

Higher Learning Commission
Athletic Master Plan – Assessments

Initiative

Develop and Write Strategic Athletic Plan

Department(s)

Several university departments were involved in the development of the Athletic Master Plan. The following individuals serve on one or more of the following committees:

Anthony Bates	W. Paul Bylaska	Elizabeth A. Cada
Ante Cop	Marco Krcatovich	Matthew Eggert
Tonishea Mack	Paul McGuinness	John Potempa
Rick Romeli	Sandra Zurawski	

Descriptions

The Athletic Master Plan for 2021-2026 is a framework for the continued growth of athletics for the next five years. This plan builds on the first athletic master plan with the addition of sports, full-time coaches, full-time administrators, and the infrastructure and facilities needed for approximately 330 athletes.

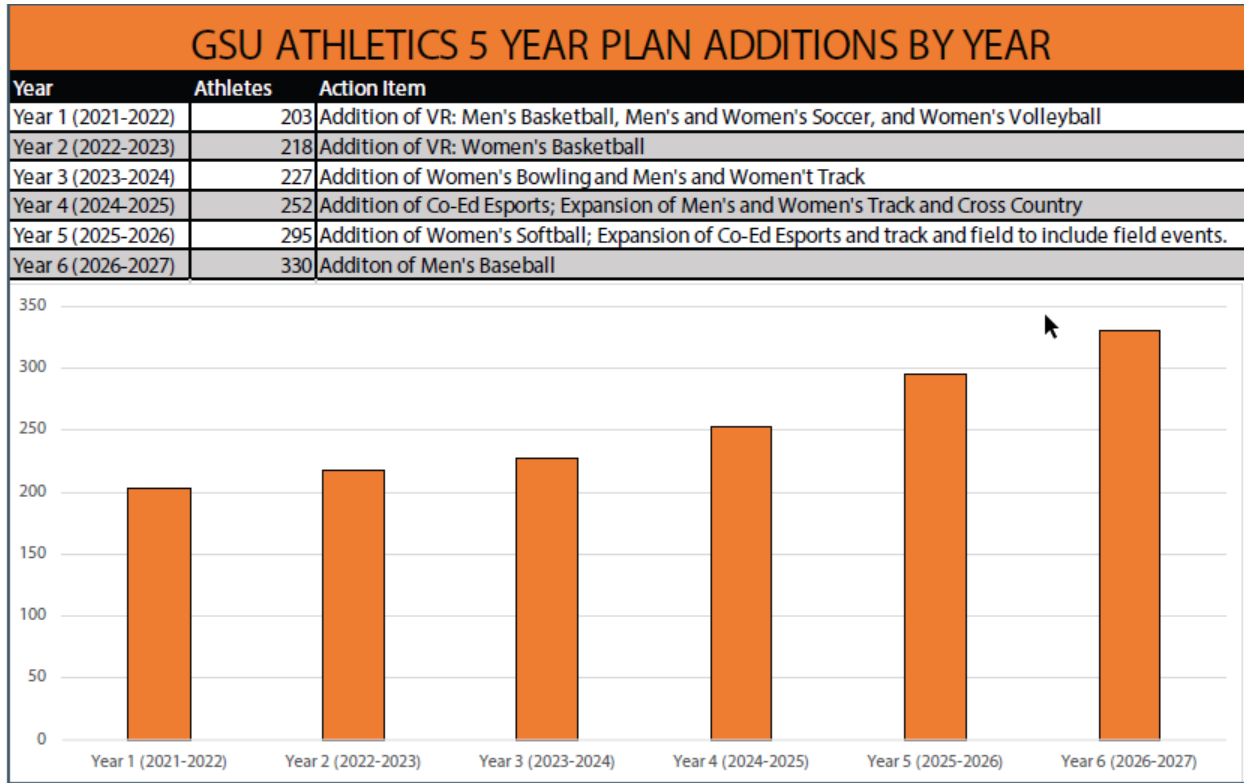
The following areas assisted with development of the plan, Budget and Financial Planning, Institutional Research, Facilities Development, and Athletics.

This plan intentionally staggers the rollout of the new sports programs for recruitment and budgetary purposes. The implementation will also give Facilities Development the opportunity to study, plan, and incorporate athletic fields into the University's Facilities Master Plan.

The addition of projected new teams began in year one, 2021-2022, of the master plan with four Varsity Reserve (i.e., junior varsity –JV) teams. These new teams were based upon existing sports programs that had been established within the first master plan: Men's Basketball, Women's Volleyball, Men's Soccer and Women's Soccer. Varsity Reserve (VR) is an efficient use of existing resources with low overhead costs that support the University's return on investment while driving enrollment.

Assessment, Driving Enrollment, and On-Campus Housing

The Athletic Master Plan Committee researched sports with: (1) the capacity to grow in the Chicagoland-market and (2) having available competition for scheduling games within the NAIA. The five-year plan seeks controlled expansion into sports that will provide sustainable growth. Athletics should be viewed as an asset to the university that will assist in driving Enrollment. Here is a breakdown of the projected student-athlete growth within the Plan.



2021-2022: Varsity Reserve Men's Basketball, Women's Volleyball, Men's Soccer, and Women's Soccer

Year one's goal of adding Varsity Reserve teams (better known as Junior Varsity or JV) for Men's Basketball, Women's Soccer, and Men's Soccer has been implemented. Each of those 3 sports have been able to recruit and field full VR teams. A Varsity Reserve team for Woman's Volleyball has not been added currently.

