Athletic student services: Enhancing the educational experiences of student-athletes

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Abstract
Intercollegiate athletics was born in 1852 when Harvard and Yale competed in a boat race (Rudolph, 1990/1962). Over the course of the ensuing two decades, intercollegiate athletics experienced tremendous growth as college teams began competing against each other in baseball, football, and other sports. The first baseball game was played between Amherst and Williams in 1859, and the first football game was played between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869 (Rudolph). These first athletic contests conjure up images of purity and of college students who played their respective sports out of a love for the game and out of a desire to bring recognition to their institutions.
ATHLETIC STUDENT SERVICES: ENHANCING THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

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Intercollegiate athletics was born in 1852 when Harvard and Yale competed in a boat race (Rudolph, 1990/1962). Over the course of the ensuing two decades, intercollegiate athletics experienced tremendous growth as college teams began competing against each other in baseball, football, and other sports. The first baseball game was played between Amherst and Williams in 1859, and the first football game was played between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869 (Rudolph). These first athletic contests conjure up images of purity and of college students who played their respective sports out of a love for the game and out of a desire to bring recognition to their institutions.

Now, well over 100 years later, the growth of intercollegiate athletics is unprecedented. However, the images associated with it and its participants have changed. Intercollegiate athletics has become big business, causing many of the participants to be athletes who happen to be students rather than students who are also athletes. Athletes are now frequently stereotyped as "dumb jocks," doing what is necessary to remain academically eligible to participate and no
more. In addition, a few college athletes are highlighted by the media for incidents ranging from academic difficulties to violations of the law. Thus, the stereotypes are sustained and continue to plague intercollegiate athletics.

What is absent from the aforementioned descriptions is a focus on why most of its participants attend, or should be attending college: an education. What has happened in the midst of the changes in intercollegiate athletics is a de-emphasis on the "student" in "student-athlete."

An entity now exists at all National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) institutions with Division I-A status, as well as some institutions at other levels, which addresses the academic aspect of intercollegiate athletics and advocates the academic needs of student-athletes. This entity is an office of athletic student services, which also might be referred to as athletic counseling. The field of athletic student services became formally recognized in 1976 with the founding of the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (Serrano, 1988). The services provided by such offices, which will be
highlighted in this paper, include, but are not limited to: orientation, academic advising, tutoring, and career planning and exploration.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it will be shown how offices of athletic student services take a developmental approach in working with student-athletes. The theoretical construct which will be used herein is that of "moving in, moving through, and moving on," which is a concept developed by Ann Lynch in the late 1980s (Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989). Second, in conjunction with this theoretical construct, the field of athletic student services will be described by illustrating the comprehensive functions served by such offices. The Office of Athletic Student Services at a large midwestern research university will serve as a model for this description and will be identified throughout this paper as University A.

It is hoped that this paper will serve to inform a diverse audience about the educational and developmental value of intercollegiate athletics. Offices of athletic student services are advocates for these aspects of the college experience and can reduce
attrition, improve graduation rates, and play a critical role in returning the integrity to intercollegiate athletics that has been lost over the years. In order to gain respect and support from the academic community, as well as from the general public, the functions that these offices serve must be made known.

Theoretical Framework

The concept "moving in, moving through, and moving on," was developed by Ann Lynch in Schlossberg et al. (1989) to explain the transitions that non-traditional students go through as they either return to college or enroll for the first time. At first thought, it would seem that non-traditional students and student-athletes have little in common. However, in the context of this concept, there are a number of parallels that exist between the two groups. For example, both groups typically have commitments outside of academics that make their college experiences unique (i.e., family, job, practice, or competition).

Before illustrating athletic student services using the "moving in, moving through, and moving on" concept, it is necessary to explain each phase.
Moving In

As the term implies, "moving in" refers to the transitions involved in starting college. For non-traditional students, this means returning to school after a hiatus of some time or attending a postsecondary institution for the first time. For student-athletes, this means making the transition from high school to college, typically without a break.

Making the transition into college, for non-traditional students, student-athletes, and others alike, involves understanding and coping with the new environment, learning the institution's cultures and routines, and discovering all of the resources that are available to help them accomplish the above. As Schlossberg et al. (1989) pose it, the main question asked by student services at this point is, "What can student development professionals do to activate an educational response that will eliminate barriers and provide the support and challenge necessary for adults moving in and for adult learning to take place?" (p. 55).

