

Semi-Annual Report of the Faculty Athletics Representative to Faculty Senate
Spring 2026 Report

Student-Athlete Health and Well-Being

Submitted by Chris Melde, Ph.D., Faculty Athletics Representative

Introduction

The Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR), in conjunction with the Athletics Council, provides periodic reports to the University Council and Faculty Senate. At minimum, Athletics Council reports to University Council once per year, while the FAR, in consultation with the Athletics Council, produces a semi-annual report to the Faculty Senate on the academic performance and well-being of student athletes. The fall report of the FAR to Faculty Senate focuses on student-athlete academics, while the spring report focuses on student-athlete well-being. Included in the FAR report will also be a complete list of their duties.

Background and Table of Contents

The focus of this report is on the well-being of student athletes. The following report includes multiple sections providing an overview of student-athlete participation figures for the 2025-2026 academic year as well as a description of the resources available at Michigan State University (MSU) to help ensure student-athlete health and well-being. These sections include:

1. Student-athlete participation at MSU
2. The structure of student-athlete health and well-being resources at MSU
3. Services offered through sports medicine, athletics training, mental health and athletic performance, and nutrition.
4. Prevention, Outreach, and Engagement (POE): Spartans Against Violence
5. Description of the FAR's Activities/Role of the FAR
6. Roster of the Athletic Council

1. Student-athlete Participation at MSU

To better contextualize the size and scope of MSU Athletics, the following figures report on athletics participation at MSU among men and women athletes, both in total and by individual sports. There are 11 men's and 12 women's varsity sports at MSU. While total participation in varsity sports varies from year to year (see Table 1), the proportion of women to men participating in varsity athletics in the last seven years has hovered around 48%. This figure, however, represents the unduplicated participation rate across athletics teams. That is, some

athletes appear on multiple varsity rosters, with some sports having multiple rosters across spring and fall seasons.

Table 1: Total Student-Athlete Participation and Participation for Women and Men					
Year	Fiscal Year	Total Unduplicated Student-athletes	Total Men	Total Women	Proportion of Women to Men
2020	2019-2020	695	357	338	48.63%
2021	2020-2021	713	375	338	47.41%
2022	2021-2022	669	356	313	46.79%
2023	2022-2023	676	350	326	48.22%
2024	2023-2024	704	367	337	47.87%
2025	2024-2025	732	396	336	45.90%
2026	2025-2026	708	357	351	49.58%

Notes: *Some sports have separate fall and spring rosters that can comprise the same student athletes. This figure does not duplicate a student-athlete across multiple seasons.

Table 2 provides information on participation in varsity sports by individual sport. Here, we see there were 372 male members of varsity athletics rosters across the 11 sports, while there were 375 females rostered across 12 varsity sports. When counted this way, female athletes represented 50.2% of the total roster spots across all varsity teams, with men totaling 49.8%. For comparison purposes, in the fall of 2025 there were 38,710 full-time undergraduate students at MSU. Women represented 51.9% of the undergraduate student body, while men were 48.1% of the total. While not exact, this suggests a high degree of consistency between the gender breakdown in varsity athletics and university enrollments.

Table 2: Title IX Participation Count - 2025-26				
Sports	Male	DSA	Female	DSA
Baseball	30			
Men's Basketball	15			
Women's Basketball			15	
Men's Cross Country	18	1		
Women's Cross Country			22	5
Field Hockey			27	
Football	115	10		
Men's Golf	10	1		
Women's Golf			9	
Gymnastics			20	

