Finding balance between the demands of academics, athletics, and social life is a daily challenge for student athlete G. Deon Maddox. "It can really be difficult, especially as a freshman, to arrive at college and be faced with so many responsibilities," says the fourth-year finance and marketing major and Orange wide receiver. "You really need to have someone you can talk with to help you sort things out, set priorities, and keep on track."

In an effort to assist student athletes like Maddox, Syracuse University's Department of Athletics has established the Athletes Center for Educational Services (ACES), a program based at Manley Field House that offers academic guidance and support to student athletes. "The goal of ACES is to provide them with life-enhancing experiences, bridging the gap between the university experience and career goals," says Emily Ward, Education Resources Program coordinator with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). ACES is one of 46 life-skills pilot programs introduced in recent years by the NCAA on college campuses across the country.

Tom Perry, director of Student-Athlete Support Services and associate director of Athletics, heads up the ACES program at SU. He explains that four key concepts have been identified as critical to the success of student athletes both as individuals and team members: choice, integrity, accountability, and commitment. "The role of ACES is to provide experiences and opportunities that help athletes realize their potential by understanding and applying these concepts in their daily lives," Perry says.

One way this is achieved is through academic advising, where students meet regularly with one of four staff advisors to discuss their academic progress. "I meet with my advisor to discuss different ways to reach and obtain my goals," says Maddox. "My advisor understands where I'm coming from and where I want to go. His willingness to listen to me and offer advice when I need it has really been helpful."

Perry says the contributions of the academic advisors extends far beyond the classroom. "Advisors are here to provide support and direction for student athletes and encourage them to participate in other campus activities," he says. "SU values student athletes' contributions to our athletic programs. In return we want them to enjoy the total campus experience by getting involved with the non-sports clubs, organizations, and activities."

Another way student athletes receive assistance is through the three-credit course Developmental Issues of College Age Adults (EDP 100). First-year student athletes are required to take the course which is taught by professors from various SU colleges.
“EDP 100 assists incoming students in coping effectively with the transition from high school to college,” says Alan Goldberg, a professor in the School of Education and program coordinator. “It is designed for student athletes, but is not unique to them. It is useful for every student.”

Goldberg says that student athletes face special demands — traveling to and from sporting events, participating in team practices, following strict training regimens — that are constant challenges to their ability to effectively manage time. “Ultimately, one of the program’s goals is for these student athletes to recognize that skills developed in an athletic environment, such as time management and working cooperatively, have value in other settings,” Goldberg says.

Rachel Treadwell, a first-year international relations major and member of the women’s crew team, says she is grateful for the opportunity to attend a course like EDP 100. “The class helps you succeed in every aspect of life as you go through college and helps you deal with being a student athlete,” she says. “Through the course I learned how to cope with stress, and develop study skills that I will apply during my years at SU and throughout the rest of my life.”

According to Ward, Syracuse University’s EDP 100 is a model for what the NCAA hoped to achieve by piloting the life-skills program. “The classroom approach is a wonderful delivery system to student athletes,” she says. “It is a win-win situation, where athletes receive credits toward their degrees while spending their time in a valuable way.”

Perry, too, is pleased with the results. “For far too long the misconception about student athletes at Syracuse University has been that the athlete comes first, and then the student,” he says. “But the reality is that most of these students’ athletic careers will end after graduation, while their other campus experiences will be with them the rest of their lives. ACEs works to ensure that athletics is an important part, but not the only part, of their college careers.”

—HOLLY CHARRON

If you haven’t been back to SU in a few years and plan a visit in the near future, be sure to include as part of your itinerary a stop at the “new” Manley Field House.

Manley and adjacent Colvin Park have gone through some major improvements: The field house now boasts a pair of attractive two-story wings, while the park features two artificial and five grass athletic fields, an outdoor track, a renovated Coyne Field, and a lighted soccer stadium that seats 1,500. “The whole place has really changed dramatically,” says Jake Crouthamel, SU’s director of athletics. “In many ways it’s a whole different facility.”

Inside the football wing, a sky-lighted atrium houses an SU football hall of fame with photographs, memorabilia, bowl game trophies, and Ernie Davis’ 1961 Heisman. The complex also has a tiered auditorium, coaches’ offices, meeting rooms, a computer cluster, an academic support office, and a cafeteria. This spring the wing will be named in honor of alumni George R. Iocolano and the late William Petty, both from Auburn, N.Y. Iocolano and the estate of William Petty recently gave the University a $1.4 million gift for student athlete scholarships and library books.

The coaches’ wing, completed this past summer, brings the majority of the University’s coaches together under one roof. “Everything is more organized now,” Crouthamel says. “Previously we just stuck people where we had a place to stick them.” By consolidating the coaches’ offices, substantial space has now been given to the Office of Athletic Compliance and the Athletes Center for Educational Services, which provides student athletes an area for study, tutoring, computer work, and other activities. “It’s truly a state-of-the-art facility for academic services,” says Barbara Adams, assistant athletic director.

Reconfigurations and upgrades of Manley Field House have also enhanced the weight, training, equipment, and locker rooms. A set of double glass doors now leads into a more spacious Manley lobby outfitted with renovated trophy cases and a new Wall of Honor to be inscribed with the names of major donors to the Student Athlete Fund.

“The conveniences offered within our facility are pretty significant, and that’s done for a reason,” Crouthamel says. “Student athletes spend a lot of time at Manley, and it’s important that we provide them with all the tools necessary to ensure that their educational and athletic needs are being met.”

—Jay Cox