

Thomas Paskus, PhD — Quantitative Psychologist

MORE THAN SPORTS

Thomas Paskus, PhD, works at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the center of the universe for college sports. As a psychologist, he helps the NCAA understand and support the thousands of athletes and organizations who rely upon it to make sound judgments.

To execute a mission like that takes research. Paskus fills that need.

“Our in-house research staff is relatively small but with a broad directive: Enhance the NCAA’s ability to make data-driven policy decisions,” Paskus says.

His research explores a range of policy questions related to student athletes, including their performance on and off the field. For example:

- What high school academic variables predict academic success in college for student-athletes?
- How does the time needed to engage in athletics affect student stress and academic and health outcomes?
- Are student athletes more prone to certain types of risky behaviors (e.g., substance use or gambling) than other college students?

These questions touch on important areas related to the NCAA and its stakeholders, which include association members and the students themselves.

GETTING THE BEST ANSWERS

To answer these questions, Paskus and his colleagues need to understand complex issues in measurement, statistics and large-scale data collection. For instance, his team analyzes high school and college transcript data for more than 100,000 student athletes each year and collects survey data on thousands of current and former student athletes. Their charge is finding patterns in data files that can contain up to 2 million cases from high school to early adulthood.

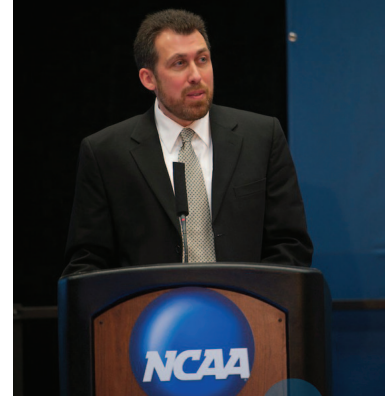
A crucial skill in this setting is learning to communicate results that may be quite complex to varied audiences. “We need to be able to speak comfortably to faculty members and college presidents, but also [to] football coaches and college sports writers,” he adds.

FROM GIG TO CAREER

While earning his doctoral degree, Paskus worked on a research project with the NCAA. What began as a small “gig” served as the foundation for his dissertation and became a two-year post-doctoral fellowship.

From there, Paskus moved to a teaching job at the University of Denver, but left for the NCAA when they extended his current job offer. Working for the NCAA allows him to work in a national setting where his research directly helps students.

“There are exciting challenges and opportunities each day in this role,” says Paskus.



Joshua Duplechien/NCAA Photos

“I work in a national setting where my research can directly assist colleges and students in real-time. I also can collaborate with the best in various fields while still having opportunities to grow as a methodologist.”

QUANTITATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Quantitative psychology is the study of methods and techniques for the measurement of human behavior. It involves the statistical and mathematical modeling of psychological processes, the design of research studies and the analysis of psychological data.