While VR recruitment poses unique challenges, it does open Governors State athletics up to a larger pool of student-athletes. Varsity Reserve has helped athletics build awareness within the community to our school academically and athletically. A strong majority of the Varsity Reserve teams' rosters make up local student-athletes participating.

Also with the additional Varsity Reserve teams, we have seen an increase in the number of student-athletes staying on campus in Prairie Place.

2022-2023: Varsity Reserve Women's Basketball, Full-Time Coaches, and Full-Time Administrators

Year two saw further expansion of the Varsity Reserve teams by adding Women's Basketball. While year two provided the smallest increase of student-athletes (15) this was intentional to prepare for the addition of new sports, hiring full-time coaches, and full-time administrators.

The Men's Soccer and Women's Basketball coaches moved into full-time coaching positions from part-time roles in the Spring of 2023. In addition, a full-time Associate Athletic Director was hired in the Summer of 2023 to fulfill the Academic Success and Compliance roles previously held by the two coaches transitioning mentioned.

In preparation for the launching of Women's Bowling and Track and Field two full-time coaches were hired in Spring of 2023 to start recruiting for the Fall of 2023. The Women's Bowling full-time coaching position was created. The Cross Country part-time coaching position was transitioned to a full-time coaching position for both Cross Country/Track & Field.

2023 - 2024: Women's Bowling, Men's Track, Women's Track, Full-Time Coaches, and Full-Time Administrators

The Women's Bowling and Track and Field teams launched successfully in the Fall of 2023. Both Coaches achieved their minimum roster requirements set forth in the Master Plan.

As of this assessment, the athletic department is transitioning the Women's Volleyball coaching position from part-time to full-time in the Winter of 2024. Also, we are in the process of hiring a full-time E-Sports Coach to launch that new program in the Fall of 2024.

The remaining positions that were proposed within the Master Plan yet to transition to full-time are the Athletic Director, Men's Basketball, and Men's/Women's Golf. Those positions are in the plan to move to full-time with the launching of Softball in the Fall of 2025.

2024-2025: E-sports, Expansion of Track & Cross Country, Full-Time Coaches, and Full-Time Administrators

Esports is one of the fastest growing collegiate competitive activities. The Esports lounge offers an incredible benefit to the campus beyond the athletic department.

Like outdoor sports facilities, an Esports lounge would earn revenue by hosting high school and collegiate events. With Esports being labeled an emerging sport interest amongst potential student-athletes is at an all-time high.

In the Winter of 2024, we will need to hire a Softball Coach to recruit for the Spring of 2026.

2025-2026: All Coaching and Administrative Positions are Full-Time, Softball

The full implementation of full-time coaches and administrators should be complete by the Fall of 2025 with the launch of our Softball program.

Softball is one of the most played women's competitive sports in the nation. Locally, high school softball participation is high which correlates positively to strong recruitment and retention numbers. Intercollegiate Softball would require the identification of a suitable rental facility for games and practice as well as an indoor practice facility for hitting, pitching, and fielding.

In the Winter of 2025, we will need to hire a Baseball Coach to recruit for the Spring of 2027.

2026-2027: Baseball

Baseball is one of the most played competitive sports in the nation. Locally, high school baseball participation is high which correlates positively to strong recruitment and retention numbers. Intercollegiate Baseball would require the identification of a suitable rental facility for games and practice as well as an indoor practice facility for hitting, pitching, and fielding.

Academics, Retention, and Long-term Relationships

Participation in intercollegiate athletics develops life-long habits of a healthy lifestyle, resiliency, drive, and discipline. The ability to work within a team, take constructive criticism, goal setting, and persevering through setbacks are life lessons they can carry forward to their future jobs, relationships, and families.

The friendships they form are long lasting along with a deeper connection to the school the more years they attend school and participate in their sport. Over time, a school culture beaming with pride and steeped in tradition will shape what it means to be a Jaguar.

Students who are actively involved in extracurricular activities or the student community tend to experience better retention rates. Governors State Athletics has a retention rate of 61%. The average retention rate of comparable NAIA athletic programs is 51%.

Through exit interviews with the student-athletes deciding to move on from Governors State there are two reasons we are unable to retain them. The first reason is the student-athletes academic performance. With the hiring a full-time Associate Athletic Director a plan has been set forth to focus in on each student's academic success; along with staying on track for graduation.

The second factor that has been an issue for our student-athletes is our facilities. With the lack of on-campus facilities to hold practices, run additional events, and the inability to host true home games for many of our sports student-athletes feel underserved by the University. Extra hours of traveling for home games, practices, and additional road games has an impact of them academically and their commitment to the program.

Here are some of the success stories from our current student athletes.

<https://gsunews.govst.edu/for-soccer-player-from-columbia-dreams-do-come-true/>

<https://gsunews.govst.edu/putting-academics-first-to-pursue-criminal-justice-career/>

<https://gsunews.govst.edu/important-life-priorities-led-to-gsu/>

Community Service



More than just Athletics! The Athletic Department provides a platform for student-athletes to become involved in the community. Each student-athlete takes part in a minimum of two service projects per year. Individual teams have participated in clean-ups of vacant lots in Monee, prepared meals for Feed our Starving Children in Schaumburg, assisted with mobile food banks in Crete, and raised donations for families affected by an apartment building fire in Chicago Heights.

The highlight of our community service is the annual department-wide service day each November. The most recent service day saw student-athletes and coaches dispersing food baskets and winter clothing to needy families in the area. As part of their volunteer activities, the Governors State athletic teams promote the NAIA's Five Core Values of integrity, respect, responsibility, sportsmanship, and servant leadership through the NAIA Champions of Character program.