

Overall, my data supports the notion that club athletes at Grand Valley are truly student-athletes. The majority of participants in the research voiced that although they loved their sport, they understood that they were at school to learn, and thus valued their academics over athletics. That being said, it also was made clear that this relationship was sometimes strained, mainly due to opportunities like Nationals that teams don't always have the chance to participate in. Participants were very open in saying that professors were not always very understanding of the commitments that students had to athletics, and thus it sometimes was hard to balance both. Particularly, many participants said that they wished professors treated club athletics more similarly to varsity athletics.

One of the easiest to implement suggestions that participants had to improve the relationship between club athletics and academics is having weekly "study tables" for them to go to. Not only would this encourage teams to spend more time on academics, but it could also be a chance for athletes from different sports to meet each other. One way to do this would be for teams to take turns hosting the study tables by simply booking a few study rooms that are near each other at the library. It could be decided at the beginning of the semester when each team would host, and after they have booked rooms an email could be sent out to let student-athletes know when and where they can get some studying and socializing in.

Although some clubs have an unofficial academic advisor, most do not. It would be a great resource for club-athletes to have someone knowledgeable about their athletic commitments giving them academic guidance, since the person would better understand how much the student is able to manage given their other obligations. An academic advisor would also be able to check-in with athletes and ensure that they were on track with their program. Further, an academic advisor could be a credible resource for students to go to if they are struggling to make limited accommodations with a professor. Students also said that in order to balance academics and athletics better, it would be helpful if the university allowed them to enroll in classes earlier. This would be useful since they would have a better chance of being able to schedule around common practice and game times.

The most concerning takeaway that I had from this project was the fact that Grand Valley does not have any academic requirements for participation in club athletics besides being enrolled in at least 1 credit. Some clubs have their own requirements, usually set by the conference that they compete in. These requirements were still minimal: athletes must be enrolled in at least 12 credits and in good academic standing with the University (2.0 GPA).

I believe that in order for Grand Valley to be able to say that they value the academic success of its club athletes, there must also be policies in place that support them. The biggest policy change that I suggest would be requiring all club-athletes to maintain at least a 2.0 GPA and be a fulltime student. This is a very manageable adjustment, it would just require an academic advisor to check the eligibility of student-athletes at the beginning of each semester.

Generally speaking, the club student-athletes at Grand Valley are doing well at managing their athletic and academic lives on their own, but there is definite room for improvement. Implementation of these changes in order to better support club student-athletes will best be done in steps, throughout the course of a few semesters. Initially, awareness will need to be raised about the support that Grand Valley would like to offer. The study table system would be a great way to kick off the new initiative. Next, teams should be introduced to an academic advisor who can familiarize themselves with the program. Finally, larger policy changes could follow such as raising the minimum requirements to play and allowing club student-athletes to enroll in classes earlier. These actions would benefit both the University and the club student-athletes, since they reinforce that students come to Grand Valley first and foremost for an education.