Policy Statement and Purpose

The VCU Department of Intercollegiate Athletics (“Athletics Department”) is committed to the personal health and development of all our members and to the educational mission of our university. We strive to create an environment that provides equality of access to educational benefits and program participation and that respects all pregnancies and parenting decisions. The purpose of this policy is to protect the health, confidentiality, scholarship and ability of the pregnant or parenting student-athlete to participate in athletics while also assisting medical providers, coaches and administrators with information that addresses these issues.

I. Compliance With Title IX and Athletic Policies

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 bars discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes the guarantee of equal educational opportunity to pregnant and parenting students. This means that student-athletes at VCU cannot be discriminated against because of their parental status, marital status, pregnancy, or recovery from pregnancy related conditions. VCU also abides by the athletic policies regarding a student-athlete’s pregnancy and parenting set by the NCAA, the Atlantic 10 Conference, and the VCU athletic department’s insurance carrier.

II. Full Participation

The athletics department must allow a pregnant or parenting student-athlete to fully participate on the team, including all team-related activities, unless the student-athlete’s physician or other medical caregiver certifies that participation is not medically safe.

III. Non-discrimination and Prohibition of Disparate Treatment and Harassment

The athletics department is committed to promoting a positive learning environment, free from all forms of discrimination, including any disparate treatment of a student-athlete who is parenting, pregnant, or who has a pregnancy related medical condition. Any and all acts or statements that are harassing or hostile in manner toward pregnancy, parenting, or that shun or shame the student-athlete because she is pregnant or parenting are prohibited. Additionally, members of the athletics department are prohibited from suggesting or implying to any female student-athlete that, if she becomes pregnant,
her athletic participation and/or athletic scholarship will be jeopardized. Such prohibited statements also apply to interaction with recruits, applicants, and prospective admittees. Any such discriminatory conduct or statements shall be immediately reported to Equity and Access Services and the departmental Title IX Coordinator for a prompt and thorough investigation, in accordance with the university’s anti-discrimination policies and practices. In the event that an investigation confirms a violation of this policy, it shall be resolved in a manner consistent with the university's anti-discrimination policies, including taking reasonable steps to immediately stop the harassing acts complained of and appropriately disciplining those members of the department found to be in violation of this policy.

IV. Medical Leaves of Absence

A student-athlete may take a medical leave for pregnancy and pregnancy related conditions. At the end of this leave, the student-athlete must be given a full opportunity to participate in the sport program at VCU in which she previously participated or was recruited to participate provided that all other student-athlete eligibility requirements are met. Returning students must be evaluated in the same manner as any other team member returning after a medical leave of absence.

V. Confidentiality of Pregnancy Status

A. Right to Privacy

A student-athlete’s right to privacy is the same for pregnancy as it is for any other personal medical condition.

B. Confidentiality of Information

If informed of a pregnancy, a sports medicine physician must not share this information with other students, with the student-athlete’s coach, parents/guardian, or the father of the child without the student-athlete’s expressed and informed consent. The decision to inform her coaches about her pregnancy must remain within the discretion of the student-athlete. If coaches are informed, they must also maintain the confidentiality of this information.

C. Duration of Confidentiality

Information about a student-athlete’s pregnancy must be kept confidential by the sports medicine physician, coaches and other athletics personnel for as long as the student-athlete wants the information to be confidential, regardless of whether she remains on the team and regardless of whether she is participating in athletic competition.

VI. Partner of Pregnant Student-Athlete

VCU offers counseling resources to all students facing pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions. These resources are also available to the partner of a pregnant student-athlete. The athletics department encourages all students who need these resources to use them.
VII. Disciplinary Action For Non-Compliance

Any member of the athletics department found to have violated this policy in any way, such as by threatening to withhold or withholding athletics participation or an athletics award, by harassing a student athlete on the basis of pregnancy or parenting, or by breaching medical confidentiality will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Noncompliance with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. VCU supports an environment free from retaliation. Retaliation against any employee who brings forth a good faith concern, asks a clarifying question, or participates in an investigation is prohibited.

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Who Should Know This Policy

All student-athletes and all members of the VCU athletics department are responsible for knowing this policy and familiarizing themselves with its contents and provisions.

Definitions

Partner
Spouse or father of the child.

Pregnancy-Related Conditions
Includes false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, subsequent periods of recovery, and having a pregnant partner.

