People told me all through college that it would be the best four years of my life, and they couldn’t have been more right.

— Patricia Metzger

Congratulations! You put in considerable time and effort to get to this point, and now you’ve made it—you’ve achieved your goal. You are, or are about to become, a student-athlete on a college or university campus. You deserve to feel great about yourself and what you’ve accomplished. And quite possibly, as Patricia Metzger says, you are entering what will be the best four years of your life.

At the same time, however, you may also be feeling a little nervous, maybe even intimidated by the prospect of what lies ahead. After all, being a college-level student-athlete involves experiences and challenges you’ve never faced before. How well will you be able to handle them?

Being a university-level student is not easy. Being an athlete is even harder. . . . Make the best of every moment you have with your team, in your classes and everywhere you go. College can be your best friend or worst enemy—so make the best of it!

— Jenifer Martin-Flake

As Jenifer Martin-Flake implies, the transition from high school to college is a challenge for everyone, whether playing a sport or not. All college freshmen—athletes and nonathletes alike—have much in common and must deal with many of the same issues.

In college you’re far more on your own. How will you respond to the freedom and independence that college students enjoy? What will you do when there’s no parent around to make sure you go to bed at a decent hour, get up to make it to
class on time, or attend class at all? No one to check if you eat nutritionally or feast on junk food all day? Will you keep up with your class work or pull all-nighters and cram at the last minute? Take just the easiest “gut” courses or more rigorous ones that will better prepare you for life after college?

Starting college truly changes your world. For example, you may find that your high school friends are scattered all over the country, doing all sorts of different things. That means you’ll have to make new friends. Will you be open to meeting and getting to know people from different communities, social classes, religions, and cultures who have different values, tastes, and beliefs than you? Will you value and celebrate diversity?

These are only a few of the significant decisions and adjustments all students have to make when going to college, especially when attending a school away from home. But you’re not just another student. You’re a student-athlete, and that means for the next four or five years you’ll be facing additional pressures that most non–student-athletes don’t have to deal with.

One thing to keep in mind . . . the transition from high school can be overwhelming, but you should remember that you are not alone. Many others have felt the same way.

— Jill Turner

Learning to adapt to the demands of new coaches and the expectations of new teammates are challenges in themselves. Practices are likely to be longer, harder, more frequent, and may be held at different times each day, sometimes twice a day. Competition is much tougher and the season is far longer. Physical exhaustion, mental fatigue, and scrutiny by sports-governing bodies and the media may place additional pressures on you as a student-athlete. You’ll be pulled in different directions by heavy time pressures and conflicting academic and athletic schedules because of practices, training, travel, competitions, athletics-related obligations, and higher expectations for performance in your sport.

When you first come to school as an athlete, it seems like your sport is the number-one thing to worry about and you want to make a great impression on your coaches and teammates. So you seem to spend every moment doing all you can to be successful in athletics.

— Darci Pemberton Desilet

But if what Darci Desilet claims is true, then what happens to the student in student-athlete? After all, college is supposed to be about intellectual growth, learning, classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, art museums, and concert halls, not to mention developing new social relationships and maturing as an adult.
To Succeed Athletically, You Have to Succeed Academically

Academically, college is very different than high school for all students. Although every student has to take certain required courses, it'll be up to you to decide when to take them. You'll probably be able to choose your classes and design your own schedule (making sure classes don't conflict with team obligations). That means, if you like to sleep late, you may have the freedom and flexibility to do just that by scheduling your first class of the day for 10 or 11 a.m. And each class won't meet every day. Some may meet only once or twice a week for two or three hours at a time. So on some days you might not have any classes at all or have long breaks between classes. What's more, some professors may not take attendance, learn your name, or know whether you show up for class or not. Sounds great, doesn't it? But is it?

Will you be able to stay focused on the material presented during a long class without a break? How will you spend the valuable free time between classes or on your days off? How will you handle the temptation to ignore that annoying alarm clock, arrive late to class, or cut class entirely? The freedom of college means you have important choices to make.

Your high school teachers probably were careful to write notes or outlines on the board. They may have repeated key points, reviewed lessons before moving on, and provided individualized attention to students who needed extra help. In college, however, that won't always be the case. You may have professors who lecture the entire semester to classes of 20, 200, or 2,000 without ever using the board or stopping to take questions from confused students. For them, if you don't understand the material, it's your problem, not theirs.

In college, you'll probably be assigned far more reading from week to week than you ever got in high school, and classes will progress at a much faster pace. Yet your professors may never check on whether you've done the reading or grade all of your work. Some may assign daily homework; others may not. But keep in mind, even though the assignments won't always be called homework, you're still expected to do them. What's more, due dates for assignments may be indicated on syllabi distributed at the first class meeting and never mentioned again. Meeting the deadlines is up to you. And professors may not accept late papers or excuse missed exams. Your papers will probably have to be typed, and spelling and grammar will count. And of course, there aren't any report cards or parent-teacher conferences in college.

When you add it all up, it's easy to see why doing well in college is tough for just about everyone. But it's likely to be even more challenging for you because, like other students with extra obligations (e.g., working or parenting), as a student-athlete you have serious demands on your time and energy. Most other students are able to study or go to the library whenever they're not in class, but you may have to be at practice, in the weight room, at team meetings, or at training or physical therapy sessions. When nonathletes are in class, you're away at games, meets, or competitions. Students who don't have additional obligations seem to be able to get by on just a few hours of sleep.
When they need to, they have time to just lie down and crash. It may also be easier for them to find those precious additional hours when there’s an exam to study for or a paper due the next day. But the physical demands of your sport and the pulls it creates on your time are likely to make that more difficult for you.