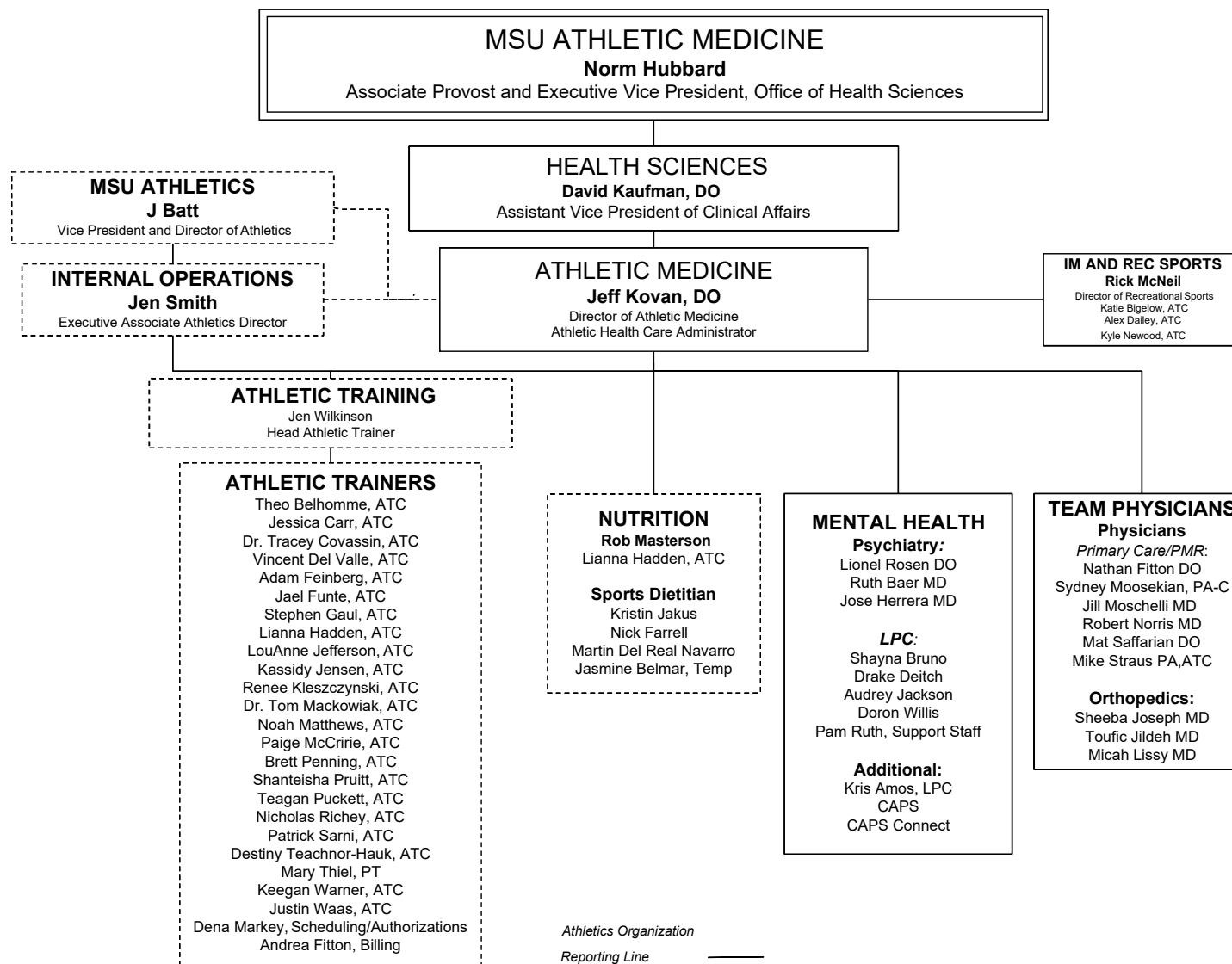
Ice Hockey	28	2		
Rowing			75	7
Men's Soccer	29	1		
Women's Soccer			30	2
Softball			25	
Men's Tennis	8			
Women's Tennis			10	
Men's Indoor Track	37			
Women's Indoor Track			50	5
Men's Outdoor Track	37			
Women's Outdoor Track			50	5
Volleyball			18	
Wrestling	30			
Total	372		375	
<i>Percent of Total*</i>	<i>49.80%</i>		<i>50.20%</i>	

Notes: *In the fall of 2025 there were 38,710 full-time undergraduate students at MSU. Women represented 51.9% of the full-time undergraduate student body, while men were 48.1% of the total. DSA stands for Designated Student Athlete, which allows for student-athletes to participate in a sport and not count towards the roster limit.

