

Stanford NIL Partnership Strategy

An academic cohort model for recurring athlete and brand partnerships

ALISA BLESKE | STRATEGY CASE STUDY

Executive Overview

I developed an academic cohort framework to give prospective brands a consistent entry point into Stanford student-athlete partnerships. The proposed model groups athletes across sports by shared academic interests, connects those cohorts with relevant brands, and supports recurring campaigns as individual athletes graduate or leave the program.

My contribution centered on originating the framework, developing its commercial rationale, seeking industry feedback, and presenting it to a six-person team. The team incorporated the concept into a broader NIL marketing proposal and collaboratively developed the research, activations, measurement approach, and presentation.

Developed through the University of San Francisco's graduate Sport Marketing course, this is an academic strategy proposal, not a commissioned Stanford engagement or an implemented program.

Business Opportunity

An athlete-led campaign can offer a strong individual story, but its continuity may depend on that athlete's availability and trajectory. Graduation, transfers, and changing visibility can require brands to find new partners and rebuild campaign plans. I saw an opportunity to organize athlete discovery around an institutional characteristic that endures: Stanford's academic identity.

The strategic question was whether a shared academic interest could provide a clearer basis for brand alignment while allowing each athlete to retain a distinct story and individual agreement.

Proposed Partnership Model

Group. Form cross-sport cohorts around shared academic or professional interests.

Match. Identify brands whose products, audiences, and objectives align with the cohort.

Activate. Develop individual athlete agreements within shared content campaigns and live experiences.

As participants rotate out, new athletes can enter the cohort. The recurring structure is intended to preserve the brand relationship while refreshing the people and stories behind it.

Strategy Development

Research and Industry Feedback

I examined Stanford's existing NIL ecosystem to position the concept alongside its education, mentorship, and commercial support resources. The proposal adds a campaign framework built around academic affinity that complements those existing resources.

I sought feedback from an industry professional with collegiate sponsorship and NIL experience before presenting the framework to the team. The discussion focused on the commercial logic of defining a relevant athlete category before selecting individual partners, and on whether the model could remain useful as participants change.

That feedback helped refine the proposition: a brand could evaluate a recurring partnership around a recognizable cohort, while selecting individual athletes for specific activations. This was qualitative input on the concept; brand demand and renewal potential would still need to be tested through execution.

Introducing the Framework

The team had already invested time in athlete research, brand selection, and activation ideas. I presented the cohort model as an organizing framework for that work, showing how existing selections could contribute to a larger, repeatable strategy.

The presentation connected three decisions: what shared interest defines the cohort, which athletes make that interest credible, and what a brand could accomplish through the partnership. This gave the team a common basis for evaluating its research while preserving earlier contributions.

Collaborative Development

The team adopted the broader framework and developed the proposal together. Athlete and brand choices could then be evaluated for academic relevance, audience fit, activation potential, and the ability to continue with future participants.

My role was to introduce the strategic direction, explain its value, and help integrate the team's ideas. The final research, creative executions, and presentation reflect the contributions of all six team members.

My Contribution

Concept development. Originated the academic cohort approach and its continuity rationale.

Strategic assessment. Examined where the framework could complement Stanford's existing NIL resources.

Industry consultation. Sought external feedback to challenge and refine the commercial proposition.

Team communication. Presented the model and helped connect existing athlete, brand, and activation ideas to it.

Execution and Evaluation

Translating the Model Into Campaigns

The proposal connects a recurring cohort framework with brand-specific activations and measurement. Each partnership needs an authentic connection to the participating athletes, a defined audience, and a measurable objective. The cohort structure is intended to support continuity without requiring every athlete to participate in every campaign.

The supporting slides show how the model fits Stanford's existing resources, how cohorts would be formed and activated, and how athlete turnover could be incorporated into a continuing platform. The On example serves as a benchmark for multi-athlete brand relationships; it is separate from the proposed academic cohort program.

Defining Success

The evaluation approach distinguishes campaign performance from the sustainability of the overall platform. Brand metrics should reflect what each partner seeks to achieve, rather than applying the same engagement measure to every activation.

LEGO. Stanford sets sold, licensing royalties, and campaign-to-purchase conversion.

Spotify. Playlist saves, unique playlist listeners, and repeat listening.

Strava. Challenge sign-ups, completion rate, and repeat active participants.

Chime. Attributed account openings, qualifying direct deposits, and cost per activated account.

Across partnerships, brand renewals, active campaign months, and athlete workload would help assess whether the recurring model delivers continuity at a manageable participation level. These are proposed measures; the project does not report live campaign results.

Project Deliverable

The result is a collaboratively developed NIL marketing proposal with an academic cohort framework, athlete and brand applications, activation concepts, and an evaluation approach. My individual contribution demonstrates how I assess a partnership opportunity, develop a practical structure, and communicate a new direction within an existing team.

Supporting Appendices

A Building on Stanford's Foundation

B Academic Cohort Partnerships

C Existing Multi-Athlete NIL Example

D What Success Looks Like

E Athletes Graduate. The Platform Remains.



WHERE OUR VERTICAL FITS

Building on Stanford's Foundation

Cardinal Connect

NIL education
& resources

Cardinal Conversations

Alumni mentorship
& career development

Altius NIL GM

NIL strategy
& commercial support

OUR PROPOSAL

Academic Cohort Partnerships

Recurring brand campaigns across sports

Shared academic identity. Rotating athletes. Continuing brand relationships.

Project framework based on published programs; not an official organizational chart.
Cardinal Connect: published education framework.

OUR PROPOSED VERTICAL



Academic Cohort Partnerships

Shared academic interests. Multiple sports. Year-round brand partnerships.

01 GROUP

Cross-sport academic cohorts

02 MATCH

Brands aligned with shared interests

03 ACTIVATE

Individual athlete deals · Shared campaigns

EXAMPLE: ENGINEERING × LEGO

The cohort continues as athletes change.

EXISTING MULTI-ATHLETE NIL EXAMPLE



On × Stanford Athletes

Individual partnerships. Shared brand.

JULIETTE WHITTAKER

Olympic finalist

Paris 2024 • 800m

GLOBAL VISIBILITY

KY ROBINSON

NIL → Professional

Joined On Athletics Club • 2024

LONG-TERM BRAND RELATIONSHIP

Multiple athletes. Lasting partnerships.



MEASURING EACH PARTNERSHIP

What Success Looks Like



PRODUCT & LICENSING

Stanford sets sold

Licensing royalties

Campaign-to-purchase
conversion



LISTENING & DISCOVERY

Playlist saves

Unique playlist
listeners

Repeat listening



COMMUNITY & ACTIVITY

Challenge sign-ups

Challenge
completion rate

Repeat active
participants



CUSTOMER ACQUISITION

Attributed account
openings

Qualifying direct
deposits

Cost per activated
account

Across all four: Brand renewals • Active months • Athlete workload

Athletes Graduate. The Platform Remains.

A renewable Stanford Athletics NIL platform



Stanford does not need to rebuild NIL value every year — it can renew it through a rotating athlete cohort.

The athletes change. The platform compounds.