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On the Same Team?

Student-Athlete and Faculty Relations at Trinity College

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Introduction

For years, athletics have been linked with leisure. Sports have been a hobby or extracurricular activity used as a source of enjoyment. Also for years, athletes have competed at the collegiate level, providing college campus a chance to join together and display institutional pride by cheering on their college teams. Unfortunately, not all is golden with collegiate sports. Some view college athletics no longer as leisure activities, but more as occupations. Others believe that athletics have become a source of favoritism and unethical procedures on college campuses. No matter how they are viewed, college athletics and athletes are not as perfect as one would believe.

One area in which college athletics have become tainted is in the eyes of faculty members. Across the nation, campuses are filled with challenging professors who deemed nothing, but intellectual and thought-provoking work from students, even student-athletes. Many times student-athletes gain admittance into a school based more on their athletic ability than their academic performance. Some student-athletes are more concerned with their athletic commitments than their academic work, which in turn produces poor scholastic achievement.

Does the poor work ethic of a few student-athletes create the framework for negative images of all student-athletes in the classroom? Are all student-athletes typecast as inadequate learners in the eyes of faculty members? Are athletics seen as a detriment to a college or university's academic reputation by those who teach there? All these questions helped spark my interest to see what exists at Trinity College. I wanted to

know just how faculty members view student athletes on this campus and how it compares to student-athletes' institutional intentions.

Research Question

What is the overall academic perception Trinity College faculty members have of varsity student-athletes and how does this perception compare to the academic persona that Trinity College varsity athletes possess?

Significance

I just recently concluded my fourth and final season as member of the Trinity College football team. For me, football has amplified important qualities, such as communication and teamwork, which have better prepared me to succeed in the classroom and intense work environments. During an interview with my eventual summer internship company, the interviewer appreciated my athletic commitment, claiming that former athletes are often the company's most successful employees. However, I have always questioned whether everyone, mainly educators, appreciates the diligent efforts of athletes. I had these concerns all throughout high school and continue to have them in my final year at Trinity College. Understandably, not all athletes express the same passion or hard work in the classroom as they do on the field. But do the lack luster academic performances of some student-athletes write the script for all those who compete athletically?

A major portion of our seminar was devoted to the controversial book written by James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen, The Game of Life. This book addresses the issues of athletics and academics on college campuses. Now while the aforementioned

concerns that I have are not the main focus of the book, student-athlete and faculty relations are touched upon. They write, “As these colleges and universities [those studied] have become stronger and stronger academically (as all of them have), there is bound to be a growing tension between their academic side and an athletic enterprise that is itself becoming more intensive” (74). This simply adds to my concerns, as I am left questioning whether faculty members are or are willing to be understanding of the commitments made by student-athletes. Or are faculty members solely rooted in academic rigor that athletics are nothing more than a leisure activity in their eyes?

During this semester, we were fortunate enough to have a conference held at Trinity College that was devoted to the book, The Game of Life. While the conference detailed the findings of the book and new statistical findings, it also provided an opportunity to discuss the issue of academics and athletics. The audience was filled with students, faculty, coaches, and alumni from Trinity and several other colleges. It wasn't until the question and answer portion of the conference that my concerns were brought to the forefront. I can recall one Trinity professor stating that he understood the time commitment student-athletes make for their sports, but he didn't see why these commitments were any greater than those who partake in community service or other extracurricular activities.

Another one of my concerns was touched upon at the conference. A Trinity faculty member stated that, initially, he is unaware of which students are athletes in his class, but once low grades start coming in, he begins to see who the student-athletes are. One Trinity College faculty member made a claim that football players can not control their violence and they are naturally violent. Football players often obtain a bad

academic reputation. In the May 1, 2000 issue of Sports Illustrated, an article entitled “Irish Stew” discusses the difficulty football recruits have in regards to the envisioned academic success at Notre Dame, one of the best academic schools in the country. The main individual featured in the article was then 18-year-old high school All-American, T.J. Duckett. According to Duckett’s father, Ted, the head of admissions for Notre Dame, Dan Saracino, was extremely insulting in his assessment of his son’s academic ability. Mr. Duckett explains, “The man assumed that my son wasn’t intelligent enough to get through his school. He told me ‘We don’t have basket-weaving at Notre Dame.’” (Layden 64). T.J. Duckett was never rejected from Notre Dame because he never officially applied. He went on to star at Michigan State and is currently playing in the National Football League with the Atlanta Falcons. But academic images like the one placed on Duckett, along with certain comments made at The Game of Life conference just made me more determined to get a better understanding of the relationships between faculty and student-athletes here at Trinity College.

