDesign, Adobe Illustrator)
- Statistics software
- Web-streaming equipment for indoor/outdoor events
- Web hosting company (rather than an in-house website)

CoSIDA Resources

- CoSIDA.com [www.cosida.com]
- CoSIDA Twitter (@CoSIDAnews) [twitter.com/cosidanews]
- CoSIDA listserv
- D3SIDA Facebook [facebook.com/pages/D3SIDA]

NCAA Division III Resources

- Division III Strategic Positioning Platform
- NCAA.org (public) [www.ncaa.org] (@InsidetheNCAA)
- NCAA.org/D3SpecialOlympics [www.ncaa.org/D3SpecialOlympics]
- NCAA.com [www.ncaa.com]
- NCAA Division III Videos and Resources
[<http://www.ncaa.org/governance/videos-and-resources>]
Download customizable Division III Week resources (communications kit, logos, videos, splash page, etc.) and Identity Initiative videos.
- NCAA Division III Facebook [www.facebook.com/NCAADivisionIII]
- NCAA Division III Instagram [www.instagram.com/ncaadiviii/]
- NCAA Division III Twitter [twitter.com/NCAADivIII] (@NCAADivIII) #whyd3
- NCAA Division III YouTube [www.youtube.com/ncaadivisioniii]
- NCAA News archives
[<http://ncaanewsarchive.s3.amazonaws.com/index.html>]

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

Memberships/Affiliations

- Membership in CoSIDA
- Membership in NACDA
- Membership in ECAC-SIDA
- Membership in public relations/communications/marketing organizations

Workshops

- Attendance at annual CoSIDA convention
- Attendance at NCAA Division III Day at CoSIDA convention
- Attendance at ECAC-SIDA workshops and professional development activities
- Attendance at communications-related seminars, workshops and webinars

Online

- Public Relations Society of America [www.prsa.org] (@PRSA tactics)
- Ragan Communications [www.ragan.com] (@MarkRaganCEO)
- Institute for Public Relations [www.instituteforpr.org]
- International Association of Business Communicators [www.iabc.com]
- International Public Relations Association [www.ipra.org]
- Mashable [mashable.com] (@mashable)
- LinkedIn Groups (CoSIDA, PRSA, PR and Communications professionals, and Sports Information and Statistics)



Other

- ECAC-SIDA [www.ecac-sida.org]
- NCAA Division III Sports Information Directors Email Address Listing [moraviansports.com/information/links/D3emails]
- NCAA Division III College Athletics Website Addresses (Alphabetical) [moraviansports.com/information/links/AlphaWebsites]
- NCAA Division III College Athletics Website Addresses (By Conference) [moraviansports.com/information/links/D3websites]
- AP Style Guide [www.apstylebook.com] (@APStylebook)

On-Campus

- Communications/Journalism departments (professors, class projects, internships, etc.)
- Campus-wide communication group/team
- Student-athletes. Their stories are the greatest resource.

Budget

- Independent budget operations for communications
- Work-study budget and/or stipends to hire graduate assistants and student interns

To provide feedback on this guide or for more information on the NCAA Division III Strategic Communications Working Group, please contact d3identity@NCAA.org.







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