Norm Gaddis helps Wake Forest athletes adjust from the competitive world of intercollegiate sports to the competitive world of business and professions. It isn't an easy transition, according to Gaddis, and Wake Forest is one of the few schools that tries to smooth the path for its athletes.

Gaddis said that a representative of a national company told him that he had visited 38 schools talking with senior students and that Wake Forest was the only one with an active program to advise and help its athletes in job procurement after graduation.

Gaddis took the job two years ago, and as a pioneer, he has had to feel his way through it. There were no guidelines, so he's had to learn by trial and error. He doesn't guarantee an athlete that he'll get a job. His role is to show them how to make a good impression when applying for a job, to keep up with openings, and to help make contacts.

His help may range from showing how to prepare a resume to setting up an interview with a corporate executive. It may include advice on what courses to take to best prepare the student for a career or help in realizing that the young person is not likely to step in as president of a big corporation when he graduates from college.

Gaddis works mostly with athletes, but he will help any student who needs advice. If an opening comes to him and he has no athlete to fill it, he passes the information on to the university placement office. The two work together. Football and basketball players have been most active in the program, tennis players and golfers the least. Gaddis thinks this probably is because the tennis players and golfers know pretty well what they want to do after college.

Athletes, Gaddis has found, aren't different from Wake Forest students. Few think about their after-college plans until they are seniors. He wishes they would plan ahead a little better.

Many of them are concerned about the value of a liberal arts education as preparation for the world of business. Gaddis understands their concerns, but believes that the liberal arts education can be of value. "I recommend that they concentrate on a well-rounded education, that they take as much history, English and philosophy as they can," Gaddis said. "I think it is important for them to be at least computer literate, that they take some subjects that will give them a computer background. And they should also have some mathematics.

"These courses will enable them to go into a company and score well in positions in administration, as personnel managers, in marketing and promotion and advertising."

The dream of becoming a professional athlete is not
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a factor with Wake Forest athletes, as it is in some schools. "Our athletes don't concentrate on the pros," said Gaddis. "Some of them are interested in pro careers, but they realize that they need their degree if the pros don't work out."

"Phil Denfeld is an example. He is interested in a career in pro football, but he also wants to get his master's degree in business. He knows that his pro sports career is limited. He wants to get an education that will make him competitive in business, and he is not counting on pro sports as his life's work."

Many athletes do want to stay in some field related to athletics. Some want to teach and coach, while others want to work with sports equipment companies, sports promotion and similar careers.

At best, though, the transition from college to career isn't easy. "It's tough for any student," said Gaddis. "They find themselves working for a company where they are expected to produce. The company wants to know what you can do to increase their earnings. That is the bottom line."

Athletes, like other students, sometimes have unrealistic ideas about what jobs are available. "All of them want to find challenging, rewarding jobs that pay a good salary," said Gaddis. "In reality, they must start at the beginning level and establish themselves with a record before they can move up."

Gaddis said that some of the athletes are weak in verbal and written communication. "They need to strengthen themselves in these areas," said Gaddis. "These things are important when they go for their job interview. They have only one opportunity to make that first impression. If they can't express themselves adequately, it will be a weakness."

Gaddis thinks that athletic participation is an asset. "The athlete has been exposed to all areas of competition and motivation. He has worked in a competitive situation; he has worked as part of a team. He has concentrated on specific goals. All these things help him," said Gaddis.

But there can be a problem in the transition from being a successful athlete to this new role in business. "Gaddis said that athletes at Wake Forest range from those who are excellent students to those who need tutoring help to get through."

Gaddis said that Winston-Salem business leaders have been most cooperative in working with Wake Forest athletes. They call Gaddis and tell him about job opportunities, and one local business executive spent an hour talking with one Wake athlete about his professional future.

These are the things that make Gaddis feel the program is worthwhile.