Working Thesis

I believe that there is a significant gap between Trinity faculty and Trinity student-athletes, in regards to understanding one another. I believe faculty members have generalized the academic work ethic of student-athletes as poor and not up to the standards of Trinity College. I feel that with honest participation from both faculty members and student-athletes, we will see that such generalizations exist, but are not accurate. My research is aimed at determining if such a gap exists between Trinity faculty and student-athletes. It is not my intention to provide solutions to any existing

problems, nor is it to determine whose views and opinions are “right” and whose are “wrong.”

Methodology

Originally to collect my data, I created three different surveys, one for faculty members, one for student-athletes and a third one for varsity head coaches. I feel head coaches are the perfect middlemen, as they are heavily involved in athletics and are also concerned with academic achievement. My desired number of student-athlete respondents was fifty, hoping to establish representation from each varsity sport at Trinity, male and female. I circulated through Ferris Athletic Center, my classes, and The Bistro looking for respondents. If I encountered someone who was a student-athlete, I asked them to fill out a survey. The represented varsity male sports included football, soccer, baseball, basketball, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, tennis, and crew. The varsity female sports that were represented were field hockey, soccer, volleyball, softball, tennis, crew, ice hockey, and lacrosse. Appropriate survey candidates were athletes who are seniors, juniors, and sophomores. Freshmen do not have enough experience with Trinity faculty to provide as helpful information as upperclassmen. The student-athlete survey asked questions that allowed the student-athlete to give a solid representation of their commitments to athletics and academics, as well as relationships with faculty members.

I created a similar survey for Trinity faculty, asking questions that hopefully represent their academic images of student-athletes. I distributed surveys to twenty-five Trinity faculty members, with even representation of the academic departments. Similar to my student-athlete respondents, faculty respondents were somewhat random. By somewhat random I mean that I had a few faculty members who I knew I wanted to

partake in my research, and then the rest I “randomly” selected within the desired departments. The represented departments were Religion, Psychology, Sociology, Economics, English, Political Science, Public Policy, History, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Anthropology, Music, Philosophy, and American Studies. I also dropped surveys in ten varsity coaches’ mailboxes. Again, I tried to gain even representation, this time finding a balance of head coaches from male and female sports. . All respondents are anonymous, students, faculty, and coaches.

As is the case with many research projects, my original plans turned out to be simply that, plans. In actuality, I only obtained thirty-eight student-athlete respondents compared to the desired number of fifty. I failed to gain one hundred percent response rate from Trinity faculty members either, as only twenty-one out of the twenty-four surveys that I distributed were returned to me. As far as head coaches, I received minimal response, which in turn caused me to eliminate that aspect of my project. Although my ideal plans were not followed, I still received adequate participation and data to proceed.

Interpretation and Analysis

To best illustrate my results, I have chosen to display charts of the data for each survey question. Each chart consists of the individual question asked to student-athletes and the faculty. The percentage results (which have been rounded to the nearest whole number) are in the appropriate columns to the right. Under each chart, I have briefly summarized my findings. A copy of both the student athletes’ survey and the faculty survey are attached at the end of my paper.

Sex of Respondents	Male	Female
Student-Athletes	68 %	32%
Faculty	71%	29%

Class	Senior	Junior	Sophomore
Student-Athletes	55%	24%	21%

Question 1

Student- Athletes	Yes	No		
Have you ever been on Academic Probation?	21%	79%		
Faculty	0-5%	6-10%	11-20%	More than 20%
In your opinion, what percentage of students at Trinity have been on Academic Probation? (FAC)	24%	43%	24%	9%

Based on these graphs, it seems that student-athletes have been on Academic Probation (21%) more than faculty assumes Trinity students as a whole have been on Academic Probation (6-10%).

Question 2

Student-Athletes	Yes	No
If your team had or has a study hall, would you voluntarily attend it?	37%	63%
Faculty	Yes	No
Do you feel athletic teams should have study halls?	78%	22%

Here we can see a difference of opinion. While faculty members feel teams should have study halls, student-athletes would rather not have one.

Question 3

Student-Athletes	3.0 and Higher	2.0 to 3.0	Below 2.0
What G.P.A range do you fall into?	50%	50%	0%
Faculty			
What G.P.A. range do you feel most Trinity students fall into?	25%	70%	5%

According to these results, student-athletes have higher Grade Point Averages' than what faculty members envision as the average GPA for all Trinity students. This could possibly hint that student-athletes perform better than expected, but more research would need to be done to prove so.

