Resilience for the Rocky Road: Supporting First Year Student-Athletes in their Transition to College

A joint project between Boise State University and Illinois State University

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Problem

• First-year student-athletes encounter
  • New time and energy demands
  • Experience challenges of independence and autonomy
  • Are exposed to new elite athletic environment where expectations and psychological pressures are heightened
  • Have their support networks altered

(Arnett, 2000; Gayles & Baker, 2015; Wylleman, 2017)
Why Resilience Matters

- Resilience is a process of positive adaptation as a result of significant adversity and the ability to use personal qualities to withstand these pressures (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000)

- Resilience programming should focus on:
  1. Optimizing personal qualities
  2. Creating a facilitative environment
  3. Developing a challenge mindset

  (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016)
Program Content

Adapted from Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012
Program Format

In-person
• Integrated into Freshman orientation class
• 4-week workshops
• 67 student-athletes in two sections
• Surveys at semester start, end of October, December

Online
• Fully online workshop
• 4 workshops – pace was self-driven
• 106 student-athletes
• Surveys at semester start, when completed module 4, and December
Bronco Resilience for the Rocky Road

Workshop 1: Creating a Balanced Student-Athlete Identity

Task 3: Coping skills for student-athletes

Now that we have discussed a range of effective coping strategies for student-athletes and identified your preferences for coping, it is important to establish a plan for addressing the stressors associated with your first-year. After each of the three videos, consider you will be asked to identify coping strategies unique to the academically, athletically and socially demanding environment you are about to enter.
Participants

- 135 freshman student-athletes completed surveys at all three time points (Boise State = 62; Illinois State = 73)
- Male student-athletes = 62; female student-athletes = 73
- Primarily white ($n = 96$; Black/African American = 22; Hispanic/Latinx = 6)
- Split between full scholarship ($n = 48$), partial scholarship ($n = 64$) and no scholarship ($n = 23$)
Program Results
Program Value for Transition

Identity | Coping | Social Support | Leadership | Overall Program
---|---|---|---|---
1.00 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 5.00

BSU | ISU | Overall
---|---|---

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Program Value for College Experience

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Student Outcomes

Stress, Distress, and Resilience Across the Course of the Program
Student Outcomes

Athletic Identity Change Across the Program

AIMS Total
AIMS Social Identity
AIMS Exclusivity
Behavior Change

• Approximately 75% of student-athletes indicated they took actionable steps to:
  • Balance their identity
  • Use alternative coping strategies
  • Seek new types of support
  • Improve leadership skills

• 93% of student-athletes recommended that future student-athletes participate in the resilience programming
Preference for Programming Type

- Online: 72.2%
- No Matter: 28.1%
- In Person: 54.7%

In Person Online

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Implications for Campus Level Programming

1. Educate coaches and support staff to facilitate student-athlete resilience because developing student-athlete resilience cannot be accomplished in a single program.

2. Tailor educational programming to your student-athletes and your university.

3. Identify and empower champions to drive resilience and psychological development programming.

4. Promote active and collaborative learning experiences in face-to-face and online programs.