



Princeton
University
Health
Services



Building Bridges: Best Practices and Collaborative Care for Student Athlete Mental Health

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Nearly a decade ago....

“Why? Why did it take me so long to acknowledge and accept my illness? And I realized the culture that we live in as athletes does not make it easy for us to honor this. If you think about it... the culture of athletics preaches – “Where there is a will there is a way”, “The best don’t rest”, “Unless you puke, faint or die keep going.” Mental illness is associated with weakness. To appear weak is the last thing an athlete wants,”

- *Victoria Garrick, USC Women’s Volleyball*



Present day...



MENTAL HEALTH BEST PRACTICES
INTER-ASSOCIATION CONSENSUS DOCUMENT: BEST PRACTICES FOR UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING STUDENT-ATHLETE MENTAL WELLNESS



“Care (for student athlete mental health) requires an integrative approach that encourages interprofessional practice and education and draws upon the strengths of athletic trainers, sports administrators, coaches, sport psychologists, sport social workers, and other licensed professionals.”

(Moore et al., 2022)

TEAMMATES **FOR**
MENTAL HEALTH



The Team Around the Team at Princeton

Tigers Performance and Wellness (TigersPaw) is an interdisciplinary team of providers that work together to provide holistic and comprehensive support to Princeton's student-athletes, collaborate on programming, and discuss any student-athletes of concern. On this team we have licensed sport psychology service providers, athletic physicians, and athletic trainers.

Princeton Tigers Performance (PTP) oversees strength and conditioning and works closely with sport psychology, sport nutrition, athletic medicine, and athletic administration to create an environment that helps student-athletes optimize physiological and psychological health. On this team we have Director of Sport Performance, Strength & Conditioning, Sports Nutritionist, and Consulting Sport Psychologist.

Who We Are

IVY League institution with about 5,600 undergraduate and 3,200 graduate students

Education Through Athletics

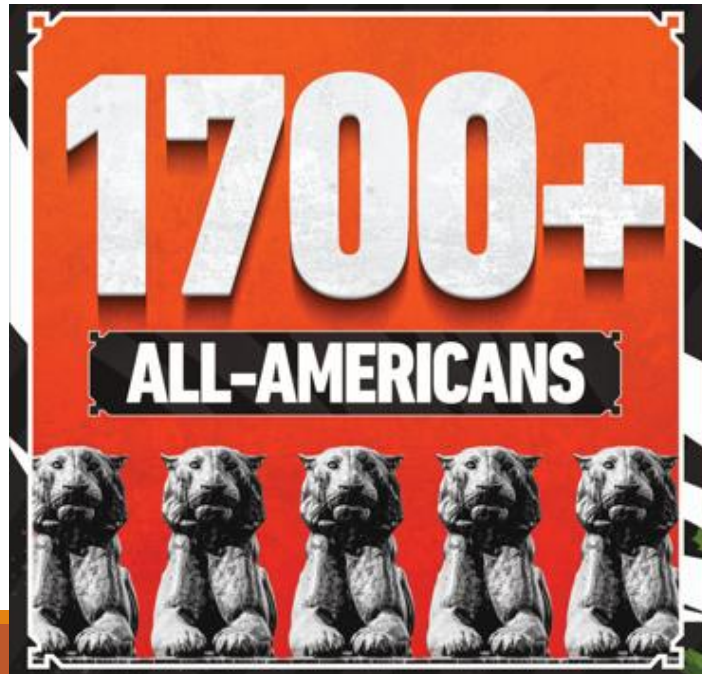
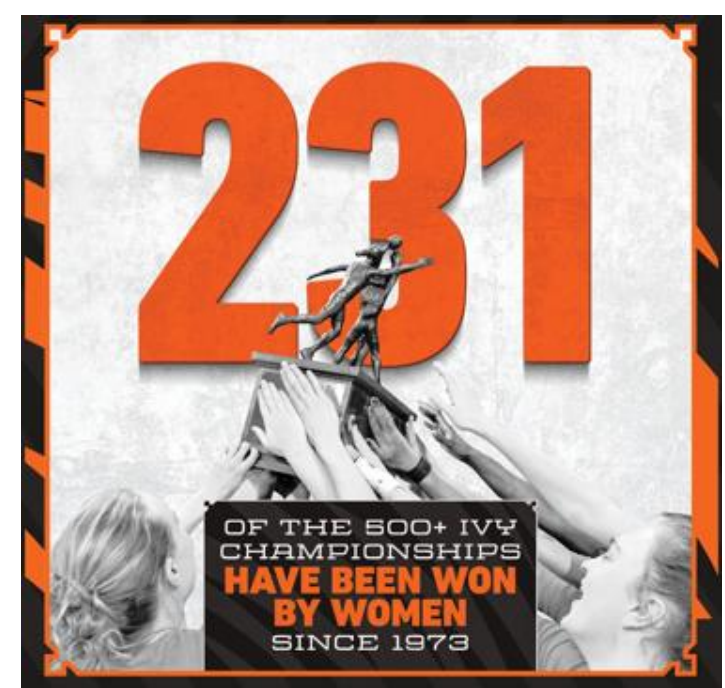
Achieve, Serve, Lead

