

Learning Services within Athletics:
An Interview with Cheryl Anderson

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For further research into my field of discipline, as well as career goals, I interviewed the Learning Specialist for student-athletes at Penn State University, Cheryl Anderson. I work in the field of student-athlete support services and this was the perfect opportunity to get more advice from a professional. Given my specific interest in how college students learn, Mrs. Anderson has a great background in teaching students of all education levels with learning disabilities.

I asked Cheryl very specific questions relating to her background and the importance of having advanced degrees or the right field of study for the career. As I listened to her background ranging from K-12 education, teaching, and reconstructing a school system's policies on how learning services are handled, I realized how broad the field requirements can be. No one places handles every child or situation the same, and no one professional has the same degree or same education. Although, some have similar stories or backgrounds in special education, it is not a requirement. Most people in the field, from her stories, are because of their passion for the students and protecting the rights of these students.

Throughout the interview, the topic of legal issues in the field kept arising. I did not realize how many legal aspects there are to dealing with any student with a learning disability at any level. At one point after asking the question what her main reason for staying in the field is, Cheryl answered with a response I was not expecting. She said, "Students are a passion. Not everyone will have the same passion, but being able to help them become everything they are capable of is rewarding. It is not about checking the boxes in this career. It is about teaching them in a way they can thrive after we are not longer around." That statement holds so much power to a person in education. Students may not always realize at the time that they are learning and developing skills to help prepare them for life outside of formal education. One of the best comments made during the interview to show how genuine and

serious Cheryl is about her job was, “I always say I am a learning specialist who happens to work with student-athletes.” Being in a field where people mix up their true purpose of their job with athletically related status, meeting someone who has the same passion to just better these kids life’s was refreshing.

According to Mrs. Anderson, one of the most important things, or most important skill in a sense, is to be “consistent.” Her advice to young professionals pursuing the field was always being consistent, even behaviorally. From there we went to talk about how that is something I am working on. In her opinion, “Student’s are looking for someone that is reliable. They need to know that you never change to help them be comfortable enough to ask for help.” This was the best advice I have heard yet from any person tied to the learning services profession. She really opens eyes into the bigger picture of the job. As hard as it may be to “leave your problems at the door”, she really emphasized that little quality is most important. Having this quality allows a person to handle all the turmoil, sensitive topics, and difficult situations that come with a learning services job in athletics.

Knowing the difficult situations and topics that come with the career, one of the main topics asked about was how do you keep up with a growing field and the trends constantly changing? Cheryl spoke about how “trendy” ADHD problems and concussion problems are becoming in athletic support. This was most interesting due to the fact that the trend relates to the trend in athletics. It has become such a hot topic conversation that even the learning services department is trying to come up with new policies and procedures in place to protect the students who suffer from these problems. “The increase for ADHD needs is due to a stem in NCAA regulations. “ This comments relates back to legal issues and the wide range of policies someone in this career needs to know and abide by. We got on the topic of all the committees she is on to help student-athletes that have suffered from concussions. It is no longer just a health or athletic concern. She said it is now even in research how bad it effects long-term learning.

Overall, this interview gave amazing insight into parts of the learning services career that one might not normally thinks about. Cheryl Anderson is an amazing mentor and professional. She is the epitome of what anyone in the industry should strive to be.