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Problems of student-athletes: Academic advising approaches

Abstract
Intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level is big business for several colleges and universities and their athletic departments. The intercollegiate athletic programs are highly visible at these institutions, are sources of substantial amounts of revenue, and are regarded as an indicator of institutional prestige (Renick, 1974).
PROBLEMS OF STUDENT-ATHLETES:
ACADEMIC ADVISING APPROACHES

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PROBLEMS OF STUDENT-ATHLETES:
ACADEMIC ADVISING APPROACHES

Intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level is big business for several colleges and universities and their athletic departments. The intercollegiate athletic programs are highly visible at these institutions, are sources of substantial amounts of revenue, and are regarded as an indicator of institutional prestige (Renick, 1974).

It is clear that intercollegiate athletics has become, and probably will remain, an institutionalized component of higher education (Zingg, 1982). The implementation of academic advising programs for student-athletes, and the hiring of academic advisors for student-athletes, are manifestations of this fact.

The author, in this paper, examines the Division I revenue-producing sports of football and basketball. This review of the literature is in two areas: (1) some ways in which institutions exploit student-athletes and (2) academic advising programs designed by selected institutions to provide academic support to their
student-athletes in the classroom.

Institutional Exploitation of Student-Athletes

Intercollegiate athletics has become a major force on America's campuses (Golden, 1980). In recent years, the role of intercollegiate athletics in campus life has become highly controversial.

Critics . . . have challenged these traditional beliefs about the value of intercollegiate athletics. They contend that varsity sports not only do not teach students constructive values, but, in fact, they impart negative values. In support of their argument, they point to recruiting abuses, inhumane coaching techniques, payoffs to student athletes, easy grading for athletes, prejudice toward black athletes, and the decisions by several universities to drop or sharply curtail major intercollegiate sports programs. (Matross, 1980, p. 299)

Michener (1976) pointed out that athletics has been accused of generating some of the most difficult, deplorable, and embarrassing
institutional problems. In his opinion, the blame for these problems should be placed on the institutions themselves, not on the student-athletes.

Admission of Student-Athletes

Much has been written about the problems and abuses of academically underprepared student-athletes who enter intercollegiate football and basketball programs (Ervin, et al., 1985). Ervin and his associates referenced the research of Purdy, et al. (1982) who studied the academic preparedness and five-year graduation rates of student-athletes enrolled at Colorado State University from 1970 to 1980. It was found that student-athletes, including men and women from all sports, had lower entrance characteristics—Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, American College Test (ACT) scores, high school grade point averages (HSGPA)—than did non-athletes. The student-athletes graduated at a lower rate, in five years or less, than did the general student population. In addition, full scholarship student-athletes, in comparison with partial scholarship and nonscholarship student-athletes,
had significantly lower SAT and ACT scores, HSGPAs, college GPAs, and five-year graduation rates. Purdy, et al. (1982) summarized: "The admission of academically marginal students is primarily a problem of the 'revenue' sports of football and basketball" (p. 445).

Ervin, et al. (1985), on the basis of their study of the high school preparation and college academic performance of revenue-producing athletes in a developmental program for underprepared freshmen at a Division I institution, concluded:

If underprepared student athletes who have little chance to succeed are admitted to academically competitive institutions, it is tantamount to exploiting the student-athletes to gain the prestige and financial reward which come with successful athletic programs. The revenue-producing goals of the athletic enterprises are diametrically opposed to the educational mission of higher educational institutions. (p. 123)
Majoring in Eligibility

Academic standards have been eroded to the point where more undereducated student-athletes than ever are getting into college. Renick (1974), Zingg (1982), and Hurley and Cunningham (1984) recognized that "majoring in eligibility" does occur at institutions of higher education. Underwood (1980) stated that student-athletes are kept eligible via "an eventless and immaterial habitation of the classroom" (p. 41).