2. The structure of student-athlete health and well-being resources at MSU

Figure 1 provides an overview of the organizational structure of MSU Athletic Medicine, which is led at the University level by Dr. Norm Hubbard, the senior vice president for the Michigan State University Office of Health Sciences. At the operational level, Dr. Jeff Kovan serves as the Director of Athletic Medicine and oversees Athletic Training, Sports Medicine, Mental Health and Performance, and Nutrition, with dotted line reporting to Vice President and Director of Athletics J Batt and Executive Associate Athletics Director Jennifer Smith. MSU employs six primary care team physicians and three orthopedic surgeons in support of our student athletes. Jen Wilkinson serves as the Head Athletic Trainer and oversees athletic trainers and athletic trainer interns across all teams. Shayna Bruno is the Director of Student-athlete Wellness and oversees personnel dedicated to both mental health and well-being and sports performance. Finally, under the direction of Rob Masterson, Director of Performance Nutrition, MSU employs nutrition specialists that work with student athletes and teams to optimize health and performance.

Figure 1: MSU Athletic Medicine Organizational Chart



3. Services offered across athletics training, sports medicine, mental health and athletic performance, and nutrition.

Sports Medicine

MSU athletics partners with MSU Sports Medicine to offer a wide variety of services through team physicians and medical consultants including orthopedics, neurology, family medicine, physical medicine, and rehabilitation. All the physicians and surgeons employed through MSU athletics also practice in the community but dedicate a portion of their time to servicing our athletes. This ensures that MSU athletes have access to a wider variety of specialists that can treat sports injuries. When necessary, MSU athletes are also able to seek treatment from medical professionals outside of MSU Sports Medicine, including in cases where medical treatments began prior to their arrival on campus to ensure continuity of care. All student athletes undergo routine physicals, including prior to their arrival on campus as MSU student athletes, to identify underlying injuries and to assess risk of further injury, consistent with the goals of preventative medicine.

Athletic Training

Each varsity sport employs at least one full-time athletic trainer dedicated to the team, with larger teams (e.g., football) employing more athletic trainers as necessary. Athletic trainers are present at all team practice and competition activities, both in a preventative medicine role (e.g., pre-event treatments and post-event care) and to respond to acute injuries. Through their dedication to particular sports, athletic trainers can develop both team and athlete specific programs to help prevent injuries and to respond to injuries when they occur, including making decisions on the need for additional resources needed in the event of serious or catastrophic injury. They also diagnose injuries and provide ongoing therapeutic care to treat injuries and create plans to allow athletes to return to action. In addition, they educate coaches on player safety and plans for players to return to team activities to ensure such decisions are made with the best interests of the student-athlete in mind.

There was a movement by the national governing body for athletic training education (i.e., CAATE: www.caate.net) to move the required degree to be a certified athletic trainer from a Bachelor's Degree to a Master's Degree starting in 2022. As an educational institution, MSU has moved their major accordingly and no longer offers an undergraduate degree in athletic training and now offers a master's level degree. This has implications for how MSU staffs their athletics programs, including athletic training interns. This move to a master's degree is meant to improve quality of care and offer athletics trainers greater opportunities in the workforce.

Information associated with particular personnel and other aspects of MSU athletic training, including pictures of the facilities available across campus, can be found at:

<https://msuspartans.com/sports/2019/9/19/michigan-state-athletic-training>.