Some of the programs and services that these authors suggest for answering this question include: an
entry education center, which is responsible for coordinating all services and programs so that students can move comfortably into an institution; and an entry/orientation course, which helps adult learners evaluate their needs, interests, and concerns. This applies to student-athletes as well, as this paper will illustrate.

Moving Through

The process of "moving through" occurs once students have settled into an institution and have established some sense of direction. Schlossberg et al. (1989) state that once students have "moved in," their needs change. They must now learn how to balance academics with other aspects of their lives, both of which require a substantial amount of time. For non-traditional students, this may include a full or part-time job, a spouse, a family, and/or any of a number of extracurricular activities. For student-athletes, this involves participation in intercollegiate athletics.

The focus of student services professionals also changes as they help students "move through" college. They must develop programs and offer services that will help students balance their competing demands, master
new skills, become involved in the institution, and maintain their direction. Some of the services that Schlossberg et al. (1989) identify as aiding in this process include: developmental mentoring; academic advising, which entails making sure that students' courses fit their educational goals, making sure that students are aware of degree requirements, and reviewing educational plans periodically so that they can be adjusted if necessary; academic support services, which includes tutoring, help in developing time-management and study skills, and help in preparing for and taking exams; and career planning and exploration.

Moving On

The process of "moving on" typically occurs during students' final year of school and involves "helping them look back at why they came, what they got, and where they are going" (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 146). At this point, students are preparing to make yet another transition. For non-traditional students, this may mean out of school and into the world of work for the first time, or out of school and into a new career. For student-athletes who do not turn
professional, this means out of school and into the world of work. Regardless, the transition is paramount. As such, they may need help "moving on" just as they needed help "moving in" and "moving through."

Schlossberg et al. (1989) suggest that the most important programs and services involved in the "moving on" process deal with career planning. Students need to discuss the possibilities that exist for them in the future, as well as need help with the job search process and/or applying for admission to graduate or professional schools. It is important that the services offered by student services professionals do not diminish during this phase. Although students may know what they want in the future and, by this time, have become aware of the resources available to them, it cannot be assumed that they no longer need help or are no longer of any importance to those that serve them.

The concept of "moving in, moving through, and moving on" provides a compelling foundation for explaining the field of athletic student services. Its
utility will become evident throughout the remainder of this paper.

Moving In

As Astin (1993) implies, the first year of college, which is synonymous with the "moving in" phase described by Schlossberg et al. (1989), begins before a student arrives on campus. A number of important decisions must be made, such as: whether or not to attend college; if attending, what type of college will provide the best atmosphere (i.e., four-year research university, four-year liberal arts college, community college); for student-athletes, whether or not to participate in intercollegiate athletics; and if so, what institution provides the best fit for academics and athletics combined. Offices of athletic student services are involved in the recruiting process in the capacity of meeting with prospective student-athletes and their parents to discuss the academic experiences a particular institution has to offer.

Once a student-athlete is on campus, the office of athletic student services continues to conduct the "moving in" process, which Chickering (1994) states "is far and away our (student personnel services) most
important responsibility" (p. 3). The largest part of this process consists of various programs and courses designed to help first-year student-athletes cope with the transition from high school to college. This transition involves academics, as well as athletics.

The first type of aid that offices of athletic student services provide for first-year student-athletes are courses or seminars that focus on issues like setting goals and objectives, time-management, communication skills, and coping with academic anxiety. Higbee and Dwinell (1992) describe such courses as they apply to academically underprepared students. However, it is conceivable that even first-year student-athletes with sufficient levels of academic preparation stand to benefit from these types of courses. The overall goal of the course described by Higbee and Dwinell is "the retention and graduation of the underprepared students who participate" (p. 31). This goal, as it applies to all student-athletes, should be, and in most cases is, the primary goal of any athletic student services entity.

The second type of aid offered by offices of athletic student services during the "moving in" phase
are study skills courses. Courses of this type, as described in a study conducted by Fletcher and Mand (1988), cover topics such as memory techniques, taking notes effectively, and preparing for and taking exams. The course described by Fletcher and Mand, as was the case with Higbee and Dwinell (1992), was geared toward academically at-risk student-athletes. The results of this study showed that such courses could increase the grade point averages of at-risk student-athletes, provided that they were motivated enough to learn the techniques and skills and use them in other courses. The authors concluded that the amount of time needed to learn course material could be significantly decreased upon learning the techniques and skills taught.

