



---

# SWA

---

## SENIOR WOMAN ADMINISTRATOR

*Understanding the designation and  
her role on your senior management team*



*“The senior woman administrator is an essential, visible leadership role in today’s athletics landscape. The senior management functions and the key audiences involved in our profession continue to evolve, creating a need for a diverse and informed viewpoint to make sound decisions, especially when those decisions involve student-athletes or the overall operation of the athletics department. The senior woman administrator can be in a leadership role in any of the professional or management areas of the athletics program, including serving as a visible role model in intercollegiate athletics, the campus and in the community.”*



— **Joni Comstock, NCAA senior vice-president for championships/SWA**

## **THE SENIOR WOMAN ADMINISTRATOR**

The senior woman administrator (SWA) is the highest ranking woman in the athletics department. The SWA is not the senior “women’s” administrator, nor is the role intended to be restricted to the individual supervising women’s sports. The SWA can fill any job duties in the athletic department – business manager, facilities, compliance, academics, sport supervision, etc. The SWA should be a member of the athletics department senior management team. She should be provided the appropriate time, resources and title to fulfill her administrative responsibilities. If the director of athletics (AD) is a woman, she can designate another woman in the department to serve in the role of SWA. (NCAA Constitution (4.02.4); First Institutional (4.02.4.1); Second Conference (4.02.4.2))

### **The SWA**

- Acts as a key decision-maker instrumentally involved with the athletics department
- Participates on senior management team
- Strategizes ways to support and manage gender equity and Title IX plans and issues
- Advocates issues important to female and male student-athletes, coaches and staff
- Educates individuals on issues concerning both men and women
- Serves as a role model and resource for students-athletes, coaches, administrators and others
- Leads student-athletes in successfully balancing academics and athletics
- Reviews Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act Report and the Gender Equity Plan
- Active member of key professional organizations

## **PURPOSE AND STATUS OF THE SWA LEADERSHIP ROLE**

---

The NCAA membership developed the designation of a senior female staff member in 1981 as the association began providing championships for women's sports. In the 1981-82 academic year, more than 64,000 female student-athletes participated in 33 NCAA championships in 16 sports. Now over 180,000 female student-athletes compete in 20 championship sports. The purpose of the designation has always been to involve female administrators in a meaningful way in the decision-making process in intercollegiate athletics. The position is intended to ensure representation of women's interests, experience and perspective at the institutional, conference and national levels.

Since sponsoring women's championships, the NCAA also pursued other avenues to promote the experience of women as student-athletes and athletics staff and coaches:

- Established the association-wide Committee on Women's Athletics (CWA) in 1989
- Developed the NCAA Women of the Year Award for career excellence in academics, athletics, community service and leadership in 1991
- Established a Gender Equity Task Force in 1993, responsible for programs such as emerging sports for women and NCAA research on women's participation
- Continued significant educational programming to advance the skills and connection of women as administrators and coaches, such as the NCAA/NACWAA Institutes, NCAA Leadership Institute for Minorities and the NCAA Women Coaches Academies

The number of women holding campus athletics leadership positions [AD, associate AD and assistant AD] in 2010 was 1,513 (30.4 percent); up minimally from the base year of 1995-96, when 661 (26.9 percent) of these positions were held by women. Women of color held just 1.8% of these campus positions in 1995-96. Women of color held 4.5% of these positions in 2009-10.

Overall, from 1998-99 to 2009-10 there was a 3.6 percent increase (from 33.4 percent to 37.0 percent) in the percentage of female staff members at NCAA conferences. In addition, the percentage of female conference commissioners increased 12.6 percent (from 7.4 percent to 20.0 percent) from 1998-99 to 2009-10. In the late 1990s women of color held 12.2% of conference leadership positions. In 2008-09 that percentage increased to 20.5%

Recent NCAA research revealed that more institutions are assigning administrative titles to the designated SWA. That research also indicated mixed opinions about support of the role:

- Approximately 30 percent of SWAs reported that their AD provided

training or a mentorship role in developing them as an administrator prior to their designation as the institutional SWA. (80 percent of ADs reported providing training or a mentorship role).

- Sixty percent of SWAs reported that they have been approved for institutional funds to receive athletics administrative training. (More than 85 percent of ADs report they have approved this funding).

The SWA aides senior management with a broad-based, well-versed, wide range of experiences in sport and in the world of intercollegiate athletics. The institution also obtains an experienced, female voice and perspective, and a role model who is conscious about equity and matters concerning gender.