Mental Health and Sport Performance Services

MSU has a full-time staff devoted to student-athlete mental health and well-being. Housed in the Duffy Daugherty Building/Skandalaris Football Center, the MSU Student-Athlete Wellness Center provides student athletes with support dedicated to mental health and sport performance. Student athletes can sign up for these resources using an online scheduling tool found at <https://msuspartans.com/sports/2023/2/1/michigan-state-student-athlete-wellness>, or through engaging a QR code that is posted throughout various athletics facilities, including all locker rooms, weight rooms, and spaces that student athletes frequent. Spartan student athletes can work with the center staff to address a wide range of issues they may face, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety (including performance anxiety)
- Grief and Loss
- Trauma
- Motivation
- Focus and Concentration
- Visualization
- Substance Abuse
- Self-esteem
- Effective Communication
- Relationship issues with family, friends, coaches, and teammates
- Identity development
- Time Management
- Daily routines and habits
- Stress Management
- Injury and Transition out of sport
- Disordered Eating

In addition to these individualized services, the center also offers group-based workshops dedicated to topics such as emotion management, team cohesion, resiliency, mindfulness, performance anxiety, and goal setting.

Beyond internal operations, the Big Ten Conference established the mental health and wellness cabinet in 2020 (see: <https://bigten.org/about/initiatives/mental-health-wellness-cabinet/>). This collaborative effort brings together mental health professionals from all regular Big Ten Conference schools, along with representatives from Johns Hopkins University (M/W lacrosse) and Notre Dame University (men's ice hockey) who play in the conference on a limited basis.

This body works together to ensure member institutions are aware of emerging trends, can share best practices, and lead initiatives to address student-athlete well-being. For instance, all members of athletics departments across the Big Ten now have access to the Calm app, a cell phone application that assists with mental health and well-being practices, including helping with better sleep practices.

Nutrition

All varsity student athletes at MSU are supported by trained and board certified nutrition and dietary staff that offer specialized nutrition plans to serve the needs of each of our sports teams. In addition to prepared food and drinks prior to and after athletic activities, athletes at MSU also have access to fueling stations located in numerous athletic facilities on campus. These fueling stations provide food and drinks that athletes can access at all hours of the day, including sports drinks, ingredients for smoothies, and other healthy grab and go foods so they can prepare for and recover from athletic activities.

Cross Unit Collaboration: Research & Excellence in Athletic Collaboration & Health (REACH)

While this report provides an overview of each specialty area under the MSU athletics sports medicine umbrella, conversations with individual health professionals reinforced MSU's stated collaborative model described in their REACH initiative. That is, the health and well-being of MSU's student athletes requires constant collaboration across all facets of the university's health and wellness units. Under this umbrella, MSU is intentional in bringing together the unique areas of expertise offered through interdisciplinary teams in the health sciences, including: Athletic Training, Kinesiology, Sports Science, Nutrition, Physical Therapy, MSU Student-Athlete Wellness, MSU Sports Medicine. A detailed description of the REACH program can be found at: <https://msuspartans.com/sports/2025/5/19/r-e-a-c-h>.

Cross Unit Collaboration Example: Mental Health Screening

MSU has invested considerable resources in the identification and treatment of mental health issues among its student body. This is also true for MSU athletics as it has hired multiple full-time employees to work exclusively with student athletes on issues associated with mental health and well-being. It is important to note, however, that sports medicine, athletic training, and mental health and well-being staff collaborate closely to ensure that athletes needing mental health services are identified and offered such services. A primary mechanism for doing so is through the use of the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (see [Form: Patient Health Questionnaire-2 \(PHQ-2\)](#)) and Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9). These are standard mental health screening tools used in healthcare to identify patients that exhibit symptoms that are associated with depression. Specifically, MSU healthcare professionals are trained to offer the PHQ-2,

which is a two-question survey to screen for depressive symptoms. If the screening suggests risks for depression the PHQ-9 is administered. If positive for potential depression, our health team is trained in how to refer student athletes to our mental health services team or external service providers if requested.