Are you prepared to take on the responsibilities of being a college student, of being a student-athlete rather than an athlete-student? Are you ready and willing to embrace the role of student? Excel in the classroom? Or if you have entered college less academically prepared than your classmates, are you willing to do what’s necessary to catch up? Are you ready to play your best game academically?

**Taking Advantage of All You Have Going for You**

We believe you can do it because many of the same personal characteristics, traits, and values that have helped you perform so well as an athlete are there for you to use in your academic pursuits. Moreover, they will serve you well when you move on to life after college. The key is to recognize that you have these characteristics and put them to use academically.

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One thing that a lot of people miss about being a student-athlete is the mutual compatibility with regard to performance. To me, it seems that school should actually be easier for a student-athlete because we are so well-versed in being disciplined and, just like class, each sport is goal-oriented. For example, soccer is quite complementary to school. You are constantly analyzing, looking for a weakness, being aware of the entire field, anticipating your opponents’ next move. It’s a lot of the same stuff that it takes to excel in class.

— David Ledet

As an athlete, you have had to work well with others, learn from your mistakes and setbacks, avoid becoming easily overwhelmed, and bounce back from disappointments. Most likely you’ve been able to accept feedback from coaches and others and take the necessary steps to improve your performance. These are the kind of abilities that have the potential to work for you academically as well, but only if you have the drive and desire to use them.

Here are some other attributes that accomplished athletes often possess:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High energy</th>
<th>Mental and physical stamina</th>
<th>Perseverance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Desire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>Work ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Decision-making ability</td>
<td>Dedication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Willingness to sacrifice</td>
<td>Anticipation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Welcome to College

Discipline
Resilience

Leadership
Ability to handle pressure

Goal setting
Courage

TIME-OUT!

Which of the attributes listed in the text have helped you excel in athletics? Jot down at least two additional positive personal attributes you possess that aren’t listed. How can you apply your attributes to your academics? Do you have the desire to do so?

Whether you’re attending an academically selective or less selective school, or playing a high- or lower-profile sport, the attributes that helped you excel in athletics can help you achieve more in your classes. And they can make it easier to strike the critical balance that student-athletes need to maintain—in the classroom and on the playing field. Each of these will help you strengthen your academic game—if you make the commitment to use them.

Developing Your Academic Game Plan

Remember, you are a student-athlete. Student comes first. . . . Make school a challenge that you want to accomplish. I like being able to say that I do track and get my schoolwork done. It says a lot about you when you can handle all the stuff placed on your plate.

— Angela Whyte

We wrote this book to help you “handle all the stuff placed on your plate,” as Angela Whyte says. Wouldn’t it be great if just having this, or any book, could make you a better student? Unfortunately, that’s not going to happen. The reality is that a book can’t make you a better student. Only you can do that. But this book can help.

Think about it this way: You didn’t become an accomplished athlete just because you read a book (or a library full of them) on your sport. Tips you picked up from reading may have helped. But ultimately, how well you perform is up to you. To become a varsity athlete, you had to work, train, and put in the time to hone your skills. And although it hasn’t always been fun (to say the least), you know it’s been worth the time and effort.

Of course, some athletes are just more naturally talented than others. And things come easier to those lucky few. It’s the same with doing well in the classroom: It comes easier to some than others. But just as those who aren’t “naturals” can excel in athletics, those who aren’t “naturals” can excel in academics. By applying your personal attributes to your schoolwork and by
using the practical insights and tips you'll find in this book, better grades and a more rewarding college experience can be yours.

This book is designed to help you successfully manage the unique responsibilities of being a student and a competitive athlete. Think of it as your academic game plan. As college professors with years of experience teaching student-athletes and working with them to improve their academic performance, we have a good sense of what works and what doesn’t, much like experienced coaches. We know what pleases us in the classroom and what gets students into trouble. We also know we don’t have all the answers. So we went to the real experts for advice. We asked academically successful student-athletes at colleges and universities around the country, athletes who’ve figured out what it takes to succeed in their studies as well as in their sports, to share their ideas and strategies with you in a realistic and user-friendly way. You can learn more about who they are and what they’ve accomplished by checking out their biographical profiles at the end of the book.

On the pages that follow you’ll learn strategies to help you:

- Develop and maintain a positive mind-set for a winning attitude in the classroom.
- Make the best use of campus resources.
- Manage your time efficiently.
- Set up a class schedule that works best for your needs and interests.
- Select a major that has value and plan for a satisfying career.
- Get the most out of classes and build positive relationships with fellow students, faculty, and other campus personnel.
- Study and prepare for exams effectively and efficiently and do your best on them.
- Take good care of yourself physically and emotionally.
- Make a smooth and rewarding transition to life after college.

In addition, you'll find Time-out! features designed to help you connect on a personal level with the things you're reading about. And at the end of each chapter, we've included several questions that ask you to think about your own situation.

This book isn't going to make you smarter than you already are—it's not designed to do that. The bottom line, however, is that it will provide you with what you need to strengthen your academic game, help you enjoy the next four or five years, and give you the tools with which to build a successful life after you graduate.
QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. In what ways did you have to work especially hard to earn the opportunity to be a collegiate student-athlete?

2. When you think about moving up from high school to college, what are the major differences between the two? Which of these are you especially looking forward to? Why?

3. As you think about your college years, what adjustments will you have to make? Of these, which ones do you think will be particularly challenging? Why?

4. How committed are you to taking on the responsibilities of being a college student, of being ready to play your best game academically?

5. In what ways can *The College Athlete’s Guide* be helpful to you?