

Sun Devil athletes excel in the classroom

For the eighth straight semester, ASU boasts at least 100 athletes with 4.0 cumulative or semester GPAs

By Scott Bordow, ASU News

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Arizona State University's athletes aren't just excelling on their field of play. They're excelling in the classroom as well.

One hundred and eighteen Sun Devil athletes earned a 4.0 semester or cumulative GPA in the fall 2024 semester, the eighth straight time that at least 100 athletes have hit that mark. In addition, ASU is leading, as of July 2024, the Big 12 Conference with 152 Academic All-Americans.

Andrea Lore, senior associate athletic director of student-athlete development and well-being, said ASU positions its athletes to succeed through several programs, including:

- The Academic Success Network, which provides in-person and online tutoring, study hubs, review sessions and more.
- Digital immersion course options that reduce the number of missed classes due to athletic competition.
- The Tip of the Fork program, which launched in 2014. Tip of the Fork recognizes high-achieving student athletes and provides them specialized experiences and education to foster transformative leadership and support their pursuit of national awards.

Lore also credited Sun Devil coaches for pursuing recruits who excel academically.

"These students are self-sufficient and meet the high expectations set by their teams and coaches, which emphasize academic excellence alongside athletic performance," Lore said. "They take advantage of all the resources and opportunities ASU has to offer."

Here are four students who either had a 4.0 cumulative or semester GPA last fall:

Tiago Behar, senior, men's swimming

Computer science major

Tiago Behar was named the 2023–24 recipient of the NCAA Elite 90 Award for men's swim and dive. The award recognizes the student athlete with the highest cumulative grade-point average who has reached the finals competition for each of the NCAA's 90 men's and women's championships.

"Beforehand, I didn't really know too much about the award," said Behar, who will graduate in May. "But, afterwards, researching it, obviously it's a very important award and it's an honor to have received it. ... It definitely helps on a resume, too."

Behar, who will pursue a career in cybersecurity following graduation, said balancing the rigors of athletics and academics is "difficult in the best of times," and impossible if a student athlete isn't extremely disciplined.

Behar said he spends a minimum of 20 hours a week in the pool or weightlifting, and that doesn't include the travel time needed for away meets. On a typical Tuesday, he said, he has a morning and afternoon practice, a one-to-two-hour weightlifting session in the late afternoon and two classes. He's usually in bed by 8 p.m. because he has an early-morning workout on Wednesdays.

"I've just had to learn to be really efficient, lock in and do my work," Behar said. "You also have to look ahead more, because you can't always do assignments on the day before they're due, especially with the time constraints I have."

In that sense, swimming competitively helped Behar excel academically.

"Swimming is a sport where you need to be very self-disciplined," Behar said. "That's definitely one thing that I've learned to become."

Alex Theodorou, senior, gymnastics

Biochemistry major

While the rest of her team was stretching and getting ready for road meets against Oregon State and the University of California the past two seasons, Alex Theodorou was taking tests inside the respective universities' student athlete centers.

"That was the only option I had," said Theodorou, who hopes to become a doctor. "It's definitely hard during a season. I'd tell my teammates, 'OK, bye. I'll be back, but I have to take this test.'"

Such is the life of a biochemistry major with a 4.0 GPA and a demanding athletic pursuit. But Theodorou is used to it, in part because she often spent up to six hours a day in the gymnasium as a youth and through high school.

“To get high school homework done, I’d have to do it in the car,” Theodorou said. “That’s how the schedule demanded it. I think doing that through middle school and high school helped me to be able to adjust to it in college as well because I’ve already had to create those strategies to help me manage my time and figure out how to get everything done in a small amount of time.”

Balancing academics and athletics isn’t a burden for Theodorou — “I think all my classes are really interesting,” she said — but some sacrifice is necessary.

Like, at times, a social life.

“There are definitely some days where I’m like, ‘OK, I can’t go out. I need to take this day to get on top of things,’” Theodorou said. “Sometimes, it can be annoying. But I also know that when I’m on top of things, then I’m more likely to be able to have those moments and enjoy them.

“I don’t regret taking a harder major or choosing to study what I want to study. And I would never let the fact I’m an athlete change that.”

Helen Park, senior, lacrosse Biological sciences major

It didn’t take long for Helen Park to grasp how difficult it would be to balance being a Division 1 athlete with the academic demands required of a student who’s on the pre-med track.

As a first-year student at ASU, Park found her mind wandering. When she was in class, she was thinking about her next lacrosse practice. When she was at practice, she was thinking about her next class or test.

It was like having dozens of tabs open on her computer. There was too much going on.

“I struggled because I tried to do everything at once,” she said. “I wouldn’t be fully paying attention in class because my mind was elsewhere, and I’d have to go home and rewatch the lecture from that day or go back and relearn everything that was just told to me.”

Once Park realized that she had to be 100% present in the moment, everything changed. She’ll graduate in May and then apply for medical school with the ultimate goal of being a physician and possibly a surgeon.

Like Theodorou and other athletes, Park has had to make sacrifices during college. “My friends make fun of me all the time because I’m always having to study,” she said. But she knows the discipline she’s shown will help her as her life moves on.

“I know that if I can get through this temporary season of my life, I’m going to feel confident moving forward,” Park said. “I know medical school is going to be hard, but I’ve done hard. I can do it again.”

Melquan Stovall, graduate student, football Organizational leadership major

Melquan Stovall made one of the biggest plays of the season for ASU’s football team when he caught a 63-yard pass from quarterback Sam Leavitt in the Sun Devils’ 45-19 win over Iowa State in the Big 12 championship game.

But that was hardly his biggest accomplishment at ASU.

Stovall will finish his education in May with two master’s degrees — one in organizational leadership, the other in global security. And that’s after receiving his undergraduate degree from Colorado State in business administration.

“Academics have pretty much always been important to me just for the simple fact that I know football will end one day,” said Stovall, who plans to pursue a career in cybersecurity. “I’ve always been someone who wanted to educate myself and be able to go and venture off into other careers that I’ve been interested in.

“That’s been my mindset since high school. My education is being paid for (as a scholarship player) so I don’t want to take that for granted.”

Stovall’s academic focus came from two people: His older brother Melvin, who played college football at Missouri University of Science and Technology and who was like a father figure to Stovall growing up, and his mother, who taught him that he should never waste resources that were afforded him.

It’s a life lesson he plans to instill in his children one day.

“Sports can end today or tomorrow,” Stovall said. “But when it’s all said and done, when it’s time to hang up the cleats, academics is something that can’t be taken away from you. Knowledge can’t be taken away from you. That will always be very important in my life.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Fourth-year biochemistry and Barrett, The Honors College scholar Alex Theodorou starts her warmup during afternoon gymnastics practice in fall 2024 in the Tempe campus Women's Gymnastics Training Facility. She spends about 30 hours a week preparing for the upcoming season while also maintaining a 4.0 GPA. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

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