From the moment the student-athlete sets foot on campus, the name of the game is "majoring in eligibility," and it is a vulgar, callous, shameful, cynical--and perfectly legal--exploitation of the system by and for the American college athlete. The formal term for it is "normal progress toward a degree." But the NCAA's definition of "progress" won't be found in any dictionary; for one thing, "progress" in the student-athlete lexicon can mean no progress at all. (p. 41)

Many student-athletes, unfortunately, do not obtain either of the things they need most: an education or a degree (Underwood, 1980).
Demands on Student-Athletes

The demands of intercollegiate sports are extensive and are frequently given priority over academic demands. Hurley and Cunningham (1984) described the year-around demands on student-athletes:

The football season begins in early August and lasts, for most, through mid-December—four months. Athletes on scholarship must perform weight training during the off-season until spring practice begins. When that is over, the conditioning expectation is there again. A football player can never forget he is at college to play football.

Basketball is no different. Unofficial conditioning programs begin immediately in the fall. Official practice begins on October 15, and the season runs until mid-March. Seven of the nine months in the school year are devoted to basketball. Practices in both sports are usually three hours long. . . . Practices are physically draining. (pp. 53-54)
Student-athletes also must miss many classes due to the demands of athletic competition. Rhatigan (1984) pointed out that basketball players at Division I schools will miss about 13 out of 75 class days (17.3%) during the semester. Further, he pointed out that basketball players will miss approximately 26% of the classes in January, February, and March. In case of post-season competition, the percentage of required absences would approach 30%.

Student-athletes are expected to keep up with their assignments while on the road. However, this can be a difficult task with all the distractions of traveling. The student-athletes will sleep in strange beds and will eat at unusual hours, and must cope with waiting in airports, misplaced luggage, books left behind, and disconcertingly close connections. Not all student-athletes are bothered by these distractions, but many may find them nerve-wracking and frustrating (Rhatigan, 1984).

According to Rhatigan (1984), student-athletes will likely have to arrange to make up exams and quizzes, obtain lecture notes from
other students in the class, miss review
sessions, and will miss the continuity of the
class material.

Another demand cited by Rhatigan (1984) is
the emotional pressure bearing on student-
athletes, particularly the preparation for the
game and the game itself. Student-athletes play
in front of fans who often expect the players to
perform as if they were professionals. The
demands and pressures on Division I student-
athletes are severe.

In summary, the reality is that many
student-athletes in revenue sports at Division I
institutions are underprepared, priority skewed,
manipulated by the demands of their sport, and
unlikely to graduate (Whitner & Myers, 1986).

Academic Advising for Student-Athletes

Special academic support services for
student-athletes are a necessity due to the
unusual demands of intercollegiate competition on
student-athletes. Student affairs professionals
have a responsibility, a responsibility oftentimes
ignored or assumed instead by athletic department
personnel, to assist student-athletes.
Academic support staff for student-athletes varies from school to school. Mathes and Gurney, in their 1985 study, found that 45% of the athletic departments in Division I institutions have no staff member responsible for student-athletes' academic assistance, and another 35% have only one person whose responsibility and expertise is related to providing academic assistance to student-athletes.

Hurley and Cunningham (1984) developed a list of 10 components that they considered necessary for a successful student-athlete academic advising program.

1. Academic support that begins with the orientation session and ends with graduation.

2. Orientation to campus, with the first-semester schedule planned and placement testing done.

3. Communication with faculty by the advisor for student-athletes, with the advisor receiving all information regarding student-athletes' progress in their courses.
4. All entering freshman student-athletes should be required to attend a study-hall, preferably during the day at a scheduled time. Study-hall is optional only after the student-athlete proves he/she can be academically successful with less supervision.

5. Tutoring (which is, in effect, extra teaching) to help the student-athlete better understand class material.

6. The academic advisor helps the student-athlete with the registration process and with course and major selection.

7. The academic advisor keeps records that provide graduation data for all student-athletes and publishes an academic honor roll for student-athletes at the institution.

8. The academic advisor serves as liaison or referral agent between student-athletes and university services.

9. The academic advisor oversees job placement of graduating student-athletes.

10. Psychological services should be provided for student-athletes on an individual or group counseling basis.
The above criteria are the hallmarks of an ideal academic advising model, in the opinion of Hurley and Cunningham (1984).

Selected institutions' programs for advising student-athletes are presented below.