Princeton sponsors 38 varsity athletic teams and total just under 1,100 student-athletes

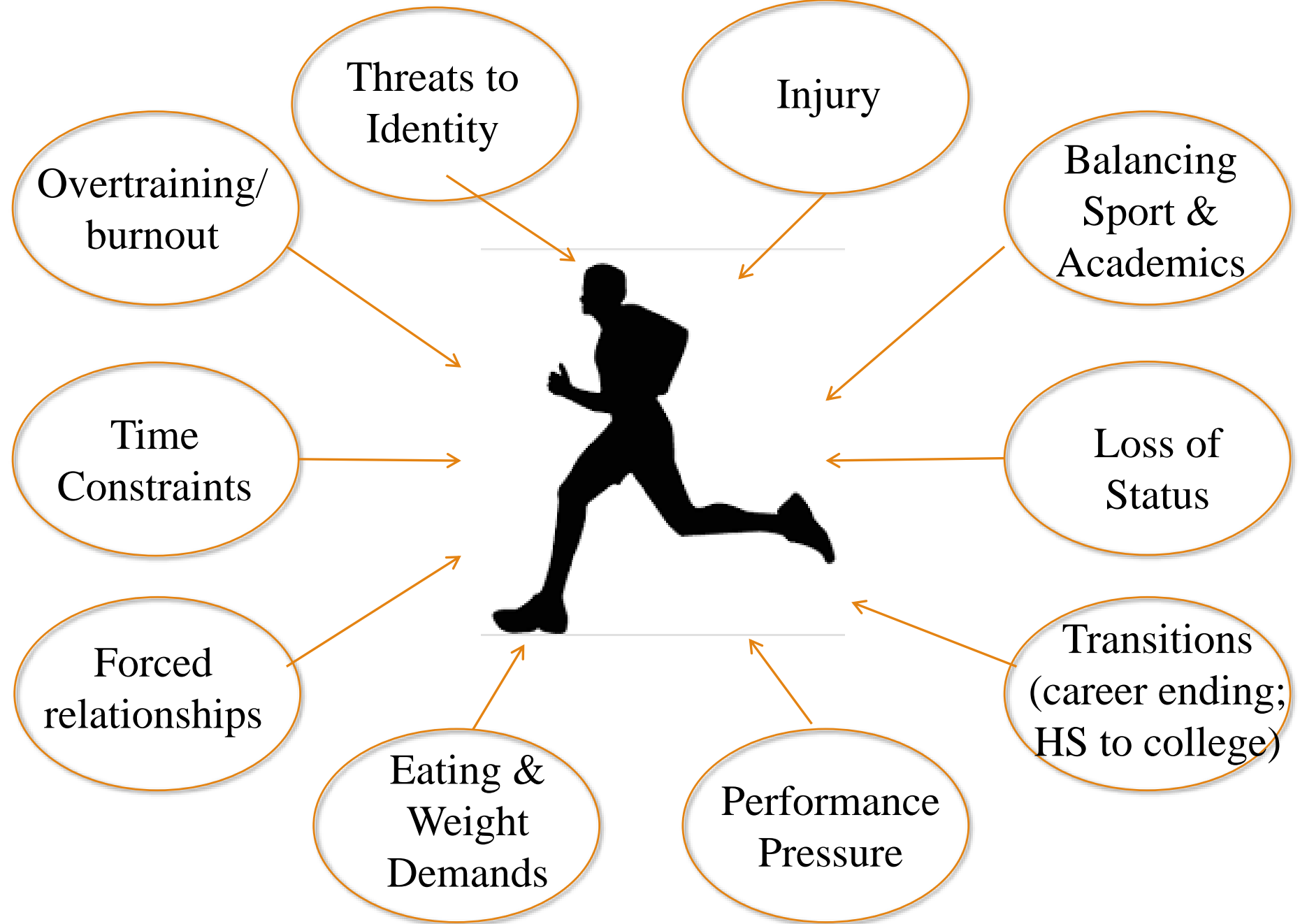
Academic tradition - 4 years to complete 4 seasons

