



A Handbook for Athlete Leaders

Special Olympics Pennsylvania

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FOUNDATION:

The Mission of Special Olympics: To provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in the sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.

Goal of Special Olympics: The ultimate goal of Special Olympics is to help persons with intellectual disabilities participate as productive and respected members of society at large, by offering them a fair opportunity to develop and demonstrate their skills and talents through sports training and competition, and by increasing the public's awareness of their capabilities and needs.

Value Statement of Athlete Leadership: Special Olympics empowers athletes to be contributing and respected members of Special Olympics and society. We support athlete-leaders on and off the playing field.

Purpose of Athlete Leadership: The purpose of Athlete Leadership is empowering athletes to develop leadership skills and utilize their voices and abilities to undertake meaningful leadership roles, influence change in the Special Olympics movement and create inclusive communities around the world.

Definition of Athlete Leadership: Through organized training and practical experiences, Athlete Leadership prepares athletes to undertake meaningful positions of influence and leadership throughout the Special Olympics organization, both on and off the playing field.

Basic Concepts of Athlete Leadership:

1. Athlete Leadership is fundamental to Special Olympics being an athlete-centered organization.

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2. Every Special Olympics athlete has leadership abilities that can contribute to the movement.
3. Athlete Leadership has a powerful effect on athletes' self-esteem and self-confidence.
4. Athlete Leadership includes courses that guide athletes toward a variety of roles, including: Board of Directors, Games Organizing Committees (GOC), public speaking, coaching, attending Athlete Congress / Leadership Conference, conducting Athlete Input Surveys, attending Athlete Input Councils, serving on Athlete Leadership Teams, and much more!
5. After attending courses, athletes need both immediate and real opportunities to practice newly-learned leadership skills.
6. Most athletes benefit from the support of a committed athlete-centered mentor whose role evolves as the athlete leader becomes more capable in their leadership role.
7. Special Olympics staff, volunteers and families must be educated to ensure they value and support the involvement of athletes in meaningful roles.
8. Skills learned in Athlete Leadership enrich athletes' abilities to become more involved and respected in the community.

ROLES FOR ATHLETES:

Athletes as Athlete Representatives

Athletes as Global Messengers

Athletes as Coaches

Athletes as Healthy Athlete Initiative Assistants and/or Health and Fitness Coordinators

Athletes as Volunteers

Athletes as Athlete Leadership University Instructors

Athletes as Special Olympics PA Employees

Athletes on Athlete Leadership Teams

Athletes on Local Program Management Teams

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Athletes on Games Organizing Committee

Athletes as Athlete Input Survey Conductors

Athletes on Board of Directors

Athletes on Regional Input Council

Athletes attending Athlete Congress

Athletes attending Leadership Conference

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

History and Curriculum Development: Special Olympics Pennsylvania first introduced Athlete Leadership training in 1989 by offering a course called “Athletes for Outreach” to teach athletes how to become spokespersons for the organization. Today, “Athletes for Outreach” is known as Global Messenger. In 2000, SOPA introduced Athlete Representative training to teach athletes how to serve on committees and solve problems. As the interest in Athlete Leadership continued to grow, SOPA created Athlete Leadership University in 2014. In 2015, SOPA began offering advanced Athlete Leadership University sessions. Most recently, in 2016, SOPA began offering Healthy Lifestyles and Athletes as Coaches.

Eligibility: Athletes who sign up for Athlete Leadership University must be at least 16 years old (18 for Athlete Representative training) and actively involved in a sport. **Each athlete** must be accompanied by **a mentor** (volunteer), who works with the athlete during each course and locally during the required practical experience.

Athlete Requirements:

- 16 years of age or older (Global Messenger)
- 18 years of age or older (Athlete Representative)
- Year round involvement with local program and SOPA.
- Ability to interact interpersonally with mentor, local management team, other athletes and SOPA staff.
- Responsible individuals with good behavior.
- Ability to be attentive during instruction.
- Represent Special Olympics professionally and manner and appearance.

Mentor Requirements:

- 18 years of age or older.
- Registered Class A Volunteer.

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- Valid background checks and completion of General Orientation and Protective Behaviors training.
- Mentors are chaperones, and therefore cannot be a current or former athlete.
- Mentors must be good role models that are patient and supportive of their Athlete Leader.
- Provide transportation, phone and internet access if athlete is unable to provide those to themselves
- Represent SOPA in a professional manner.

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM:

Course Requirements for All Majors

PLEDGE

Curriculum: The curriculum includes the history of Athlete Leadership; an overview of AL and basic definitions; the role of the mentor; the leadership roles available; potential road blocks and barriers and the development of each athlete's personal purpose statement of what he or she wants to do as an Athlete Leader.

Mentor

Curriculum: The curriculum teaches current and new mentors what is expected of them when teaching, encouraging, instructing, praising, influencing, guiding and inspiring their athletes at Athlete Leadership University and beyond. This curriculum also teaches mentors how to gradually decrease support as Athlete Leader gains more experience.

Communications Major

Course Requirements

- PLEDGE
- Global Messenger I
- Global Messenger II

Global Messenger I

Curriculum: Introduction to communication. This curriculum teaches athletes how to write, practice and deliver a speech in front of an audience.

Practicum: Deliver a minimum of three speeches at the local and/or state level within one calendar year.

Global Messenger II

Curriculum: This curriculum teaches Global Messengers on proper etiquette such as attire, conversation tips and dining tips. It also teaches how Global Messengers can enhance their speeches and learning about other programs SOPA offers outside of traditional competition.