**University of Florida Academic Advising Program**

The University of Florida's Counselor Education Department has a credit course designed for freshman student-athletes. This course is taken on a pass-fail basis. Freshman student-athletes must be invited by the instructor to enroll in the course. The course explores the following topics throughout the quarter.

1. Interpersonal skills built upon the "facilitative model" of communication (Wittmer & Myrick, 1980). This model is a structured, step-by-step approach to acquiring the skills necessary to communicate effectively with others regardless of sex, race, or creed.

2. Communal living and the guidelines thereof.

3. University support services and their use to the student-athlete.
4. Effective leadership skills.

5. Career interest, planning, and the development and implementation of appropriate decision-making strategies.

6. Academic planning as related to career goals.

7. Effective social skills and understanding the importance of one's self-concept.

8. Time management.

9. Skills in meeting the press.

(Wittmer, et al., 1981)

Indiana University Academic Advising Program

Indiana University has an academic advising program which purports to increase the graduation rates of student-athletes at the university. The program was described by Kurpius and Rose (1982) as follows:

1. Academic counselors direct a tutoring and study-table program.

2. Academic counselors advise the athletes concerning class schedules and other academic problems.
3. Academic counselors provide the athletic department with services in recruiting, maintenance of eligibility records, and interpretation of the rules of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the Big Ten.

4. Scholarship student-athletes are required to attend a two-day summer orientation program in which their reading and writing skills are tested.

5. The counselor and the student-athlete plan a tentative, first-semester schedule during the summer orientation session.

6. The head basketball coach requires his recruits to take a seven-week, noncredit reading/writing program by correspondence during the summer before the recruits' first semester. Assignments are mailed to the student-athletes who must complete and mail back one assignment each week.

7. At fall semester registration, two academic counselors are at the registration site to assist student-athletes.
8. Individualized tutoring is available throughout the academic year, using graduate students or undergraduate students who are knowledgeable in specific fields.

9. Reports from instructors provide information to monitor student-athletes' progress and to identify those who need help. The report cards are sent twice a semester to the academic counselors.

10. A time-management form is filled out by student-athletes to help them make better use of their time.

11. The program is intensive in the number of contacts student-athletes have with the academic counselor.

12. Academic advising staff encourage the coaches to make academics a priority with the student-athletes.

Kansas State University Academic Advising Program

Ender (1983) identified seven key conditions, or principles, which undergird the advising of student-athletes at Kansas State University.

Condition #1—Advising is a continuous process with an accumulation of personal
contacts between advisor and advisee. These contacts have both direction and purpose. Condition #2--Advising must concern itself with quality of life issues, and the advisor has a responsibility to facilitate the quality of the student's experience while on the college campus. Condition #3--Advising is goal related, and goals should be established and owned by the advisee. These goals should include academic, career, and personal planning areas. Condition #4--Advising requires the establishment of a caring human relationship--one in which the advisor must take primary responsibility for its initial development. Condition #5--Advisors should be models for students to emulate, specifically demonstrating behaviors which lead to self-responsibility and self-directiveness. Condition #6--Advising should seek to integrate the services and expertise of both academic and student affairs professionals.
Condition #7—Advisors should seek to utilize as many campus and community resources as possible. (p. 2)

The academic advising program at Kansas State highlights a class that has eight functional components.

A. Teaching students how to schedule classes and understand the bulletin and line schedule of classes.

B. Discussing characteristics of successful students and assessing one's own behavior in light of those characteristics.

C. Helping students plan their semester (developing weekly and monthly time management procedures).

D. Teaching effective college study skills (note-taking, test-taking, environmental management, and methods to improve concentration).

E. Demanding that students establish concrete goals in both academics and their varsity sport.

F. Introducing the notion of career planning and alternate career opportunities.
G. Insisting that students develop a two-year curriculum plan consistent with a major on campus.

H. Pointing out institutional policies and procedures and requiring students to visit and report on various campus resources. (p. 3-4)

Along with the class covering the material cited above, the student-athletes at KSU must attend a two-hour study table each evening of the week (Ender, 1983).