Value-Based Performance Model invested in creating an environment that will optimize Student-Athletes' physiological and psychological health and wellbeing

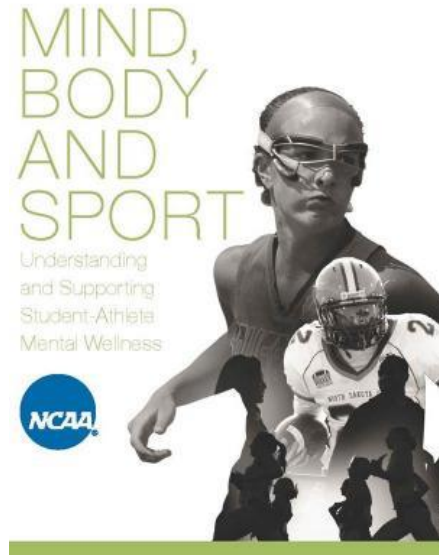
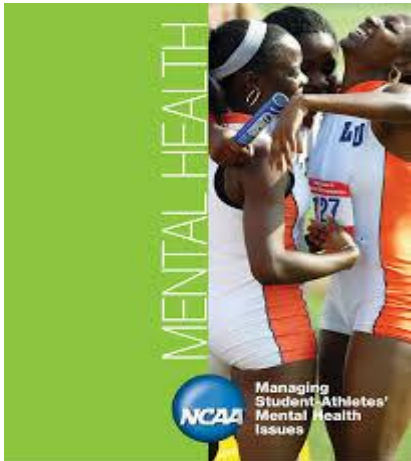




Unique Stressors for Student Athletes



Mental Health and Student-Athletes



- Approximately one in every four to five American college students per year meets criteria for a diagnosis for a mental health disorder.
- Student-athletes are just as likely as non-athletes to experience mental health issues
- Women, BIPOC and LGBTQ+ student athletes reported the highest rates of mental health struggles in most recent NCAA health and wellness study
- Most common mental health concerns for those surveyed in NCAA study insomnia, mental exhaustion, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed.
- Student-athletes are historically less likely non-athletes to seek out help for mental health concerns but some studies suggest that is changing

Mental Health Screen As Part of the Preparticipation Evaluation

Preparticipation Evaluation

- Incoming Health History Form
 - SCOFF questionnaire for disordered eating
 - Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)
 - Screen for tobacco or recreation drug use
- Screening at Preparticipation Physical
 - Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorder -7 (GAD-7)

Screening tools reviewed with team physician prior to clearance

Mental health resource information emailed to student athletes who screen moderate or higher with information on how to access resources



Mental Health Screen As Part of a Preparticipation Evaluation

Returning athletes screened annually at the start of each academic year and then throughout year based on individual needs

- PHQ-2
 - Little interest or pleasure in doing things
 - Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless
- GAD-2
 - Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling nervous, anxious or on edge or not being able to stop or control worrying
- SCOFF
- Substance use/abuse

Role of the Athletic Trainer

Often first line for observing an issue

- May be first to recognize signs of a mental health issue
- Or may be alerted by coaches or teammates of mental health concerns

Athletic Trainer team talks at the start of each season

- How to access care
- When to access care
- Contact information for Counseling and Psychological Services

Athletic Training in-service programs

- QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) Suicide prevention gatekeeper training



Bridging the Gap

AT's can often be the first to witness signs of mental health concerns in Student-Athletes, or one of the first people an athlete opens up to – they need to be prepared to respond.

Medical personnel have several avenues available to them to help an SA get connected with care:

- On-site drop-in hours offered by Outreach Counselors
- Urgent Care available on site at Health Service
- Urgent Care Counselor available to consult by phone
- CPS Cares Line available 24/7
- CPS On-call Counselor available after hours

CPS and the Medical Service have developed a MH Emergency Action Plan which details options available to on-site staff during MH Crises



TIGERSPAW – Student-Athlete Performance and Wellness Team

Collaborative approach to care: counselors, team physicians, athletic trainers – regular meetings to plan holistic care

Focus areas are at nexus of performance and mental health:

- Coping with injury
- Performance anxiety
- Relationships/communication with teammates, coaches
- Insomnia

Coordination with athletic administrators to foster more inter-departmental services; e.g. Student-Athlete Wellness Leader program, mindfulness outreaches, etc.



