

**NCAA Innovations in Research and Practice Grants Program
2023 Funded Projects**

Creating wholeness in athlete branding: A game-based learning intervention to support student-athletes on personal branding and mental well-being

University of New Haven and University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Project team: Bo Yu*, Ph.D.; Yiran Su, Ph.D.; and Ceyda Mumcu, Ph.D.

The Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policy has presented novel challenges for higher education and student-athletes alike. To address this, we propose the “ACE” program, incorporating an App, a Certification, and an Ecosystem, fostering collaboration between Division I and Division II institutions. Using game-based learning, ACE offers immersive education on personal branding for Generation Z student-athletes. The University of New Haven and University of Massachusetts Amherst have collaborated to equip student-athletes with skills to cultivate a personal brand and prioritize mental health. This solution encourages cross-divisional cooperation and bridges internal gaps to uphold student-athletes’ well-being and personal branding.

Financial freedom for athletes: Athletes empowering athletes for financial literacy

Cornell University

Project team: Austin M. Arnold*, CPA, MPS; Beth Lyon; and John William McKinley, J.D.,
LLM, CPA, CGMA

Student-athletes are inundated with financial decisions bearing potential lifetime impacts; however, research suggests that student-athletes fall behind their peers in financial literacy. Financial Freedom for Athletes through Cornell University seeks to provide a greater understanding of financial literacy through highly accessible, equitable and uniquely catered financial literacy education. This no barrier to entry, peer-to-peer learning program meets student-athletes where they are, and protects them from being taken advantage of, while also empowering them, providing them with the tools to be prepared for their financial futures, and closing deep seated racial, gender and socio-economic gaps in financial literacy spurred by generations of unequal opportunity and treatment.

Interactive narratives for mental health: Sharing stories of success.

University of Alabama and Michigan State University

Project team: Scott Parrott* Ph.D.; Shaheen Kanthawala, Ph.D.; and Bree E. Holtz, Ph.D.

Mass media professionals from the University of Alabama and Michigan State University are working with student-athletes to create interactive stories about mental health and sport. Researchers will interview student-athletes to understand common experiences and questions related to mental health. Digital artists will create engaging animated videos through which student-athletes (and others) can learn tips for handling pressures related to collegiate life and athletics. The videos will be shared - free of charge - with NCAA member institutions to help improve student-athletes' mental health literacy, attitudes and willingness to seek (or help friends find) mental health care.



RESEARCH

VitalCog: Suicide prevention navigator program

Western Illinois University

Project team: Jennifer Plos*, Ed.D.; Cara Cerullo, LCSW, CADC; Chad Cerullo, M.S., LAT, ATC, CES; Elizabeth Wilson; Hannah Hendrickson; and Matthew C. Mishkind, Ph.D.

Suicide, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation are emerging concerns in athletics; however, there is little information about suicide prevention in the athletic community. Gatekeeper training is efficacious as one component to suicide prevention. This project is a partnership between Western Illinois University and the University of Colorado Johnson Depression Center to pilot the VitalCog: Suicide Prevention Navigator (VC SPN) program, which is an integrated gatekeeper suicide prevention training and peer navigator program for athletic staff and student-athletes. Few suicide prevention programs exist in athletics, so evaluations will focus on developing and disseminating best practices applicable to all NCAA institutions.

* Denotes project director.



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