Question 4

Student-Athletes	Extreme	Somewhat	Not Much	Not at All
In your opinion, how much influence did your participation in a varsity sport have in your admittance into Trinity College?	37%	50%	10%	3%
Faculty				
In your opinion, how much influence do varsity sports have in the admissions process at Trinity College?	35%	60%	5%	0%

Based on these results, it's fair to say that faculty members have a good understanding of the influence that athletics have in admissions at Trinity.

Question 5

Student-Athletes	0	1-2	3-4	5 or More
Throughout your time at Trinity, how many classes have you missed due to an athletic commitment?	13%	43%	18%	26%
Faculty				
How many students per semester have missed one of your classes due to an athletic commitment?	0%	55%	36%	9%

These results would suggest that there are not an overwhelming number of conflicts between athletic contests and classes.

Question 6

Student-Athletes	Yes	No	
Do you feel Trinity faculty members know which students are student-athletes?	66%	34%	
Faculty	Yes	No	Some
Do you know which students are athletes?	74%	10%	16%

According to the surveys, faculty members are confident in knowing who the student-athletes are. Students-athletes, on the other hand, are not as confident that faculty members know who the athletes are. This might stem from students not broadcasting the fact that they are athletes, which is a question that is later addressed.

Question 7

Student-Athletes	Front of the Room	In the Middle	Back of the Room	NA
Where do you usually sit in your classes?	26%	44%	30%	
Faculty				
If you know which students are student-athletes, where do most of them sit in your classes?	22%	16%	31%	31%

Again, it seems as if the faculty has a good idea as to where student-athletes position themselves in classes.

Question 8

Student-Athletes	Let Them Know	Hide Affiliation	Both
Do you let professors know that you are a student-athlete or do you tend to hide your affiliation to your sport?	45%	55%	
Faculty			
Do you feel students let you know that they are a student-athlete or do you believe they tend to hide their affiliation to their sport?	55%	30%	15%

These results would suggest a slight misunderstanding between the two sides. While faculty members have a fairly accurate sense of students letting them know they are athletes, they are not as precise with students hiding their affiliation. As I alluded to earlier, this might be a case of faculty members knowing the athletes without having it be told to them. As my guest evaluator, Professor Cindy Butos, informed me, Trinity faculty members are given a list three times a year stating which students participate in a sport at Trinity. Therefore, some students might not even be aware that professors know they play a sport.

Question 9

Student-Athletes	Understanding and willing to help you (them) catch up on what is missed	Indifferent, but felt class information missed had to be obtained on your (their) own	Unsympathetic and have penalized you (them).	All of the Above	A & B	B & C	A & C	NA
If you have had to miss a class due to an athletic commitment, Trinity faculty has been:	10%	32%	8%	5%	13 %	16 %	0%	16 %
Faculty								
If a student has had to miss a class due to an athletic commitment, you most likely have been:	65%	35%	0%	0%	--	--	--	--

Here it can be seen that faculty members believe they are much more understanding of conflicts between class and sports than students perceive. According to

the results, students feel that professors are not unsympathetic, but they also are not helpful in catching up on missed work.

Question 10

Student-Athletes	Get an A	Win the League	Don't Know
Would you rather receive an A in a class or win a league championship?	29%	71%	
Faculty			
Do you feel student-athletes would rather receive an A in a class or win a league championship?	15%	70%	15%

I used this question to get an understanding as to where priorities lie with student-athletes. As you can see, student-athletes are more concerned with winning the league than receiving an A, which the faculty accurately assumed.

Question 11

Student-Athletes	Dean's List	All-Conference	Don't Know
Would you rather make Dean's List or be an All-Conference athlete?	50%	50%	
Faculty			
Do you feel student-athletes would rather make Dean's List or be an All-Conference athlete?	5%	75%	20%

Like Question 10, I used this question to see what is more important to student-athletes. Unlike Question 10, these results suggest that student-athletes are just as interested in succeeding academically as athletically. The faculty members greatly underestimated student-athletes' desires to make Dean's List.

Question 12

Student-Athletes	A Great Deal	A Fair Amount	Very Little	Not at All
How much do you believe Trinity faculty members involve themselves in Trinity College athletics (ex. going to games, reading about teams, etc.)?	0%	21%	42%	37%
Faculty				
How much would you say you are involved in Trinity College athletics (ex. going to games, reading about teams, etc.)?	14%	24%	43%	19%

Both sides are in agreement that faculty members do not involve themselves in Trinity athletics. Over fifty percent of the student-athletes and faculty suggest the faculty involvement is very little or not at all.

