

# MODEL POLICY

## Policy on religion in athletics

### Policy Statement: Rights of Conscience for Student Athletes

The University recognizes the unique power dynamic between student athletes and coaching staff and the University values the right of every student athlete to hold his or her own religious or nonreligious views, free from direct or indirect coercion or contrary endorsement. Therefore, the University has adopted the following provisions to protect the rights of conscience of its student athletes and to prohibit religious coercion by coaches.

### Coaches, Staff, and Volunteers

All University representatives, including coaches, athletic department staff, and volunteers must remain neutral on matters of religion. University representatives may not plan or endorse any religious activity to their players. They may not include religious activities, even if optional, in team schedules, announcements, or other communications.

### Hired Chaplains

Athletic department staff, including coaches, may not coordinate the hiring or appointment of a chaplain, a religious/spiritual advisor, or an assistant whose primary qualifications or duties are religious, whether paid or “volunteer”. Student athletes who wish to receive religious or spiritual counseling have access to facilities that administer these services to the general student body.

### Campus Ministry Chaplains

People who are not legitimately affiliated with the athletic department, such as student body chaplains or other religious representatives, may not be given special access to players during any athletic events. Such representatives may not have offices in stadium or athletic department facilities; may not be given complimentary access to games and events; may not be paid, reimbursed, or given a per diem for their services; and may not travel with a team or have their travel and accommodations paid through any university or athletic department funds. Athletic department staff, including coaches, cannot encourage student athletes to fundraise for chaplains or the organizations they represent or donate University or team property to volunteer chaplains or the organizations they represent.

### Character Development Coaches

Character values such as respect, perseverance, humility, sportsmanship, and teamwork are secular values that the University seeks to instill in all of its student athletes. Hiring a “character coach,” a “player development coach,” or other such employee is a permissible way to foster these values in student athletes, provided that all university staff and volunteers—including that employee—remain neutral on matters of religious belief.

Any character development coach is explicitly prohibited from promoting a particular religious viewpoint, pressuring student-athletes to choose religion over non-religion, or directly *or indirectly* coercing student-athletes to participate in any type of religious activity. A person holding this position must comply fully with the university’s nondiscrimination policy and must be prepared to assist, without prejudice, student athletes with a diverse range of religious and nonreligious viewpoints. A person holding this position must have training in psychology, psychiatry, sports psychology, secular therapy, or a substantially equivalent field—divinity or religious counseling experience is insufficient to fulfill this position. A person meeting these criteria may be paid.

**(This policy is excerpted from *Pray to Play* a report by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and available at [www.ffrf.org](http://www.ffrf.org))**