



# MOUNTAIN LION STRONG: COMPREHENSIVE PSYCHOEDUCATION TO SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN STUDENT-ATHLETE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Supporting the development and sustainability of student-athlete psychological-being and resilience is essential for the longevity and success of each student-athlete during their athletic career and after. College students have reported escalating rates of mental health challenges to include depression, anxiety, and high rates of loneliness and hopelessness. College students were one of the highest risk groups in a growing national mental health crisis prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, the social isolation, uncertainty, and volatility of the pandemic severely exacerbated the critical state of college student mental health. Collegiate student-athletes face these same challenges plus the added performance pressures and navigation of a college athletic landscape greatly changed by the multi-year COVID freezes, changes, and delays in sport competition opportunities.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Our program proposes a comprehensive, evidence-based psycho-education program that utilizes a tiered and progressive approach. The program will facilitate knowledge and skill development for student-athletes to have the tools, resources, and support to develop behaviors and habits to keep their mind and body in a state of balanced wellness, with the primary program pillars presented in the table. The program will be developed with a progressive approach that builds and grows with the athlete year by year, from freshmen student-athletes entering college and adjusting to the demands of academics and athletics, to graduating senior/graduate student-athletes needing a healthy transition out of sport. The program team will include an interdisciplinary team of campus faculty and staff to include faculty in Health Promotion, Sport Psychology, and Sport Nutrition, along with staff from Campus Wellness and Student Health Services, and UCCS Athletics Administration and Coaching staff. The program will offer student-athletes pre-, intra-, post-, and off-season education, workshops, and community building events to teach the skills necessary to align their health and wellness behaviors with their academic and athletic goals. In the progressive model, a peer leadership approach will be used to utilize junior/senior/graduate students in and out of athletics to mentor and help facilitate the program. Students will have access to peer health coaches, be educated on campus resources for mental health, and have monthly peer sessions available for encouragement and accountability of goals and wellness behaviors, and to facilitate peer support and belonging.

## PROGRAM EDUCATIONAL PILLARS TO FACILITATE STUDENT-ATHLETE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Identity	Healthy Relationships	Goal Setting & Time Management	Healthy Eating and Physical Activity	Wellness for Body and Mind
Developing a healthy and multi-faceted identity not limited to the athlete identity	Developing healthy peer relationships in and out of sport; developing a sense of community and belonging on campus	Setting balanced goals for academics and athletics that are positively framed and match the athlete's core values	Healthy and mindful eating both for performance and long term well-being; Training to perform and finding joy in movement outside of sport	Skill building for physical, social, and psychological well-being; Building resilient student-athletes over time who are positioned to thrive after sport.

## EVALUATION PLAN

A mixed-methods evaluation approach will be used. Program effectiveness will be measured at the athlete and team levels at the start and end of each season, and academic year, using a combination of validated questionnaires, individual open-ended reflections, workshop/session feedback, focus groups, and demographic and retention data. Measures will include evaluation of flourishing, psychological well-being, mental skills, and overall program benefits and impacts.

## ESTIMATED BUDGET

\$15,000 to include graduate student funding for program development and implementation,, marketing, and activity incentives.

## MEMBERSHIP DELIVERABLES

Development of a comprehensive, evidence-based best practices model and guide to implementing education on other member campuses to include:

- Lessons learned
- Tips for getting started
- Considerations at the DI, DII, and DIII levels
- Results of initial implementation evaluation
- Opportunities to collaborate in multi-institution evaluation of model

## PROJECT TEAM

- Jessica Kirby, PhD
  - Assistant Professor | Health Promotion/Sport Psychology
  - Assistant Director | Center for Critical Sport Studies
- Margaret Harris, PhD
  - Associate Professor | Sport Nutrition
- Nathan Gibson
  - Executive Director UCCS Athletics
- Katie Smith, MAEd
  - Campus Wellness Manager