Confidentiality & Privacy

A challenge in inter-disciplinary care of athletes is balancing athletes' rights to privacy, especially in clinical relationships, and the potential benefits of coordinated care planning

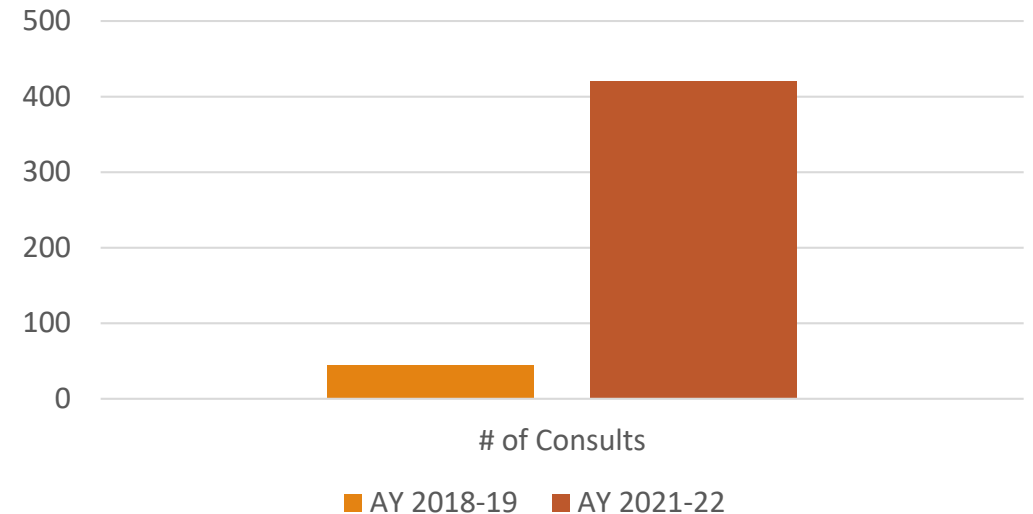
TIGERSPAW addresses this via informed consent and communication with athletes about the treatment team – and by talking through parameters of information shared/not shared

Athletes can opt out of Team census if desired; or, they can consent to only certain info being shared (e.g., attendance to sessions – but nothing more)

CPS Increases to Student-Athlete Individual Services

Over the past 5 years, CPS has dramatically increased our targeted mental health and sport psychology services for student-athletes.

- Our specialized counseling staff has grown from two to five in the last six years
- CPS went from doing 45 sport psychology consultations in AY 2018-19 to doing 420 sport psychology consultations in AY 2021-22, to over 500 last academic year
- Student-Athletes also are equally represented as clients across general the counseling staff – with a 30% annual utilization by overall student body



Multifaceted Outreach Approach

- Student Athlete Focused Outreach
- Athletics Staff Focused Outreach
- Being Present within the Athletic Context



Being the Team Around the Teams

- Sport Psych. Office in Athletic Space
- Attending Practices and Games
- Participating in MH Awareness Events at Games
- Being Present at Athletic Events and Meetings



Student Athlete Focused Outreach

- Team Introductions
- Lunch & Learns
- Team Workshops, Trainings and Consultations
- Training & Collaboration with Student Athlete Wellness Leaders (SAWLS) and Affinity Groups
- Listening Circles in Response to Current Events
- Topical Drop in Groups (e.g. injury, transitions)
- Drop in Meditation Group

Athletics Staff Outreach

- Presenting at All Staff Meetings
- Wellness Workshops and Presentations
- Princeton Distress and Awareness Response (PDAR)
- Lunch & Learns
- Q&A Sessions
- Listening Circles
- Coach Consultations
- Coach Meditation





Student Athlete Wellness Leaders

Princeton University Student-Athlete Wellness Leaders (SAWL) program is a collaboration between Princeton Athletics and University Health Services to support healthy lifestyles among student-athletes through peer leadership.

SAWLs provide support, knowledge and leadership around issues that affect student-athlete performance and wellbeing.

The foundation of SAWL training is bystander intervention. SAWLs are taught skills to **recognize** when someone is in distress and **refer** to the proper professional.

Training modules include topics on mental health, sports nutrition, sexual harassment, diversity and inclusion, distress awareness, leadership and more.

Questions?