**Other findings:**

- More than 84 percent of SWAs indicated that they advocate issues important to female student-athletes, coaches and staff.
- Approximately 77 percent of SWAs indicated that they advocate issues important to male student-athletes, coaches and staff.
- More than 75 percent of SWAs indicated that the SWA is involved in the recruitment and hiring of key department personnel.
- Approximately 67 percent of SWAs indicated that they are involved in sport program supervision.
- Approximately 90 percent of ADs indicated that the SWA is part of the senior management team whereas 75 percent of SWAs indicated that they are part of this team.
- Approximately 74 percent of SWAs indicated that they are involved in administration and governance of the athletics program.
- Sixty-five percent of SWAs indicated that they act as a key decision-



*“The senior woman administrator ensures the representation of women’s interests, experiences and perspective into the decision-making process in intercollegiate athletics. This is important because an inclusive culture – one where all points of view are heard and valued – creates a better environment for student-athletes and higher education.”*

**Dr. Mark Emmert  
President, NCAA**

maker instrumentally involved with the athletics department.

- More than 57 percent of SWAs indicated that they monitor the implementation of the gender-equity plan.
- Approximately 88 percent of SWA indicated that their roles were gender-neutral (geared toward both men's and women's programs).
- Over 81 percent of SWAs indicated high levels of agreement to the statement that the SWA should have an accompanying title as an athletics administrator (assistant, associate or senior associate AD) within three years of their designation.

## **BEST PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS**

The Senior Woman Administrator should be instrumentally involved with the implementation of the following NCAA guiding principles at the conference and institutional levels:

- Institutional control and responsibility
- Student-athlete well-being
- Gender equity
- Sportsmanship and ethical conduct
- Sound academic standards
- Equitable hiring and compensation efforts
- Diversity within the conference and NCAA governance structures
- Competitive equity
- Fair recruiting practices
- Equitable budget allocations
- Financial aid provision
- Playing and practice season opportunities
- Economy of athletics program operation

### **Schools and conferences should:**

- Include the SWA on the senior management team of the institution.
- Include SWA's at conference leadership meetings and assign the group clear responsibilities in the conference governance structure
- Seek conference and national governance and committee opportunities for the SWA.
- Provide mentorship to the SWA.
- Train the SWA. Suggestions include attendance at the NCAA Gender Equity Forum; membership in NACDA and NACWAA; professional development opportunities to improve leadership and communication skills. Divisions II and III should take advantage of grants specifically targeting SWA training.
- Connect the SWA to appropriate campus resources, such as the campus Title IX Coordinator and faculty leadership
- Provide the SWA with appropriate resources and time to complete her responsibilities in this role.
- Consider including an appropriate administrative title to reflect her responsibilities

## **NCAA INCLUSION FRAMEWORK**

In 2010 the NCAA Executive Committee reaffirmed the association's commitment to providing an inclusive experience for students and staff by adopting a broadened directive:

“As a core value, the NCAA believes in and is committed to diversity, inclusion and gender equity among its student-athletes, coaches and administrators. We seek to establish and maintain an inclusive culture that fosters equitable participation for student-athletes and career opportunities for coaches and administrators from diverse backgrounds. Diversity and inclusion improves the learning environment for all student-athletes, and enhances excellence within the Association.”

“The NCAA will provide or enable programming and education which sustains foundations of a diverse and inclusive culture across dimensions of diversity including, but not limited to age, race, sex, class, national origin, creed, educational background, disability, gender expression, geographical location, income, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation and work experiences. Programming and education will also strive to support equitable laws and practices, increase opportunities for individuals from historically underrepresented groups to participate in intercollegiate athletics at all levels, and enhance hiring practices for all athletics personnel to facilitate more inclusive leadership in intercollegiate athletics.”

In support of this spirit of inclusion and recognition of the value of diverse leadership to both improved decision-making and to providing leadership reflective of the student-athlete experience, schools and conferences are encouraged to actively train and engage their senior woman administrators in all aspects of the organization's operations.

**Resources Available:**

**NACDA — National Association of Collegiate Athletic Directors**

<http://nacda.fansonly.com>

**NACWAA — National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators**

<http://nacwaa.org> or e-mail: [info@nacwaa.org](mailto:info@nacwaa.org)

**NCAA WEB SITE** — [http://www.ncaa.org/gender\\_equity](http://www.ncaa.org/gender_equity)

**Select Senior Woman Administrator Resource**

Includes best practices resources such as hiring, student-athlete experience evaluations and the NCAA Gender Equity Manual.

**Karen Morrison**

*NCAA, Director of Gender Inclusion Initiatives*

P.O. Box 6222

Indianapolis, Indiana 46206-6222

317-917-6321

[kmorrison@ncaa.org](mailto:kmorrison@ncaa.org)



**Go to: [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org)  
Governance  
Office of Inclusion**