The third type of aid provided by offices of athletic student services during the "moving in" phase, as described by Petitpas and Champagne (1988), is developmental programming. Petitpas and Champagne alluded to the fact that student-athletes, perhaps those at the NCAA Division I level more than others, tend to overidentify with the athlete role and subsequently have a difficult time developing educational and career plans. These authors discussed
a four-year program, based on Perry's (1970) cognitive-structural theory of development, designed to address the needs of student-athletes. The goal of this program during the first year of college is to involve student-athletes in the initial stages of recognizing their roles and responsibilities in life outside of athletics. According to Petitpas and Champagne, only 3.3% of college athletes continue on professionally in their respective sports. Thus, developmental programming like that described above is of paramount importance.

The Office of Athletic Student Services at University A offers a course for first-year student-athletes appropriately entitled "New Student Orientation/Transition Seminar." The goals of this course are as follows: (a) to introduce students to the main library and its computer system; (b) to identify the academic expectations of the university, its athletic conference, and the NCAA; (c) to assess attitudes, academic motivation, and learning styles; (d) to discuss time-management strategies; and (e) to identify and discuss issues involved with the transition from high school to college. In addition,
student-athletes attend summer orientation sessions, as do other first-year students. The purposes of these sessions are to allow students to become familiar with what the university has to offer, and to register them for first semester classes. When combined, these services provide student-athletes with a broad overview of what to expect in their first year of college and help them become acclimated to this particular institution.

Many students who decide to attend college, including student-athletes, enter with underdeveloped academic skills that are necessary for success. Student-athletes are at a distinct disadvantage because of the time commitment required by intercollegiate athletics. This commitment significantly reduces the time that student-athletes can devote to academics and can have detrimental effects. Evidence of this was provided by Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, and Terenzini (1995). This study found that first-year student-athletes, especially those in revenue-producing sports like football and basketball, had lower end-of-freshman-year averages in reading comprehension and math scores than their non-athlete counterparts. Thus,
courses and programs such as those described above have the potential to provide student-athletes with the tools that they need to be academically successful.

Although the utility of the courses and programs described above is evident, the services offered by offices of athletic student services must be comprehensive in nature and include more than courses and programs designed to benefit first-year student-athletes. This necessity manifests itself in the "moving through" and "moving on" phases, which will be discussed next.

Moving Through

Chickering (1994) states that helping students during the "moving in" phase is the most important function served by student services professionals. The importance of this phase lies in the fact that the first year of college sets the stage for the subsequent three to four years. In addition, it is assumed, erroneously, that students automatically "move through" college if the "moving in" phase is attended to. This is obviously not the case. The "moving through" phase is the broadest, most involved phase in this process, due to the fact that it spans a greater period of time
and has more components than the "moving in" and "moving on" phases.

Denson (1992) described Student Services for Athletes (SSA) at one university as "a comprehensive, integrated program of support services for student-athletes" (p. 16). Ideally, this is the model that most offices of athletic student services try to emulate. The "moving through" process will be discussed in terms of three of the components identified by Denson: academic mentoring or academic advising, programming, and teaching.

**Academic Mentoring/Academic Advising**

While some components of athletic student services vary from institution to institution, academic advising, as it will be referred to here, is one that remains constant. Academic advising begins when a student-athlete enters an institution and continues throughout the entire college career. This involves helping student-athletes select majors that incorporate their interests and goals, develop educational plans in compliance with the requirements of a selected major, making sure that all general education requirements are completed, and restructuring educational plans when a
student-athlete changes majors. Academic advising for student-athletes at the NCAA Division I level is more involved than it is with the general student population for two reasons: first, student-athletes must follow NCAA, conference, and institutional guidelines that require them to complete a certain number of general education and major requirements each year; and second, as Sowa and Gressard (1983) stated, student-athletes experience more difficulties developing educational plans than their non-athlete counterparts.

A service related to academic advising is that of securing tutors for student-athletes. Just as non-athletes must sometimes seek out others to help them with academic difficulties, so must student-athletes. As was stated previously, academics becomes even more challenging for this population because of the time that they are required to spend with their respective sports. Thus, providing tutoring services for student-athletes, when needed, is vital for their academic success.

At University A, academic advising is the primary function of the Office of Athletic Student Services.
The reasoning behind its importance is that academics is their primary concern and their reason for existing.

Programming

As is the case with many college or university departments, programming is an important function of athletic student services. There are many areas in which programming can be done, including two significant ones that will be discussed in this section: campus involvement and career planning and exploration.