Continuous Improvement and Quality Assurance

The mission of MSU's Sports Medicine and Performance unit is "to ensure best practices regarding the health, safety, and wellness of all involved parties." To achieve this mission, each unit in this space seeks to maintain cutting edge practices through ongoing education and engagement with external partners that support continuous improvement. The Big Ten Conference, of which MSU is a part, is unique in the NCAA as it employs a Chief Medical Officer (currently Dr. James Borchers) and maintains conference wide standards and review procedures associated with medical care and waivers. The Chief Medical Officer serves as a consultant to all Big Ten member institutions related to student-athlete health and safety. This role also spearheads sports medicine programming and initiatives across the conference, including on such matters as policy development, research, educational opportunities, and public outreach. For example, the Chief Medical Officer conducts periodic presentations for Big Ten Joint group members (i.e., Athletics Directors, Senior Women Administrators, Faculty Athletics Representatives) to update them on conference efforts to ensure best practices in medical care, share ideas on emerging issues, and offer guidance on potential areas for investment for member schools. MSU, therefore, can leverage the expertise of the conference in ensuring it maintains best practices as the Big Ten ensures relevant university stakeholders are aware of high priority areas of focus.

MSU also engages with the U.S. Council for Athletes' Health (USCAH), a national organization, for quality improvement. In fact, MSU is finishing its' first year of a four-year process to become accredited by USCAH. This multi-year agreement to collaborate with USCAH reflects MSU's commitment to quality assurance in its' care for our student athletes by inviting outside experts to review, comment, and recommend improvements to practice and ultimately evaluate our institution's athletics medicine practices. For more information on this accreditation process, see: <https://uscah.com/what-we-do/accreditation/>.

In an effort to improve operations associated with student athlete injuries during athletics contests, MSU Sports Medicine and Athletic Training engage in ongoing training by practicing their responses to potential routine and catastrophic injuries. For instance, all those responsible for responding to serious injuries during football contests engage in a weekly practice scenario during the season to help ensure all staff are prepared to respond to case scenarios and to improve communication among team members.

Team Travel Policies Associated with Student Well-being

MSU is part of the Big Ten Conference that has a national footprint. As such, team travel is a major component of our varsity athletics program. Team travel includes players, coaches, and myriad staff. As such, the Athletics Department has policies in place to reduce the likelihood of misconduct and safety concerns. With respect to lodging, teams must seek accommodations that allow each student-athlete to have a bed of their own, such that no room has more than two student athletes unless it is a suite style accommodation that includes more bedrooms. Further, per MSU regulations, no faculty, staff, or coaches can share a room with students. Those in supervisory positions are also prohibited from sharing a room with subordinate employees. Given safety concerns, teams are also not permitted to use 12 or 15 passenger vans unless necessary and prior approval is received from the team's sport administrator and business office.

Student-Athlete Reporting and Exit Interviews

Student athletes are presented with a number of options to report misconduct, including issues associated with their health and well-being. Rules, regulations, and reporting requirements are presented in the Student-Athlete Handbook ([Student-Athletes Handbook .pdf](#)). Like all MSU students, faculty, and staff, there is a hotline for reporting misconduct, which can be found at <https://misconduct.msu.edu/>. In addition, each team has a dedicated Sports Administrator, housed in the Athletics Department, that is frequently available to meet with student athletes should there be concerns, along with the Faculty Athletics Representative, housed in the Office of the President, who serves as a principal point of contact for student athletes who want to report violations or seek guidance on matters of health and well-being.

The Athletics Department also conducts student-athlete exit interviews when student athletes use up their athletic eligibility or enter the transfer portal. The purpose of the interview is to discuss their experiences at MSU and offer an opportunity to discuss matters they feel are important to share. This includes their assessment of health and well-being services received during their athletics career. Feedback received during this interview can then be used to continually monitor our athletics programs for areas of concern or improvement.

4. Prevention, Outreach, and Engagement (POE): Spartans Against Violence

To help ensure student-athlete well-being, MSU Athletics partners with Prevention, Outreach, and Engagement (POE) to educate student athletes and staff on factors associated with sexual misconduct, relationship violence, stalking, and hazing behaviors through a program titled Spartans Against Violence (SAV, see: <https://poe.msu.edu/students/sav>). SAV is a training program that includes two sessions and is delivered to men's and women's teams separately.