Practicum: Complete a minimum of three capstone projects within one calendar year using communication skills in meaningful leadership roles at the local and state level. This can include, but is not limited to: Leading local public speaking workshops, gathering athlete input at local/invitational competitions, setting goals for your program, etc.

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Practical Experience Examples

- **Local Program Level:** Speaking during a check presentation at a local business.
- **State / National Level:** Co-emceeding Opening Ceremonies at a state competition.
- **International:** Sargent Shriver International Global Messenger.

Governance Major

Course Requirements

- PLEDGE
- Athlete Representative I
- Athlete Representative II

Athlete Representative I

Curriculum: Introduction to governance. This curriculum teaches athletes how to serve on committees and how to solve problems with the help of their mentor, local management team, SOPA Staff and their fellow athletes.

Practicum: Complete a minimum of three capstone projects at the local and/or state level in one calendar year. This can include, but is not limited to: Starting an Athlete Leadership Team, attending Athlete Congress/Leadership Conference, serving on a Games Organizing Committee, etc.

Athlete Representative II

Curriculum: Heavy hands on curriculum on how to start and run an Athlete Leadership Team. Major focus on how to address important issues at the local and state level, as well as learning to deal with different personalities.

Practicum: Complete a minimum of three capstone projects within one calendar year at the local and state level which include, but are not limited to: Setting up an ALT Directory, serving in a lead role on a Games Organizing Committee, serving a full term on the SOPA Board of Directors, etc.

Practical Experience Examples

- **Local Program Level:** Chair of an Athlete Leadership Team
- **State / National:** Member of a Games Organizing Committee
- **International:** SOI Sports Advisory Committee

Sports Major

Course Requirements

- PLEDGE
- Athletes as Coaches

Athletes as Coaches

Curriculum: A non-sports specific training to help athletes that currently are or want to become certified coaches make the transition from a competitor to a coach.

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Practicum: Athletes must attend a minimum of 8 practices as an assistant coach and have their report form signed off by the head coach or local program training coordinator within a calendar year. While not required for the sports degree, it is highly encouraged that Athletes as Coaches also attend competitions as an assistant coach and attend a SOPA Coaches' Training School to receive their skills certification.

Additional Athletes as Coaches Information:

- FAQ:
http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/Athletes_as_Coaches_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf

Health Major

Course Requirements

- PLEDGE
- Healthy Lifestyles

Healthy Lifestyles

Curriculum: Not only focuses on the Healthy Athletes initiative offered during state competitions but also training athletes to promote better health, nutrition and fitness in their local programs.

Practicum: Athletes must complete a certain number of sub-projects within a project:

- Become a Health and Fitness Coordinator for local program:
 - Organize Health and Fitness clubs, which include, but are not limited to:
 - Walking Club
 - Hygiene Club
 - Cooking Club
 - Yoga Club
 - And More!
 - Spread the word about Health and Fitness Clubs via Social Media (Facebook and/or Twitter), e-mail blasts, local program newsletter and other methods of mass communication.
 - ***Optional*** Help local program partner with local health and fitness organizations.
- Volunteer/Offer Healthy Habits at local, invitational, sectional and/or state competitions.
 - If not competing, Health and Fitness Coordinators have the opportunity to volunteer with Healthy Habits at sectional and state competitions and/or host Healthy Habits at any local and invitational competitions.
- ***Optional*** Volunteer as a Healthy Athletes assistant at state competitions.
 - Optional due being available to only non-competing athletes, geographical location and ability for mentor and/or local program to provide transportation.

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Additional Healthy Lifestyles Information:

- FAQ: [http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/Healthy_Lifestyles - Frequently Asked Questions.pdf](http://specialolympicspa.org/images/Athlete_Leadership/Healthy_Lifestyles_-_Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf)

ATHLETE LEADERSHIP UNIVERSITY PRE-REQUISITES, PRACTICUM & CREDIT

First Course: All athletes attending Athlete Leadership University for the first time must take PLEDGE*.

*(*If an athlete has completed an introductory course and practicum before 2014, they are not required to take PLEDGE unless they choose to take or instruct another introductory course)*

Practicum for Credit in a Course: Each athlete completing an introductory course receives a certificate of completion as credit. Following the completion of an introductory course, each athlete must complete a minimum of three speeches (Global Messenger), three capstone projects (Athlete Representative), attend eight practices as an assistant coach (Athletes as Coaches) or become a Health and Fitness Coordinator and offer Healthy Habits (Healthy Lifestyles.)

Pre-requisites for Advanced-level: Advanced courses have pre-requisites. Note: An athlete cannot take an advanced course unless he/she first takes the introductory course and completes the practicum.

Advanced Practicum: Once an athlete has received credit for completing the advanced training, they must complete an advanced practicum in order to receive an Athlete Leadership University degree. Unlike the introductory practicum, the advanced practicum requires completing projects that are meaningful to being an Athlete Leader.

Earning additional degrees: Once an athlete leader completes his or her first degree, he/she may wish to earn additional degrees. He/she does not have to retake a course from the new degree curriculum if he/she already has credit for that course from a prior degree. Completing and receiving credit for the additional leadership course unique to the additional degree curriculum is required.

Retaking Courses: If an athlete has been inactive and/or has been paired with a new mentor, it's highly encouraged that they retake the introductory training as course content may change as Athlete Leadership continues to grow.

GETTING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT ATHLETE LEADERSHIP

Go to the following websites for access to additional information:

Special Olympics Pennsylvania Athlete Leadership resource page:

<http://specialolympicspa.org/special-programs/initiatives/athlete-leadership>

And/or:

Contact Athlete Leadership Coordinator, Jordan Schubert and Director of Programming Projects, Chelsea Drob:

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