

# The University of Maryland Puts Student-Athlete Feedback First

The University of Maryland boasts a nationally renowned athletics program, which encompasses more than 550 student-athletes across 20 intercollegiate sports. The institution's current tagline is "Fearlessly Forward," a mentality the athletics department embodies in its efforts to evolve the Terrapin student-athlete experience.

Maryland Athletics' leadership is laser-focused on supporting student-athletes in all realms—in and out of the classroom, personally and professionally. Players have access to a breadth of resources, including programs that guide them through the transition into college and others that prepare them for successful postgraduate careers.

A key pillar of this transformation? Amplifying student voices.

## A more expansive approach to addressing mental health

In the post-pandemic environment, protecting student-athlete mental health has been a growing concern across higher education. And it's one Maryland Athletics is committed to addressing in innovative ways.

"Mental health means something different to everyone, and it addresses a whole range of issues, from mental wellness to performance," said Dr. Sue Sherburne, Executive Associate Athletic Director and Senior Woman Administrator at the University of Maryland.

Leadership has been intentional about democratizing support beyond just the school's counselors and sports psychology unit. "We're trying to work as a team, with our mental health providers, to ensure that our coaches and administrators are all aware of what our students are dealing with," said Colleen Sorem, Deputy Athletic Director and Chief Operating Officer for Maryland Athletics.

In order to create a truly student-centered experience, Maryland Athletics needed a way to go straight to the source.

## Taking Terps' feedback to heart

In July 2019, Maryland Athletics introduced RealResponse (internally known as Terps' Feedback), to serve as an always-on channel for capturing student input and concerns.



From Wikimedia Commons

“Mental health means something different to everyone, and it addresses a whole range of issues, from mental wellness to performance.”

—DR. SUE SHERBURNE  
EXECUTIVE ASSOCIATE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR  
AND SENIOR WOMAN ADMINISTRATOR, UMD

“When people have issues, they’re coming to us in ways that, in the past, they wouldn’t have. Students’ voices are being heard more. And we are listening and adapting and changing.”

—COLLEEN SOREM, DEPUTY ATHLETIC DIRECTOR AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, MARYLAND ATHLETICS

“Feedback is one of the ways we’re trying to enhance our entire student-athlete experience. The RealResponse platform is instrumental in helping us gather that feedback both collectively from teams and individually from students,” said Dr. Sherburne.

Recognizing that some students may be apprehensive about coming forward with concerns about team culture or coaching staff dynamics, Maryland Athletics needed a mechanism that could balance anonymity and real-time communication. Through RealResponse’s two-way Anonymous Threads portal, students can share information privately with campus leadership, including the university’s general counsel and dean of students. All students receive a response within 24 hours, along with an invitation to share any additional feedback live or via a call (if they would like).

Every Maryland team also receives an annual student-athlete experience survey through RealResponse, to share input at the end of their sports season. Anonymized data from these surveys are shared not only with coaches and sports supervisors, but also unit heads across the athletics and academic departments.



From Wikimedia Commons

## Opening up a critical cross-campus dialogue

Despite having a traditional campus reporting system already in place for the general student population, the University of Maryland recognized the need to support their student-athletes more effectively with specialized engagement resources. Rewarding in many ways, the intercollegiate athletics experience has become a pressure cooker for student-athletes, arguably, unlike any other time in the history of college sports. Student-athletes, who manage a landscape complicated by policy changes, NIL, an increase in illegal sports betting, and high performance expectations, require a full court press of campuswide support.

RealResponse has been an essential piece in Maryland Athletics’ move toward student-centric, 360-degree support. Socializing the platform internally and embedding it throughout the department’s day-to-day operations keeps the resource top of mind so that no feedback goes unheard. Campus leaders—from the Office of the Dean of Students to the General Counsel’s office—are ready to provide support and resources to address both the day-to-day concerns and the difficult issues student-athletes are now facing.

Dr. Sherburne and Sorem cite RealResponse’s ability to help center Maryland student-athletes’ voices—along with their administration’s willingness to listen—as key differentiators of their athletics program.



See what this game-changing platform can do for your organization.  
**RealResponse.com**