Although the training is delivered to men's and women's teams in isolation, the first session covers the same information for both groups, including relevant policies and reporting channels, along with information associated with skill development on topics of bystander intervention, gaining consent, among others. The second lesson is not standardized, but rather is based on student-athlete questions and feedback provided in lesson 1. This lesson allows POE to develop customized information on topics of interest to student athletes.

In addition to the student focused lessons, SAV also includes training for athletics staff. While athletics staff are required to engage in MSU's online mandatory trainings associated with RVSM and Title IX, they are also required to attend a yearly session of SAV. This training provides more in-depth information on these relevant policies and procedures, but incorporates more specialized information associated with student athletes and offers opportunities for questions and answers.

Collectively, SAV is consistent with policy passed by the NCAA in 2017 requiring athletics personnel (i.e., coaches, student-athletes, athletics administrators) to complete continuing education on sexual violence prevention each year.

5. Description of the FAR's Activities/Role of the FAR

Each institutional member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is required to have a Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR). According to the NCAA Constitution "The president or chancellor of each member institution shall appoint and support the Faculty Athletics Representative as the principal point of contact to whom student-athletes can report any action, activity or behavior by anyone associated with athletics programs inconsistent with this Constitution's principle of student-athlete health and well-being. In this role, the Faculty Athletics Representative is a reporting contact for student-athletes independent of the institution's athletic department, but not a legal advocate for student-athletes. The Faculty Athletics Representative, in this capacity, shall report directly to the member institution's president or chancellor" (p. 16).

Beyond this basic mission, the FAR position can take on many forms across institutions. At MSU, the FAR serves a number of roles both internal to the institution and via representation on Big Ten Conference and NCAA matters. Below is a description of the FAR position and a list of responsibilities noted in the most recent position description for the FAR.

Overview:

The Michigan State University Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) is a member of the university's faculty, appointed by the MSU President, and serves as a liaison, independent faculty voice and provides advice in the administration of the institution's athletic program. The FAR is

an ex-officio member the MSU Athletic Council and is the institution's faculty representative to the Big Ten Conference and the NCAA.

Role:

The FAR plays a strategic role at Michigan State University, helping ensure the academic integrity of the intercollegiate athletics program and enhancing the student-athlete experience.

The FAR represents MSU and its faculty in the relationship between the NCAA, The Big Ten Conference and the institution. The FAR serves an integral liaison and advisory role in the governance of MSU's intercollegiate athletics programs and represents the President -- in academic and student-athlete matters -- to the athletic department and MSU's faculty.

Authority

The authority for the FAR's oversight responsibilities comes from the President, the NCAA Bylaws, the Big Ten Conference Bylaws, and MSU's Academic Governance Bylaws.

Additionally, the FAR:

- Maintains access to and a working relationship with the Provost, Vice President for Student Life & Engagement, the Director of Athletics, and other key personnel within the institution and the Athletic Department.
- Reports annually to the Faculty Senate regarding the operation of the athletics program and their role as FAR.
- Serves as ex-officio member of Athletic Council, without vote, and serves as a member of other committees as assigned.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Academic integrity

The FAR helps ensure the academic integrity of Michigan State University's intercollegiate athletics program.

- Periodically review appropriate records (for both individual student-athletes and for athletic teams) to ensure that decisions related to admissions, academic advising, evaluation of academic performance, and the extent of academic support services are made in ways that are consistent with the primary academic mission of the institution.
- Review that MSU has effective mechanisms for evaluating whether student-athletes have met all academic eligibility requirements for practice, financial aid, and intercollegiate competition established by the NCAA, the Big Ten Conference, and MSU.
- Review that all certifications for both initial and continuing academic eligibility have been performed correctly, and with adequate documentation.

- Prepare (or request on the basis of FAR specifications) periodic reports on the academic preparation and performance of student-athletes and discuss such reports with the President, the faculty, and the athletics department.

Compliance

The FAR assumes joint responsibility with the Director of Athletics and staff for ensuring compliance with NCAA, Big Ten Conference, and institutional rules.