Stone and Strange (1989) stated that student-athletes are significantly less involved with campus activities than non-athletes. This is important when considering the findings of Cooper, Healy and Simpson (1994). These authors found that students who are involved in campus organizations have more positive educational and social experiences in college and, as a result, are more likely to graduate. Although participation in intercollegiate athletics is a form of campus involvement, it is but one of the many possibilities available to college students. It is important for student-athletes to be aware of what exists outside of athletics, so that they do not become
isolated in and too focused on one specific area. It is also important that student-athletes be encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.

Career planning and exploration is another area that provides programming opportunities for athletic student services. The focus of athletic student services is academics, making sure that student-athletes progress toward a degree. It is equally important that they develop plans for utilizing their degrees when college and athletics have ended. The program described by Petitpas and Champagne (1988), which was alluded to earlier, has as one of its goals to encourage student-athletes to explore careers outside of athletics. Doing so exposes them to services and organizations outside of the athletic department.

The Office of Athletic Student Services at University A creates numerous opportunities for student-athletes to come into contact with services, activities, and organizations outside the boundaries of athletics. First, the Youth Leadership Program is a summer program that exists to provide selected youth with the opportunity to develop leadership skills.
Student-athletes are encouraged to apply to participate in this program as counselors, mentors, and role models. Second, first- and second-year student-athletes who have yet to declare majors can attend a series of presentations on various majors within the university. The intent of these presentations is to give participants the information necessary to make decisions regarding their futures.

The importance of programming lies in the fact that it begins when student-athletes arrive on campus and concludes just prior to their graduation. Although space does not permit the explanation of all of the programming efforts put forth by athletic student services, the above examples are evidence of their scope.

Teaching

The concept of holistic education holds that students are educated outside of the classroom just as they are educated inside of it. Historically, the role of academic advisors has consisted of helping students choose majors and developing the educational plans to accompany them (Crookston, 1994/1972). However, the student development movement caused a re-examination of
this role. Today, student services professionals, including those in athletic student services, are considered educators in the context of holistic education.

Crookston (1994/1972) states that, in some cases, a developmental relationship exists between students and their advisors in which students are viewed as mature, responsible, and capable of completing tasks on their own. Such a relationship allows athletic student services professionals to teach student-athletes two things: (a) how to learn from their experiences outside of the classroom and (b) how to become independent in securing the resources necessary for quality educational experiences. Thus, the role of teaching is critical in athletic student services.

This explanation of the "moving through" phase by no means includes all that athletic student services does to help student-athletes during their college years. It is believed, though, that the services described above provide an overview of what these entities offer. Helping student-athletes "move through" college is an ongoing process. However, this does not mark the end of athletic student services'
responsibilities. The final phase, "moving on," will be discussed next.

Moving On

The final phase of postsecondary education, in terms of the theoretical framework used here, is "moving on." In the case of student-athletes at the NCAA Division I level, this phase occurs during the fourth or fifth year, depending upon the eligibility status of the individual and the completion of degree requirements. It marks yet another transition in a student-athlete’s life, which, for the vast majority, is out of intercollegiate athletics and into other roles. Chickering (1994) put this phase well into perspective:

When students have defined a major that has worked for them; when they have learned how to learn from both academic and extracurricular experiences; when they have developed a rich set of diverse, mature relationships, they are well-positioned for work, for further education, moving toward marriage and starting a family. (p. 5)

The issues associated with the "moving on" process are critical, especially for student-athletes at the
NCAA Division I level. First, Pearson and Petitpas (1990) discussed the transitions that student-athletes must make. These authors suggested that student-athletes have an extremely narrow focus on their respective sports, especially those participating in revenue-producing sports like football and basketball. As a result, processes such as career planning may be neglected or considered to be of secondary importance. Second, Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, and Mahar (1993) conducted a study which found that intercollegiate athletes were more likely than non-athletes to identify with the athlete role, as well as to commit to an athletically-related occupation without exploring other career options. Chartrand and Lent (1987) identified this problem as role conflict, which occurs when the demands of two roles (i.e., student and athlete) are incompatible with one another. This would suggest that student-athletes may not fully understand the importance of planning a career outside of athletics. Statistics have shown that only 3.3% of intercollegiate athletes continue on to the professional level in their respective sports (Petitpas and Champagne, 1988). Thus, the importance of career
planning is evident for student services professionals who work with student-athletes.

