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Student-athletes excel in classroom

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

More than 100 of Oakland University's student-athletes were named to the 2007 Mid-Continent Conference Commissioner's List of Academic Excellence, an honor the OU student-athletes consistently earn. Oakland University Athletics prides itself on the success of its student-athletes not only in their respective sports, but also in the classroom. Through programs, planning and mentoring, Athletics helps students prepare for the challenge of busy schedules and demanding workloads to help them succeed not only at Oakland, but also in the future.

"The NCAA has strong academic requirements and the student-athletes know that if they don't take care of their academics, they will not be playing their sport," said Holly Kerstner, assistant athletic director for Student Athlete Services, who has worked for the past two years advocating for student-athletes to succeed in academics. "The coaches are really good about finding prospects who fit really well with this institution. This is not a blow-off and the student-athletes know that coming in."

Student-athletes have classes, practice, weight training, team meetings, team meals, travel schedules and even yoga to juggle. OU Athletics provides all of the student-athletes with tools to be successful in finding a balance.

Women's basketball junior Jessica Pike carries a 3.9 GPA as a Wellness and Health Promotion major.

"I really want to do the best I can in everything I do, so I spend a lot of time studying to get the best grades possible. I want to go to grad school, so I know it is important to keep my grades up now," Pike said. In addition to being a student-athlete, Pike also balances a job at the Rec Center and the Academic Skills Center.

"It really helped me my freshman year to learn time management and learn how to set time aside to study," Pike said. "It's really tough to learn how to balance so many things, but knowing what you have to do and making a schedule for yourself helps."

Patrick McClosky, a men's basketball team member, graduated in December with a 3.2 GPA and is now taking classes toward a master's degree with a focus in supply chain management.

"Being successful is all about organization. You really have to pick that up quickly. I realized after my first couple of classes on my first days at Oakland that you really have to plan out your day," McClosky said.

One available resource is the Grizzly Center for Graduates and Champions. The center, located in the Athletics complex, offers academic counseling, study sessions and a computer lab and quiet reading area.

"The Grizz Center has really been helpful for student-athletes," Pike said. "It gives us a place to go where student-athletes, who manage the same busy schedules, can get together and help each other out and study together."

All incoming student-athletes are required to put in a required number of hours at the Grizz Center to learn good study habits and dedication to their academics.

"The students need to find a place that is away from their room or apartment. There are too many distractions there. They need a quiet place where they can go and get into a routine," Kerstner said.

In addition, students can meet with Kerstner for help with time management.

"While many of our student-athletes are used to juggling sports and academics in high school, this is different because they don't have their parents helping to manage their time and making sure they get somewhere or eat dinner. It's all up to the student now," Kerstner said. She helps students budget their time and works with coaches to find the most convenient times for practices. "There is a different kind of pressure on student-athletes. If they let me know what their needs are, we can help them be successful."

Pike and McClosky indicated their respective coaches hold academics in high regard.

"It's a big thing with the coaches. They will really get on your case if you are falling behind in a class," McClosky said. He added his coaches require progress reports from professors.

Pike said the women's basketball team, like many of the teams, has additional mandatory study times at home and on the road and the student-athletes are required to meet with academic coaches to provide progress reports and indicate if they need help in any area.

"It's a joint effort. The coaches understand the importance of being a student-athlete and being successful in the classroom," Kerstner said. "We try hard to bridge Athletics and academic and make sure the two work together."

Kerstner often works with faculty members who are teaching student-athletes to make sure they understand the rules, regulations and constraints of being a student-athlete.

For more information on OU Athletics, visit the **Athletics** Web site.

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