

## Longwood Athletics Senior Student Athlete Exit Interviews

Spring 2019

Completed by Tim Coffey, Ph.D

As part of the Faculty Athletics Representative duties, I completed exit interviews with eleven (11) Senior student athletes at Longwood University at the end of the Spring 2019 semester. Based on a list provided by Athletics I sent multiple email requests to Senior student athletes to sign up for a timeslot to come meet with. Thirteen (13) student athletes signed up for a time, and eleven (11) of those appeared for their meeting. A majority of these student athletes came to Longwood as freshman, but there was significant representation from student athletes that transferred to Longwood from another university. The interview itself was informal and I asked student athletes a number of questions pertaining to their experience as a student athlete at Longwood. I have provided below qualitatively the trends that appeared throughout the conversations that I had with these student athletes about their experiences. Below is a list of the student athletes that I met with during the Spring 2019 semester.

### Senior Student Athletes interviewed by Dr. Tim Coffey

Student Athlete	Sport	Date
	Women's Lacrosse	4/17/19
	Men's Soccer	4/17/19
	Men's Soccer	4/17/19
	Women's Golf	4/17/19
	Women's Basketball	4/17/19
	Men's Soccer	4/19/19
	Softball	4/22/19
	Field Hockey	4/22/19
	Women's Basketball	4/29/19
	Women's Soccer	4/29/19
	Men's Soccer	4/30/19
	Women's Basketball	Missed
	Women's Soccer	Missed

### Consistent trends across the group

Overall the student athletes that I met with viewed their time at Longwood and as a student athlete in a favorable light. Almost all of them stated that knowing what they knew from their time at Longwood, they would still elect to commit to Longwood as a student athlete in their sport if they had the choice again. A strong majority also stated that they would recommend being at student athlete at Longwood to a friend from their hometown. Many of them stated that they felt like they had a strong connection to the University and to Longwood Athletics. It was not uncommon for them to refer to Longwood Athletics as a "family." There were also favorable comments made about study hall and the structure of study hall hours, especially for Freshmen. One student athlete stated that without the structure of study hall as a Freshman, they did not believe they would have been successful academically their first year. Student athletes also tended to speak highly of their head coach and coaching staff and in general felt like their coach was invested in them as an individual. This favorable view of coaches was not uniform across all student athletes, but was a predominant overarching trend.

### One Word Description

Each student athlete was asked to pick one word that they thought best described their experience at Longwood as a student and student athlete, and then expand on why that one word. Below are the words provided by the student athletes in their exit interview.

Inconsistent  
Challenging  
Growing  
Learning Curve  
Journey  
Interesting  
Fantastic  
Exasperating  
Opportunity

### Challenges

While overall feedback was positive, student athletes were asked what one item they would change with Longwood Athletics, additionally they identified other challenges or area for improvement in some of the other questions. Most of the focus for this area was on the perceived need for additional resources across the department. Specifically, student athletes mentioned the need for additional resources for Athletic Training, academic resources, and fairness across programs. One student athlete described some of the resources for teams as the “haves” and the “have nots” and noted how they believed some teams had a plethora of resources while others were barely making it. One example that was pointed out was the refurbish of the Men’s Basketball locker room that had previously been updated while other teams had to share lockers or cope with locker doors falling off. Another area that was noted by a majority of student athletes centered about better communication from Longwood Athletics as a whole. Some of these concerns related to coaches and others focused on their concerns with communication from the Longwood Athletics office staff. Very few specific examples were provided, but there seemed to be a sense from student athletes that they did not feel very informed about events, activities, or other information pertaining to the department.

While not wide ranging trends, there were some student athletes that stated a significant challenge was the amount of change and inconsistency that transpired over their term at Longwood. Some of these student athletes had been through coaching changes, and did state that much of the change was due to changes in the coaching staff and coach expectations. There were also a few comments made about the significant time demands on student athletes, like early morning workouts, that they believed would often prevent student athletes from being involved in other organizations across campus. This was a concern of a few student athletes, but was not consistent across the group.

### Team Dynamics

While most athletic teams did not have multiple student athletes complete an interview, a large number (4) of Men’s Soccer student athletes did meet. All of these student athletes spoke highly of their time as a student athlete and of their coach. As a group they appeared to be significantly more engaged with the University and in wishing to stay involved with Longwood Athletics after graduation. Due to the small number of participants from other teams, it is very difficult to

compare teams, but the enthusiasm and engagement of Men's Soccer was very clear and consistent in these exit interviews.

### Conclusions and Recommendations for Future

Based on the conversations with these eleven (11) student athletes, it is consistent across the group that Senior student athletes at Longwood University have enjoyed their time at the University, feel connected to the University and Longwood Athletics, and would refer potential student athletes to Longwood. That being said, there were some areas that they believed should be addressed to improve the student athlete experience at Longwood.

One common theme for an area to improve seemed to be about communication from Longwood Athletics. It would be beneficial for the department to examine how they communicate with student athletes and about what items or topics. This additional & improved communication could also help to address the other concern about the "haves" and "have-nots" that were discussed earlier. The department may also want to examine the methods that they use to hear concerns from student athletes. While SAAC is a beneficial tool, and is an active group at Longwood, additional strategies like forums, Athletic Director chats, etc. could be beneficial to help student athletes feel like their voice is being heard and they are being informed about the state of the department.

Another recommendation for the future is to improve the rate of response to the invitation for a Senior exit interview from the FAR. There are strategies that can be developed by the FAR to create better rapport with student athletes moving forward. Longwood Athletics along with the FAR should also want to examine strategies that could be used to help improve the response rate, such as: reminders from coaches to meet, text message reminders, etc..

Completed by:  
Tim Coffey, Ph.D  
Assistant Professor of Kinesiology  
Faculty Athletics Representative  
Longwood University  
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