Counseling College Student-Athletes: Issues and Interventions
Edward F. Etzel, A.P. Ferrante, and James W. Pinkney (Editors). Published 1991 by Fitness Information Technology, Inc., Morgantown, WV 26505. (270 pp., U.S. $36.00)

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Athletic counseling has become an essential component of the total support programming for college athletes in Division I and II athletics. Unfortunately, few athletic counselors have received formal training in sport psychology or counseling strategies. This initial text in athletic counseling attempts both to ambitiously broach the professional concerns involved in this new field and to suggest relevant intervention strategies in several areas of counseling potential.

The authors sensibly adopt a developmental perspective in presenting various problems that may plague student-athletes. Their purpose aims to increase the awareness of counselors to the competing demands in the harried lifestyle of typical college student-athletes in order that these helpers may more effectively enhance their performance in all areas of life. They succeed admirably in this endeavor, but fail to provide a comprehensive text for students enrolled in upper level counseling because they try to develop too much in one text. They should concentrate on their described purpose of increasing awareness by thoroughly reviewing current issues in athletic counseling rather than spending a great deal of space in latter chapters describing a mix of techniques.

The first half of the text (chapters 1–5) presents issues of current concern to professionals working in athletic counseling. The latter part of the book (chapters 6–13) deals with a variety of intervention areas and possible strategies to use in helping college student-athletes. Unfortunately, most chapters are not developed in enough depth to provide a comprehensive picture of current problem areas or recent model programs; similarly, most life skill interventions are broadly outlined for novice practitioners.

Chapter 1 (Ferrante & Etzel) paints a decent picture of developmental deficiencies that may be present in some student-athletes. Chapter 2 (Ferrante, Etzel, & Pinkney) presents an outline for a developmental counseling model that differs from recent trends in athlete services located within athlete support centers outside the athletic department. To date, several of their suggestions concerning external counseling services have not met with great success at several western Division I schools. The chapter does rightly advise cooperation with athletic directors and coaches whether the program is “in-house” or run through undergraduate studies or the counseling center. Chapter 3 (Lottes) presents a delphi study thesis completed at West Virginia University which provides a need assessment of various services that could be included in athletic counseling centers.
This chapter probably should have been included prior to the model explanation in the previous chapter, and the wordy discussion should have been cut.

Chapter 4 by Gould and Finch zeroes in on the developmental stage needing the most attention from counselors—the high school years—and provides descriptions of a variety of plausible interventions. Gould’s prior goal-setting model has been adapted effectively to academic goals of student-athletes. The next chapter, by Scales, also focuses on a particular subgroup requiring special awareness—the Afro-American student-athlete. Unfortunately, the author slides through some worthwhile strategies, advises several “one-shot” interventions (e.g., sport camps) and presents too much irrelevant data on an exploratory study he conducted which may or may not provide viable information.

In chapter 6 Riffee and Alexander skillfully examine career counseling in some college programs and review some necessary interpersonal skills. Additional reference to the successful CAPA Olympic athlete model and the number of current programs developed by several Division I schools would have added more interesting examples. Chapters 7 and 8, by Pinkney, deal with time management and test-taking strategies respectively. Both chapters offer some interesting strategies and advice, but do not give the novice helper enough explicit directions to develop a thorough skill-learning sequence. On the other hand, the inclusion of sport-specific skills that are then applied to nonsport academic examples in order to help athletes develop skill transfer is a useful addition.

Chapters 9–11 present specific helping concern areas for student athletes—drugs (Damm), eating disorders (Seime & Damer), and injuries (Tunick, Etzel, & Leard). These chapters are useful to neophyte counselors who may be unacquainted with these problems in athletes and the previous literature. These specialized intervention areas require additional training for helpers, but these chapters tend to gloss over definitions and various intervention strategies. In addition, they tend to ignore existing models in the literature (e.g., Anderson and Williams’ model of injury) and refer to unsupported models (e.g., the grief/mourning model for injury). In summary, the interventions mentioned adopt a narrow clinical-remedial approach and rarely include any recent developmental-educational approaches in practice today.

Chapter 12 (Compton & Ferrante) deals with a helping profession that has tremendous impact on athletes—athletic trainers. Unfortunately this chapter reviews basic procedures and adds little insight to other potential intervention areas. This group could be trained to do very effective life skill interventions because of the trust developed and the extensive time spent with student-athletes. The last chapter dealing with resident hall helpers (Parker & Reese) is redundant and adds little. The authors make unsubstantiated statements about sexism, big-time sport, and jock dorms that are unsupported by extensive experience with student-athletes from many colleges. In its present format this chapter could be combined with an earlier one.

In summary, this text makes a satisfactory initial attempt to educate future athletic counselors and succeeds at a basic level, but is too ambitious in its inclusion of an extensive literature review and some intervention strategies. For helpers in sport psychology, most of the helping information is basic and underdeveloped. The literature concerning student-athlete developmental concerns, however, might be informative. In particular, some clinicians might benefit from the developmental approach, but will probably be disappointed about the