

# Creating Optimal Environments for Student-Athletes

by Lois Elfman

For **Resa B. Lovelace**, creating a positive impact on student-athletes is a mission. As director of student-athlete development at the University of Oregon, Lovelace always puts student-athletes first—whether it is developing meaningful programs that help prepare them for life after competitive sports or cultivating welcoming and inclusive environments.

Every day, Lovelace wakes up with a sense of purpose—to make sure student-athletes finish college as well-rounded people. An important question for her is how to turn the degrees that student-athletes earn into desire for lifelong learning and fulfilling careers.

Also, as an out lesbian working in Division I intercollegiate athletics, Lovelace understands she has a platform and utilizes it by creating awareness for LGBTQ issues and working toward understanding and inclusion.

## Background

Growing up in Maryland, Lovelace was an avid athlete. A walk-on to the bowling team at Hampton University VA, she ended up earning a full athletic scholarship. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in sports management and then earned a master's in sports administration at Old Dominion University VA.

Traveling with her college bowling team gave her insight into athletic programs around the country. As an undergraduate and graduate student, she researched and wrote about gender and race in intercollegiate athletics and made intentional decisions in her education and internships, with the long-term goal of achieving a position where she could impact the student-athlete experience.

"As I got into the field, I thought about how I could put my stamp on it and make it that much better so that students have great experiences," says Lovelace.

Lovelace's first position was as coordinator of student-athlete affairs at George Mason University VA. Her work included overseeing life skills programs, serving as advisor to the student-athlete advisory council, advocating that all of the university's varsity sports participate in community engagement and collaborating with university departments to foster opportunities for student-athletes outside of sports that would help them become more well-rounded.

## Student-Athlete Development

In 2014, Lovelace made the move to Oregon, where she's intently focused on helping student-athletes focus on academics and life after sports. After taking a course



**Resa B. Lovelace**

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in career development theory, she worked to revamp Oregon's career development program from its previous focus on juniors and seniors. Now called Ducks Go Pro, it encompasses freshmen through fifth-year seniors. There are about eight programs a year that include traditional items like résumé writing and finances as well as new elements such as job shadows, internships and mentoring.

In addition to her job, she's involved with the Women Leaders in College Sports organization, which takes a proactive role in advancing women into positions of influence. Lovelace has served in the mentor program and the education and professional development committee and co-chaired the academics/student-athlete development circle.

"I feed into the motto 'lift as you rise,'" she says. "I will take the time to have a conversation with any undergraduate or high school student who is interested in being in this field."

## LGBTQ Inclusion

When Lovelace first arrived at Oregon, she observed staff development training around LGBTQ issues. There was a conversation about allies and how to fully inform coaches and administrators. The thought was to have a panel with representatives from the LGBTQ community and allies from within Oregon's sports department.

"I sat on the panel and openly talked about what I faced in the industry up to that point and why I choose to identify," says Lovelace, who has an open-door policy for any student-athlete, coach or administrator who wishes to ask her questions. "Some of the work we've been able to do internally here has helped me understand that I need to give back to students who are maybe struggling with this area in their lives and think how we can make it better for them."

Outside of her work at Oregon, Lovelace became part of LGBT SportSafe, an inclusion program, and works with outreach to various colleges and universities.

"My part of this is working with the student-athletes and staffs to help promote the importance of educating the departments and students on LGBTQ issues," says Lovelace.

Lovelace says one of the greatest challenges she's faced is that many times people don't want to have the conversation about LGBTQ issues. Her biggest rewards come from watching people who had initial resistance embrace being part of creating diversity and inclusion.

"The nature of wanting everyone to feel safe no matter who they are ... means not feeling like they have to restrict an identity of theirs," she says. "As an openly out athletic administrator, it's on me to be in spaces where we're having these conversations."

Oregon's athletic department staff goes through Queer

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**Women on the Move,**  
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in addition to her previous duties as the Russell K. Pitzer Professor of Philosophy.

