



“ The SWA designation is important to provide a visible presence for more women to see athletics as a viable career opportunity. The SWA also serves as a vessel to add perspective and value to the student-athlete experience beyond the classroom. ”



**Angel Mason**

Director of Athletics, Berry College

“ Great leaders understand that innovation and strong cultures are born from diverse voices. When the SWA is engaged in meaningful ways and brought to the table, departments get better. ”



**Michelle Filander**

Head Women's Basketball Coach/Assistant Athletics Director/SWA, Austin College

## 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](http://naaa.org) for help with clarifying the purpose of the designation and engaging in open communication to optimize the SWA's role.

## 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 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 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.

### **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](http://ncaa.org) with you. Ask or offer suggestions about how you can help the program, and provide substantive feedback about department issues, dynamics and culture. Be clear about what you need to be successful in this role, which may include asking for a more senior title.

#### **TIPS FOR ADs**

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

### **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.).

#### **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 all 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 (especially for coaches!).**

#### **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.