

# Coastal Carolina University Elevates Student-Athlete Voices with Anonymous Communications Platform

When the Coastal Carolina Athletics Department started using the RealResponse platform a few years ago, they weren't quite sure what to expect. The value soon became clear: with communications instantly transparent to a wide group of stakeholders, real-time intervention with student-athletes was possible, and when needed most.

## Meeting Student-Athlete Needs Was Challenging

Engaging more directly with student-athletes and reducing barriers to confidential and trustworthy communications was a high priority for the athletics department at Coastal Carolina.

Prior to adopting the RealResponse platform, the process for triaging and acting on information shared by student-athletes was neither clear nor consistent. Case management styles varied, a universal checklist for collecting and sharing intake information with appropriate departments did not exist, and follow-up communications and outreach were ad hoc. Connecting stakeholders—counseling services, coaching staff, facilities, campus police, and other departments—required anyone handling a response to understand who had to be involved and under which circumstances. Cari Rosiek, associate athletic director for student-athlete enhancement/SWA, shared that while everyone had good intentions for providing excellent support services to student-athletes, all recognized a more effective communications system needed to be implemented.

## Keeping a Finger on the Student-Athlete Pulse

The Coastal Carolina Athletics Department team identified RealResponse as a means through which student-athletes could elevate insights and concerns anonymously. Initially, the athletics department expected Title IX concerns to outpace other areas, but mental health and wellness issues surfaced as the leading and ongoing concern.

The athletics department works collaboratively with a variety of campus partners for intake and response, as it did previously, and now with greater efficiency and simultaneous coordination. Text message notifications bring the stakeholder team together virtually and almost immediately, wherever they happen to be. These notifications are followed by an automated email informing the team of a potentially high-risk event.



**Coastal Carolina University**, located in Conway, South Carolina, serves more than 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students. As a member of the Sun Belt Conference, Coastal Carolina's 17 sports teams compete at the NCAA Division 1 level. Its beloved mascot, the Chanticleer rooster, is the inspiration behind the "Chants Up" symbol, a visual representation of the rooster's feather comb and beak.

“RealResponse has made communications among campus partners seamless with its transparency and high alert, anonymous text message notifications. Campus partners engaged with this platform are completely in tune with each other and the support we must provide for our student-athletes. It’s like being part of a world-class orchestra.”

—CARI ROSIEK, ASSOCIATE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR FOR STUDENT-ATHLETE ENHANCEMENT/SWA, AND FORMER CCU STUDENT-ATHLETE WHO RETURNED TO THE UNIVERSITY IN 2003.

## Changing and Saving Lives

The RealResponse platform has facilitated fast communications across departments, allowing for real-time yet anonymous visibility into fraught situations, some of which have been life-threatening. Quick-thinking and proactive action taken by department personnel who flagged concern for student-athletes due to unexpected absences or behavioral changes helped administrative staff step in and address critical mental health needs. Rosiek credits the anonymity and immediacy that RealResponse offers in helping serve those students with the appropriate support.

Now, with this communications tool in place, RealResponse is a mainstay talking point, every semester, with student-athletes who come to the university from all over the world. Most importantly, the anonymity that RealResponse provides has alleviated communications barriers for university athletes, who might have, otherwise, felt awkward or uncomfortable about voicing concerns, whether mundane, joyful in nature, or perhaps something of greater potential risk.

What’s next? Having found a way to help bolster the wellbeing of the overextended student-athlete segment, Rosiek discussed the platform’s broader utility for the general campus population with Yvonne Hernandez Friedman, vice president for student affairs. “Ensuring safety and quick responses for all students is imperative,” states Hernandez Friedman. “Our hope is that by implementing RealResponse, with its anonymous communications capability, students now have a tool to turn to with comfort and confidence when they need help or advice whether for themselves or others.”



In 2016, the university’s baseball team won the College World Series.

Photos courtesy of Coastal Carolina University Athletics

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—YVONNE HERNANDEZ FRIEDMAN, VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS



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