Pregnant
The terms “pregnant” and “pregnancy” include pregnancy and pregnancy-related conditions.
Contacts

The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics officially interprets this policy and is responsible for obtaining approval for any revisions as required by the policy Creating and Maintaining Policies and Procedures through the appropriate governance structures. Please direct policy questions to the assistant athletic director for sports medicine or the senior associate athletic director for sports administration.

Policy Specifics and Procedures

I. Recommended Notification of Pregnancy

When a student-athlete learns she is pregnant or suspects she might be pregnant, the athletics department encourages her to notify either her head coach, member of the athletic trainer staff, or the team physician (sports medicine physician) as soon as possible in order to maintain eligibility for full and safe participation. A female member of the athletics staff will be available for this conversation, upon request. In addition, the student-athlete should consult her private, primary care physician. She may also want to inform her sexual partner, family members, religious or social adviser and others who are close to her.

II. Pregnancy-Related Services

A. Medical Cost Coverage for Student-Athletes

VCU’s insurance coverage for student-athletes addresses injury and illness resulting from participation in athletics. Pregnancy is unrelated to athletics; therefore, VCU does not provide coverage for a student-athlete’s pregnancy. It is the responsibility of the student-athlete to seek medical confirmation of a pregnancy and to be responsible for all medical expenses related to testing or the actual pregnancy.

B. Pregnancy and Parenting Support Resources

The VCU athletics department must assist student-athletes with obtaining the support resources that are available to all students.

C. Counseling

Coaches and athletic trainers must not counsel the student-athlete on pregnancy issues, such as parenting, adoption, or terminating a pregnancy. Counseling and referral services are available to the student-athlete through VCU’s University Counseling Services (www.students.vcu.edu/counseling).

III. Athletic Participation During Pregnancy

A. Participation During Pregnancy and Resulting Risks
The sports medicine physician and student-athlete shall create and agree upon a participation plan for the student-athlete. Documentation outlining the student-athlete’s medical condition, the potential risks of athletic participation during pregnancy, and the student-athlete’s understanding of these risks shall be recorded within the student-athlete’s medical record in the form of a signed informed consent agreement. Absences due to pregnancy complications must be excused.

B. Complications Due to Athletic Participation During Pregnancy

VCU must abide by the recommendations of the attending physician and team physician regarding participation during and following pregnancy, but assumes no responsibility for complications which may result from continued participation in athletics. The student-athlete will participate at her own risk.

C. Ceasing Athletic Participation

The attending physician and the VCU team physician must consult with the student-athlete, and decide the appropriate time for the student-athlete to cease participation.

IV. Pregnancy Exception to NCAA Five Year Period of Athletic Eligibility

NCAA bylaw 14.2.1.3 provides that a member institution may approve a one year extension of the five year period of athletic eligibility for a female student-athlete for reasons of pregnancy. In order for the athletics department to invoke this provision, the student-athlete needs to authorize disclosure of her pregnancy to her coach and sport administrator.

V. Scholarship and Financial Aid During Pregnancy

A. Athletic Scholarship During Pregnancy

NCAA bylaw 15.3.4.1 provides that when a student-athlete is pregnant and informs the sports medicine staff, her scholarship must remain in place for the remainder of the granting year so long as she does not voluntarily withdraw from her sport.

B. Athletic-Related Financial Aid During Pregnancy

The athletics department cannot refuse to renew a student’s athletic–related financial aid on the ground that the student is or was pregnant. However, pregnant student-athletes who receive athletic-related financial aid are advised that voluntary withdrawal from their sport may result in a loss of scholarship.

C. Grant-In-Aid Requirements

This policy does not govern institutional grant-in-aid requirements. A pregnant student-athlete who is receiving an institutional scholarship should contact the financial aid office to determine whether or not the pregnancy affects the non-athletically related grant-in-aid.

Forms

There are no forms associated with this policy and procedures.
Related Documents

1. Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972 (Title 20 U.S.C. Sections 1681-1688)
2. NCAA Division I Operating Bylaws 14.2.1.3 and 15.3.4.1

Revision History

February 25, 2013  Pregnancy and Parenting Policy for Student-Athletes

FAQ

1. I am not a student-athlete, but I am a student with a pregnancy-related condition. What resources are available at VCU to help me with my questions or concerns?

VCU offers counseling and support resources to all students facing pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions. You are encouraged to contact University Student Health Services and University Counseling Services within the Division of Student Affairs.