



SENIOR WOMAN ADMINISTRATOR 201

Overcoming Barriers to SWA Impact

While educating stakeholders (presidents, athletics and other institutional staff and student-athletes) about the SWA designation is a great first step to enhance the impact of the SWA, this resource lists common barriers faced by SWAs and provides tips to overcome them. See SWA 101 on naaa.org for help with clarifying the purpose of the designation and engaging in open communication to optimize the SWA's role.

“ The SWA designation provides an important opportunity for women to provide input into key organizational decisions. Even in departments with multiple women in key positions, the SWA designation is an important role for campus and conference representation, and leads to more inclusive work environments across college athletics. ”



Karen Peters

Senior Associate Athletics Director/SWA,
University of Portland

“ This designation has been critical to the success of our department. The SWA is an integral part of all top-level decision making for us. She also serves as a valuable resource for our coaches, staff and student-athletes who seek guidance and support on a number of fronts throughout each academic year. ”



Bernard Muir

The Jaquish & Kenninger Director of Athletics,
Stanford University

What is the SWA?

The senior woman administrator (SWA) is the highest-ranking female involved in the management of an institution's intercollegiate athletics program. The intent of the SWA designation is to promote meaningful representation of women in the leadership and management of college sports.

* A school with a female director of athletics may designate a different woman as SWA.

1 The SWA designation may create a sense of isolation if it is seen as the “solo woman administrator” rather than enhancing the number of women in senior leadership roles.*

TIPS FOR SWAs

Review the reasons the SWA designation remains important (see NCAA SWA 101 document) and communicate the value of the role across the industry. Discuss key issues with other staff members to bring multiple perspectives to meetings and other decision-making opportunities to demonstrate the value of diverse perspectives. Embrace your role as a campus leader by serving on committees outside of athletics. Look for a mentor or confidant outside your department.

TIPS FOR ADs

Strive to create a leadership team that reflects the gender diversity of the student-athlete population and include varying perspectives in decision making. Consider ways of promoting women within the department to enhance departmental operations and strategy. Provide release time for your SWA to attend external meetings.

***Note:** In 2018-19, 21% of Division I athletics departments reported having 0 or 1 female administrators.

2 The SWA may not have adequate access to information or appropriate authority to make decisions.

TIPS FOR SWAs

Invite the AD to review the SWA 101 documents on ncaa.org with you. Provide substantive feedback about department issues, dynamics and culture. Be clear about what you need to be successful in this role, and ask for feedback on your work.

TIPS FOR ADs

Be intentional about engaging the SWA in significant decisions (e.g., contract negotiations, donor meetings, budget development and oversight). Be clear about the SWA's value with staff and student-athletes. Publicly engage and recognize her leadership.

3 The SWA may have too many responsibilities to be intentional with the designation.

TIPS FOR SWAs

Educate yourself about the role of the SWA and be honest about whether you can be effective. Identify work that could be managed by others and collaborate with your AD regarding distribution of responsibilities.

TIPS FOR ADs

Educate yourself about the role of the SWA and hold yourself and other ADs accountable for taking action to maximize the role. Create the time and space for the SWA to engage in senior leadership activities.

4 The misperception that the SWA designation is solely focused on gender equity or women's sports can limit additional leadership opportunities.

TIPS FOR SWAs

Be visible with your leadership activities in the department and with your presence at men's and women's events. Share your diverse responsibilities with department and campus colleagues and ask to be involved in senior-level discussions (budget, development, etc.).

TIPS FOR ADs

Ensure that the SWA's responsibilities are broader than women's sports and gender equity oversight. Clarify that the SWA provides leadership for men's and women's sports, and that gender equity oversight is a priority for all staff.

5 It is difficult to find time or funding to attend professional development events or external committee meetings.

TIPS FOR SWAs

Review opportunities of interest and present a plan to the AD addressing time away from campus and budget impact. Recognize how understanding the national landscape can enhance your impact on campus. Pursue grants (there are many!) and consider virtual participation in trainings or meetings.

TIPS FOR ADs

Invest in the professional development of your SWA. Consider partial funding or periodic opportunities (every other year, etc.) if regular support is not feasible. Learn about grants and external sources of funding and advocate for your SWA's access to them.