Question 13

Student-Athletes	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you feel that athletics have brought down the academic reputation of Trinity College?	16%	84%	
Faculty			
Do you feel that athletics have brought down the academic reputation of Trinity College?	33%	61%	6%

Question 13 was probably the most important question on my survey(s). I felt it best summed up my intentions for the project. Now while the majority for both sides answered “no”, the faculty members did not overwhelmingly answer “no” like the student-athletes did. In fact, some faculty members wrote comments on their surveys expressing why they answered “yes,” which I will share later on in this paper.

Question 14

Student-Athletes	Help	Hinder	No Effect	Don't Know
Does your participation in a varsity sport at Trinity College help, hinder, or have no effect on your ability to academically succeed?	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	
Faculty				
Do you feel that a student's participation in a sport at Trinity College helps, hurts, or has no effect on their ability to academically succeed?	20%	30%	35%	15%

Here we see balanced results, as the student-athletes are split equally in regards to how participation in a varsity sport affects their grades. The faculty members are also equally divided on this question.

As I mentioned earlier, Question 13 was a very important question in my research. Several respondents must have felt so too, as they took the time to write comments next to their answer. Coincidentally, all the respondents who wrote comments were male faculty members who answered “yes” to the question. As a reminder, question 13 asked, “Do you feel that athletics have brought down the academic reputation of Trinity College?” These are four of the comments made by respondents who answered “yes”:

“In the sense that – especially in the case of male athletes, who are much more clustered/cloistered in their own subculture than female athletes – the College admits a whole lot of people too much on the basis of their sports gifts. Football alone tackles us for a big loss.”

“Because some athletes are admitted who would never get in except for their athletic ability- and some of these (not all) are not committed to their academic work at all”

“Not sure – I have many athletes in my courses – some are outstanding or competent students, some less than so. Occasionally, I encounter an athlete who is marginal or sub-standard. But there is a spread.”

“I answered yes because I believe we put too much emphasis on athletics in admissions.”

Unfortunately, no respondent, who answered “no,” commented on why they feel so that could be useful for comparison. Nonetheless, these comments were included as a way of representing certain respondents’ views and opinions.

Conclusion

Assuming that all respondents accurately answered my surveys, I would conclude that my thesis was disproved. Aside from a few questions, faculty members have a fairly accurate perception of student-athletes and their academic work, intentions, and habits. At the onset of my research, I was expecting to see faculty members have completely different responses than student-athletes. But as the data suggests, the gap is much smaller than I assumed.

By no means am I claiming that Trinity faculty members and student-athletes are in complete understanding, cooperation, and agreement with one another. As many of the faculty respondents wrote on their surveys, student work ethic depends on the individual, including student-athletes. Faculty members understand that not all athletes have poor academic intentions and abilities, but at the same time they realize that not all student-athletes display the same passion in the classroom that they do on the athletic field. Conversely, student-athletes acknowledge that not all faculty members are anti-athletics, but are also conscious of the fact that not all faculty members appreciate their athletic commitments. Like almost all things in life, academic work ethic varies from

individual to individual. And according to my results, the work of a few student-athletes does not write the script for all student-athletes.

Possible Improvements

There is an old saying that hindsight is 20/20 and that is most certainly true as I look back on my semester's worth of work. I realize there were several things that I could have done differently that would have improved my final product. Thankfully, I did not run into any major problems and I am very grateful for all those who were willing to be survey respondents.

One aspect of my research that could have improved my overall was the number of respondents. I realize that thirty-eight student-athletes might not be a large enough number to be representative, but I quickly realized that survey respondents are not as accessible as I thought. Originally I had planned to survey one hundred student-athletes, which turned into fifty, and eventually culminated with thirty-eight. But as I found out, tallying thirty-eight surveys, with 14 answers each, can be extremely time consuming. Future research could include dissecting how senior and female student-athletes' answers compare to the entire student-athlete pool.

A second aspect that was suggested by Professor Butos that might have improved my project was to have had a more random sample of faculty. She felt that my desire to have certain faculty members in particular participate weakened the accuracy of faculty representation. In order to get an unbiased sample, it would have to truly be random, which might require every faculty member's name put in a hat and being chosen one by one, or something along those lines.

I also realized that I should have left a space on my surveys for respondents to comment. As I mentioned earlier, some respondents took it upon themselves to write in their opinions and explanations. Had I provided a space on the survey, I assume I would have gotten even more feedback from respondents. I don't know if there is anyway to truly analysis and compare such comments, but it would have helped in understanding the views and opinions of the respondents.

Lastly, the biggest improvement I could have made would to have been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) sooner. I lost valuable time waiting for approval from the IRB, which I felt rushed my data collection. I could not contact respondents until I received IRB approval. Had I had more time, I might have been able to have had a better sample of respondents and ultimately a better response rate. This also might have allowed me more time to collect head coaches' surveys and included their input.

