



Cita Jones will drop it all at a moment's notice to offer a listening ear. (Photography by Robert Whitehead)

by Koren Wetmore

Her title is "compliance coordinator," but it could easily be mom or mentor or quite simply, friend. That's because Cita Jones is all of these to the 206 student-athletes who attend Cal State San Bernardino.

Perhaps it's her personality. The way she walks into a room and welcomes you with a hug and a smile. Maybe it's her willingness to go above and beyond to help, or how she translates complex NCAA rules into something you follow, not fear. She handles mounds of paperwork and juggles an endless flow of people in her

office, on the phone and on the field.

"I think that any young person that wants to go to college should have someone they can come to and ask any question and get help," she says. "And I will do whatever I can within the law to make sure they are successful."

It's a mission she started 26 years ago when she landed her first position at CSUSB, serving as a clerical assistant in the financial aid office. The job and the campus represented a blessing to the Illinois native, who as a single mom moved from the Chicago area to San Bernardino in search of a better life for her and her son. Having seen enough of the gangs

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in Chicago, she wanted to raise her son Dino, now 39, in a place that valued education and self-respect. She found it at Cal State.

Jones soon discovered she had a knack for understanding the NCAA rules and regulations that accompany scholarships and other sources of student aid.

"In financial aid there were rules, regulations and bylaws written by federal attorneys. In athletics there are rules, regulations and bylaws written by the NCAA," she says. "So in both cases you have to read and decipher those laws so people can understand them."

Yet understanding is only the beginning. Often the rules call for creative problem-solving. When several student-athletes nearly missed out on a work-study financial aid opportunity because there were no jobs on campus, Jones helped create jobs. When another student missed a deadline and nearly lost his financial aid, she guided him through the process of filing again and he received about \$7,000 in financial aid.

Going beyond routine expectations is second-nature for Jones, says CSUSB baseball Coach Don Parnell. "It's her job to make sure all of our paperwork is done and correct, but we practice off campus and it's hard to get athletes to meet with her in her office," he says. "She'll come over to the field and bring our files on site so we don't have to come to her. That's really beyond the call of duty."

Parnell also values Jones's tenacity in dealing with tricky NCAA eligibility rules regarding junior college transfers. "A student-athlete will have an associate's degree and diploma in hand, but NCAA rules say it has to be posted on a transcript. Cita takes the time to call and call the junior college so that they post the degree, meet the NCAA requirement, thereby making the student eligible," he says.





Women's volleyball Coach Kim Cherniss prizes Jones's support and encouragement of both student-athletes and coaches. "The biggest hurdle for us coaches is to get people to buy into what we're doing. And Cita truly believes in the value of athletics for these kids," Cherniss says. "She is part mother-bear; part police woman and part facilitator. But she's also someone the kids feel they can talk to when they get themselves into a jam."

She's also a role model. As adviser for the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, Jones helps prepare young men and women for leadership roles by coordinating events and activities that boost their skills and offer community service. In March 2005, SAAC members participated in Read Across America, visiting San Bernardino-area elementary schools.

"Cita coordinated with the schools and signed us up to do the reading," says Ashley Sodergren, a volleyball player and SAAC president. "We visited classrooms, read books to the kids and told them about ourselves and about college."

The committee also prepared and delivered a comedy skit at this year's all-sports banquet.



quet.

Working with Jones has taught committee members about leadership, responsibility and organization, Sodergren says, adding that none of the lessons would have sunk in if not for Jones's sincerity and interest. "She's like a

second coach," Sodergren says. "She knows about your grades, what you're going through and she's easy to talk to. Everyone has a close bond with her."

That rapport, combined with her knowledge and familiarity with the campus is what prompted Athletic Director Nancy Simpson to hire Jones as the compliance coordinator six years ago. "She's just such a good person," Simpson says. "It's nice to have someone who is of strong ethical and moral character. You can't teach that. You either have it or you don't. And Cita has it." Jones's presence in the athletic department has created a friendly environment despite the potential stressors and challenges that arise. For that reason and others, Simpson recently upgraded Jones's job title to assistant athletic director for compliance.

"In her position, you have to be ready for everything that comes at you. Typically, those things are problems," Simpson says. "I'm sure there are times she wants to close the door and let out a big sigh, but she hangs in there and does beautifully."

Jones stays calm through the endless procession of people — coaches needing help, NCAA officials on the phone, and student-athletes wanting advice — armed with a gentle, but firm wisdom. And always, there is that warmth and smile.

The reason?

"Most people don't get to reap their rewards every weekend, but I do," Jones says. "Any time one of our teams is on the field or the court, I am rewarded. They do so much more than the average student. And, they bring home championships."

Freelance writer and editor Koren Wetmore has written for such publications as The Press-Enterprise, Women's Health & Fitness and Shape.

SPORTS CALENDAR

All listings in this calendar are home contests. For the complete women's and men's basketball schedules, which include both home and away games, and for the schedules of other sports, visit the Coyote Web site at <http://athletics.csusb.edu> or call the athletics department at

October

4 Men's Soccer.
Cal Poly Pomona,
4 p.m.

6 Men's Soccer.
Cal State
Dominguez Hills,
4 p.m.

Women's Volleyball.
Cal State Stanislaus,
7 p.m.

7 Women's Volleyball.
Chico State, 7 p.m.

8 Men's Soccer.
UC San Diego,
3 p.m.

13 Women's Volleyball.
Cal Baptist, 7 p.m.

27 Women's Volleyball.
Humboldt State,
7 p.m.

28 Women's Volleyball.
Sonoma State,
3 p.m.

November

14 Men's Basketball.
Westmont College,
7:30 p.m.

18 Women's Basketball.
Hawaii Pacific
University, 7 p.m.

December

1 Women's Basketball.
Humboldt State,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
Humboldt State,
7:30 p.m.

2 Women's Basketball.
Sonoma State,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
Sonoma State,
7:30 p.m.

12 Men's Basketball.
Seattle Pacific,
7 p.m.

16 Men's Basketball.
Grand Canyon
University, 7 p.m.

19 Women's Basketball.
Notre Dame De
Namur, 5:30 p.m.

January 2007

12 Women's Basketball.
Cal State Stanislaus,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
Cal State Stanislaus,
7:30 p.m.

13 Women's Basketball.
Chico State,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
Chico State,
7:30 p.m.

26 Women's Basketball.
Cal State L.A.,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
Cal State L.A.,
7:30 p.m.

27 Women's Basketball.
Cal State
Bakersfield,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
Cal State
Bakersfield,
7:30 p.m.

February

6 Women's Basketball.
Cal Poly Pomona,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
Cal Poly Pomona,
7:30 p.m.

9 Women's Basketball.
San Francisco State,
5:30 p.m.

Men's Basketball.
San Francisco State,
7:30 p.m.