Offices of athletic students services identify the need for career planning on behalf of student-athletes and address this need in a number of ways. First, as Petitpas and Schwartz (1989) suggested, student services professionals who work with athletes must help them realize how the skills developed through athletic participation, or transferable skills, can be utilized for success in occupational settings. Some examples of transferable skills that student-athletes might develop through athletic participation include: perseverance, teamwork, determination, the ability to accept and subsequently utilize constructive criticism, and the ability to set and attain goals. Second, Petitpas and Champagne (1988), which was alluded to earlier, developed a four-year program based on Perry's (1970) cognitive-structural theory of development. The goal of this program during the fourth and/or fifth year is to assist student-athletes in preparing for the transition out of athletics. This is accomplished by focusing on such things as job search strategies and
securing internships for relevant, practical experience in a particular field.

It is important to note here that career planning is not exclusively a fourth or fifth year activity. Student-athletes are engaged in exploring careers as early as their first year. However, since it forms the basis for the "moving on" phase, it is discussed in detail in this context.

At University A, student-athletes are exposed to career planning through the Office of Athletic Student Services, as well as through sources outside of the athletic department and outside of the university. The Office of Athletic Student Services conducts career planning and exploration with individual student-athletes and designs educational programs for groups of student-athletes which focus on the job search process. One such program is a meeting for senior student-athletes approaching the completion of their undergraduate degrees. These individuals receive information on various job search techniques and are addressed by business professionals about the current job market. This information gives student-athletes a foundation for beginning the transition out of
intercollegiate athletics and reinforces the importance of developing career plans. Another related program consists of mock job interviews. Student-athletes are provided with the opportunity to be interviewed by personnel professionals in order to gain insight on the strengths and weaknesses of their interview skills, their resumes, and the interview process in general. As a final step in the career planning process, senior student-athletes can attend a senior’s dinner, which is also attended by a number of business professionals. This provides valuable networking opportunities for those student-athletes who attend, with many such connections leading to interviews and eventual employment.

As the explanation of the "moving on" phase indicates, there are a number of ways that athletic student services professionals can approach career planning. Using a variety of approaches is necessary because several studies (Blann, 1985; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Sowa & Gressard, 1983) suggest that student-athletes have difficulties developing career plans and because individual differences need to be accommodated. One viable approach was presented by
Etzel, Barrow, and Pinkney (1994). These authors suggested that career planning should be approached as a Plan B. Such an approach would likely not stifle student-athletes' attempts at excelling in their respective sports, and would also remind them that even professional athletes' careers end at some point, necessitating something to take its place.

The "moving on" phase of postsecondary education is vital for student-athletes because it marks the beginning of a major transition in life. This process is just as important as "moving in" and "moving through," and deserves the same attention. As such, student-athletes will realize that they are valued in more respects than just their athletic ability and their educational experiences will undoubtedly be enhanced.

Conclusion

Intercollegiate athletics has undergone drastic changes over the last century. The focus has shifted from students who participate in athletics to athletes who also happen to be students. These changes necessitated measures to bring the focus back to
academics, which is the primary purpose for the existence of postsecondary education.

The field of athletic student services came into existence in the mid 1970s so that student-athletes’ academic needs would no longer suffer at the hands of the pressure to perform athletically. These offices put forth a great deal of effort to ensure that student-athletes settle into college with minimal difficulties, progress towards degrees, and leave college with control of their own destinies.

One recurring question regarding athletic student services is, "Why do athletes deserve such special treatment?" From the perspective of this author, the answer to this question is that all students deserve to have the amount of individualized attention that NCAA Division I student-athletes receive. Instead of focusing on taking something valuable away from one population of college students, efforts should be made to level the playing field by duplicating this level of attention for all populations of college students.

The field of athletic student services has the potential to dispel the myth of the "dumb jock" and help return the purity and spirit to intercollegiate
athletics that existed at one time. What needs to happen is for athletic student services professionals to establish credibility for their programs by educating the academic community about what they do and involving student services professionals from outside the athletic department as much as possible in their day-to-day functioning. This is beginning to happen. Harden and Pina-Tallmon (1988) reported that the academic support program for student-athletes in their study produced outcomes of increases in grade point averages and retention of student-athletes, as well as a great deal of support for the program from the college as a whole.

It is conceivable that the less untouchable and mysterious intercollegiate athletics becomes, the more likely it will be that student-athletes will have successful and productive educational experiences. As student services professionals in any college or university entity, this should be the primary goal.
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