Overall, I was very pleased with the cooperation I received from all involved. My respondents were extremely important to my research and without them, I would have been lost. Hopefully, the data that I collected can be of some use to Trinity College and help establish closer ties between student-athletes and faculty members at the college.

Works Cited

Shulman, James L. and William G. Bowen. The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Layden, Tim. "Irish Stew" *Sports Illustrated*: May 1, 2000; pp. 62-75.

Kevin Waters
Senior Research Survey

Student-Athletes

*** Thank you for assisting me in my senior research project. Just a reminder that all survey respondents will remain **ANONYMOUS**. Thanks Again. ***

Please circle the option that best applies for you. Please, only one answer per question!

Male Female Senior Junior Sophomore Freshman

Have you ever been on Academic Probation here at Trinity College?

Yes No

If your team had or has a study hall, would you voluntarily attend it?

Yes No

What G.P.A range do you fall into?

3.0 and Higher 2.0 to 3.0 Below 2.0

In your opinion, how much influence did your participation in a varsity sport have in your admittance into Trinity College?

Extreme Somewhat Not Much None at All

Throughout your time at Trinity, how many classes have you missed due to an athletic commitment?

0 1-2 3-4 5 or More

Where do you usually sit in your classes?

Front of the Room In the Middle Back of the Room

Do you feel Trinity Faculty members know what students are student-athletes?

Yes *No*

If you have had to miss a class due to an athletic commitment, Trinity faculty has been:

- a) *Understanding and willing to help you catch up on what you miss*
- b) *Indifferent, but felt class information missed had to be obtained on your own*
- c) *Unsympathetic and have penalized you*
- d) *All of the above*
- e) *both A and B*
- f) *both B and C*
- g) *both A and C*
- h) *NA*

Do you let professors know that you are a student- athlete or do you tend to hide your affiliation to your sport?

Let Them Know *Hide My Affiliation*

Would you rather receive an A in a class or win a league championship?

Get an A *Win the League*

Would you rather make Dean's List or be an All-Conference Athlete?

Dean's List *All-Conference*

How much do you believe Trinity Faculty members involve themselves in Trinity College Athletics (ex. going to games, reading about teams, etc.)?

A Great Deal *A Fair Amount* *Very Little* *Not at All*

Does your participation in a varsity sport at Trinity College help, hinder, or have no effect on your ability to academically succeed?

Help *Hinder* *No Effect*

Do you feel that athletics have brought down the academic reputation of Trinity College?

Yes *No*

*** Thank you for assisting me in my senior research project. Just a reminder that all survey respondents will remain **ANONYMOUS**. Please answer **BOTH SIDES**. Thanks Again. ***

Please circle the option that best applies for you. Please, only one answer per question!

Male Female

What G.P.A range do you feel most Trinity students fall into?

3.0 and Higher 2.0 to 3.0 Below 2.0

In your opinion, what percentage of students at Trinity have been on Academic Probation?

0-5% 6-10% 11-20% More than 20%

Do you feel athletic teams should have study halls?

Yes No

In your opinion, how much influence do varsity sports have in the admissions process at Trinity College?

Extreme Somewhat Not Much None at All

Do you know which students are student-athletes?

Yes No

If so, where do most of them tend to sit in your classes?

Front of the Room In the Middle Back of the Room NA

How many students per semester have missed one of your classes due to athletic commitments?

0 1-2 3-4 5 or More

Do you feel students let you know that they are a student- athlete or do you believe they tend to hide their affiliation to their sport?

Let You Know *Hide Their Affiliation*

Do you feel student-athletes would rather receive an A in a class or win a league championship?

Get an A *Win the League*

Do you feel student-athletes would rather make Dean's List or be an All-Conference Athlete?

Dean's List *All-Conference*

How much would you say you are involved in Trinity College Athletics (ex. going to games, reading about teams, etc.)?

A Great Deal *A Fair Amount* *Very Little* *Not at All*

Do you feel that a student's participation in a sport at Trinity College helps, hinders, or has no effect on their ability to academically succeed?

Help *Hinder* *No Effect*

If a student has had to miss a class due to an athletic commitment, you most likely have been:

- a) *Understanding and willing to help them catch up on what they miss*
- b) *Indifferent, but felt class information missed had to be obtained on their own*
- c) *Unsympathetic and have penalized the student for missing class*
- d) *All of the above*

Do you feel that athletics have brought down the academic reputation of Trinity College?

Yes *No*