- Maintain a working relationship with compliance staff on compliance-related activities undertaken within the athletics department and coordinate the compliance-related activities of campus units located outside the athletics department including, but not limited to, efforts focused on academic-eligibility certifications (noted above), rules education and staff training, rules interpretations, and periodic spot-checks of records to ensure all institutional compliance systems are engaged and functioning.
- Play a role in any major institutional inquiry into alleged or suspected rules violations and in the preparation of any infraction reports submitted to the Big Ten Conference or the NCAA.
- Review the results of any periodic audits of the athletics department that may be conducted.
- Coordinate the review and completion of the Big Ten Institutional Standards document.
- Provide signature authorization for NCAA violations and Big Ten waivers.
- Serve as a member of the Review Committee for the NCAA Student-Athlete Conduct Review Policy.
- Play a major role in any NCAA athletics certification program reviews.
- In collaboration with athletics administration, ensure that appropriate standards of student-athlete conduct are established (for both on- and off-campus behavior), clearly communicated, and consistently enforced.

Student-Athlete Experience

- The FAR serves as an advocate for student-athletes, ensures student-athletes' well-being, ensures access to mental health services, and promotes the development of student-athletes as a whole -- as students, athletes, and members of the community.
- Promote a balance between academics, athletics, and the social lives of student-athletes, which affords them opportunities to enjoy the full range of collegiate experiences available to students generally.
- Facilitate student-athlete participation on athletics boards and committees and inform student-athletes about the FAR role as an independent source of counsel, assistance, and information.
- Encourage and facilitate interactions between student-athletes and the mainstream of institutional activities.

- Ensure that testing, counseling, evaluation, and other career-planning services are made available to student-athletes.

Communication/Administration

- Serve as an advisor on academic and student-athlete wellness athletics matters to the President and others involved in the administration of intercollegiate athletics.
- Represent the faculty perspective in the governance of intercollegiate athletics and play a central role in discussions of matters related to intercollegiate athletics at athletics committee meetings and at Faculty Senate meetings.
- Play a significant role, in conjunction with the Office of Compliance Services, in the shaping of institutional voting decisions on Big Ten Conference and NCAA legislation.
- Participate in NCAA and Big Ten Conference committees, councils, and in other capacities as appropriate.

Other

- Perform other duties as assigned by the President and/or as appropriate under the NCAA and Big Ten Conference Bylaws. These and above duties may change as the result of changes to the NCAA and Big Ten Conference Bylaws and policies.

6. Roster of the Athletic Council

2025-26 Athletic Council Members			
LAST	FIRST	Email	Affiliation
Batt	J	JMB@ath.msu.edu	Athletics (Ex Officio)
Callahan	Michael	mrc@msu.edu	MSU Music
Cox	Cody	coxcoddy@ath.msu.edu	Athletics (Ex Officio)
Edwards	Patricia	edwards6@msu.edu	Education
Ford	Sabrina	sford@msu.edu	Human Medicine
Gasser	Ray	gasserra@msu.edu	REHS (Ex Officio)
Gerstner	Joanne	joanneg@msu.edu	Journalism
Idema	Amanda	agidema@msu.edu	UCUE (Ex Officio)
Jones	Brian	brianjones@playmakers.com	Alumni
Key	Travis	keytravis13@gmail.com	Alumni
Malouin	Rebecca (chair)	malouinr@msu.edu	Osteopathic Medicine
McLaren	Nicklas	mclarenn@msu.edu	Alumni Association (Ex Officio)
Melde	Christopher	melde@msu.edu	FAR (Ex Officio)
Rogan	Mia	roganmia@msu.edu	SAAC President
Smith	Mary Kay	mksmith@msu.edu	Osteopathic Medicine
Stieve	Deb	stieved@msu.edu	Nursing

Urquhart	Gerald	urquhart@msu.edu	Lyman Briggs
Wagner	Brian	brian@ptisglobal.com	Alumni
			COGS
			ASMSU