



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.

“Serving as the SWA is meaningful because it is a role specifically founded in leadership, visibility and decision making. The SWA role is one where you can increase opportunities and improve environments for everyone in athletics.”

**Carrie Michaels**

Senior Associate Director of Athletics/SWA,
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

“Leadership is developed through a strategic process that requires planning, time, effort and resources in order to build knowledge and confidence. As athletics directors, we must provide the SWA with access and resources to be a leader in the campus community. This process improves our athletics programs and the student-athlete experience.”

**Clyde Doughty Jr.**

Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics and Recreation, Bowie State 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 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. Publically engage and recognize her leadership.

2

The SWA may have too many responsibilities to be intentional with the designation (she may be a coach or have too many expectations outside of 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. Acknowledge that naming a coach as SWA creates multiple challenges (e.g., time, confidentiality, supervision of colleagues, meetings). Develop a plan to overcome these challenges and communicate it to other coaches and staff in the department. Strive to expand your administrative staff such that it includes women. And create the time and space for the SWA to engage in senior leadership activities.

3

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.). Propose roles for other staff members (e.g., assign diversity programming efforts to males and other department staff) so all parties are invested in equity.

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.

4

The SWAs do not have a formal role in conference governance and may not be invited to conference meetings.

TIPS FOR SWAs

Be intentional about reviewing conference agendas, minutes and other important documents. Network with conference colleagues and form working relationships with peer SWAs. Advocate for SWAs to participate in conference leadership, and volunteer to serve on conference committees.

TIPS FOR ADs

Hold other conference ADs accountable for SWA engagement. Collaborate with your commissioner and SWAs to establish expectations for SWA attendance and participation at meetings. Review conference agendas and other materials with the SWA before and after conference meetings. Nominate the SWA for liaison and committee roles within the conference.

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 committees.

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.