- **Jennifer Kirkland, JD**, becomes general counsel at Washington and Lee University VA.
- **Kathy Kudravi** moves from executive producer of the American Sports Network to executive editor of the Sports Knowledge Lab in the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.
- **Anne Langley** moves from associate dean for research collections and scholarly communications at Pennsylvania State University Libraries to dean of the library at the University of Connecticut.
- **Glenda S. Lattimore** moves from assistant director of financial aid to director of financial aid at Jackson State University MS.
- **Dr. Mary Leveillee** becomes associate dean of the College of Nursing at the University of Rhode Island.
- **Sabrina Madison-Cannon** moves from professor of dance and associate dean of academic and faculty affairs in the Conservatory of Music and Dance at the University of Missouri-Kansas City to dean of the School of Music and Dance at the University of Oregon.
- **Dr. Constance Mallette** moves from associate vice chancellor for finance and administration to vice chancellor for finance and administration at Winston-Salem State University NC.
- **Dr. Kate Mueller** moved from dean of enrollment services at Orange Coast College CA to VP of student services at Coastline Community College CA.
- **Dr. Lynn Rainville** becomes associate dean of academic affairs at Sweet Briar College VA, in addition to her previous duties as research professor in the humanities and director of the Tusculum Institute at the school.
- **Dr. Annette C. Reboli** becomes dean of the Cooper Medical School at Rowan University NJ.
- **Dr. Lyn Redington** moves from assistant VP and dean of students at the University of Iowa to VP for student affairs at Idaho State University.
- **Dr. Quincy A. Rose** moves from associate professor of curriculum and instruction and chair of the department at Grambling State University LA to dean of the College of Education at Harris-Stowe State University MO.
- **Dr. Susan Scholz** becomes executive associate dean at the University of Kansas, in addition to her previous duties as professor in the School of Business.
- **Emily Shandley** becomes university registrar at Yale University CT.
- **Diane Glow Stormberg** moves from director of parent and family programs to assistant VP for alumni relations and donor engagement at Creighton University NE.
- **Reinette Redbird Tendore** becomes Native American program adviser in the dean of students' office for the University of Wyoming.
- **Andrea Tessier** becomes director of community outreach and engagement at Pennsylvania State University's Lehigh Valley campus.
- **Dr. Vicky Wilkins** becomes dean of the School of Public Affairs at American University DC.

- **Brandy Williams** moves from director of annual giving in the Office of Development and Alumni to director of development at the Mississippi University for Women.
- **Dr. Teresa Williams** moves from program manager for GEAR UP IL to director of TRiO student support services at Washington University in St. Louis MO.
- **Molly S. Zlock, JD**, moves from Title IX coordinator and assistant dean of students at Belmont University TN to director of the Title IX Office and Title IX coordinator at Vanderbilt University TN. 📖

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**PROFILE: Acting the Part,**  
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advocate for themselves," she said. "Even now, women still get talked over in meetings or not listened to."

When Pullen runs into roadblocks, she realizes that "I have to not get angry, stomp my foot and yell, but continue to be a force for good."

"I have to be able to change what I'm doing, work in different ways and practice what I preach."

Women leaders in nontraditional roles, Pullen suggested, should "invite people in and pay it forward. Look at the people who are doing great work and invite more people to stand next to you."

As someone who was mentored during her career, Pullen encourages others to step up and mentor younger women. "I try to surround myself with people who do the things I want to do," she said.

Those lessons are from an actress who definitely knows her lines. 📖

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**PROFILE: Creating Optimal Environments for Student-Athletes,**  
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Ally Coalition training, which seeks to reduce homophobia, heterosexism and gender bias on the Oregon campus and create an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance. There are ongoing conversations about building supportive, safe environments for everyone.

"The more that we can be transparent for the students who are coming behind us, it helps them," says Lovelace, who last year spoke at the National Collegiate Athletic Association inclusion forum on LGBTQ best practices. "If I can have any part of pushing the movement forward, I'm here for all of that." 📖



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