University of Michigan Academic-Support Program

The University of Michigan uses an academic support program to assist student-athletes in reaching the goal of a college degree. This program is intensive in the number of contacts between the student-athlete and the academic advisor. The program was described by Walter and Smith (1986) as follows:

1. A mentor program, in which a person from the university community is assigned a freshman student-athlete to help him/her adjust to life at the university.
2. Recruiting interviews by coaches, to predict the student-athletes' potential for academic success.

3. The admissions office classifies some student-athletes as academically "at-risk" based on high school rank, grade point average, high school course selection, school quality, and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores or American College Test (ACT) scores.

4. Freshman student-athletes take reading and writing tests prior to the start of fall semester.

5. At-risk student-athletes are assigned to academic support staff specialists in the student-athletes' weak areas.

6. Staff members meet with at-risk student-athletes two to four hours per week to facilitate development of academic skills.

7. All freshman student-athletes are required to take a six week course in reading and study skills which meets one hour per week.

8. Freshman football and basketball student-athletes are required to attend a two-hour, Sunday through Thursday study table which is
monitored by an academic support staff person.

9. The mandatory study-table operates on the Fridays of away games, because the program director travels with the team.

10. Individual instructional sessions with the staff are required of all at-risk student-athletes throughout the entire freshman year.

11. Student-athletes are gradually "weaned" from the program as their academic skills improve.

12. Academic support staff professionals and graduate student tutors model appropriate academic behavior for student-athletes.

When the four institutional academic programs are compared to the criteria set forth by Hurley and Cunningham (1984), some apparent similarities and differences are noted. However, a cautionary note is appropriate. The following comparisons are based on the written descriptions of the selected institutions' academic advising programs, and these descriptions may be less than perfectly complete.

1. Academic support services throughout the student-athletes' college careers are provided in
all four institutional programs.

2. Orientation programs which include first semester schedule planning and placement testing are provided by all four universities.

3. Study halls/tables for student-athletes are provided by three of the universities, but not by the University of Florida. Although not specifically mentioned by Wittmer (1981), it is highly likely that the Florida program, like the Kansas State program, includes a required study table in addition to the class.

4. Tutoring is a common component in all four academic advising programs.

5. Academic advisors at all four universities help student-athletes with academic planning and scheduling.

6. Student-athletes' class attendance and performance are monitored by academic advisors at the University of Michigan and Indiana University. Although not specifically mentioned in the program descriptions, it is highly likely that the University of Florida and Kansas State University also monitor their student-athletes.
7. The University of Michigan, University of Florida, and Kansas State University provide student-athletes with referral services to all the universities' services. Again, it is highly likely that Indiana University does likewise.

8. Individual counseling and group counseling for personal and academic problems are provided in all the advising programs for student-athletes.

9. Job-placement is not provided by any of the advising programs, according to the available information.

Other components of the four academic advising programs which were reviewed are study skills classes; identification of, and special assistance for, high-risk student-athletes; assistance to student-athletes in goal setting; and the teaching of skills in meeting the press.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

It is well documented that student-athletes have many unique demands placed on them by the institutions because of their involvement in athletics. Some of the demands cited are
required class absences, year-around training, and the emotional pressures of competition. It is evident that student-athletes face two competing demands: the academic demands and the demands of competing in intercollegiate athletics.

Several institutions have demonstrated their recognition of the fact that student-athletes need special help. They have responded to the needs of student-athletes by developing academic advising and support programs specifically for student-athletes. A sizeable number, but still a minority, of Division I institutions have an academic advisor for student-athletes specifically (Mathes & Gurney, 1985).

In this study, the academic advising programs for student-athletes at four selected Division I institutions--University of Florida, Indiana University, Kansas State University, and University of Michigan--were reviewed. These institutional programs were measured against the ten characteristics of an ideal academic advising program as delineated by Hurley and Cunningham (1984). Based on the information available, it
was concluded that the four university programs possessed nine of the ten criteria of a model program. The missing component was job placement services for student-athletes.

Student affairs professionals need to take a proactive role in offering their services to student-athletes, especially since the demands placed on student-athletes are considerably different than the demands placed on the student body in general. Without the development of support programs, hiring of advisors, and a proactive role by student affairs professionals, many student-athletes will continue to fail academically.
References


Journal of College Student Personnel, 26 (4), 327-333.


