

A Comparison of Student-Athlete and Non-Athletes Perceptions of Academic Advisement Services

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine academic advisement expectations of student athletes. One hundred and eighty-nine students completed a survey instrument addressing expectations of their academic advisor. Student-athletes surveyed in this study demonstrated advisement expectations similar to those of the general student population. Mean responses to survey items indicated non-athletes placed more importance on individual survey items than did the student athletes. Advisor's knowledge of course offerings within the department was considered important by 92.5% of all students. These findings assist in identifying specific elements useful in improving the academic advisement process and meeting student expectations.

Over the past decade, great emphasis has been placed on reform in collegiate athletics. Reform recommendations have come from within the governing bodies of collegiate sport and through external interest groups. The Knight Commission (1993) generated a series of reports in an attempt to minimize potential academic problems in collegiate athletics. A major focus of each of these reform measures has been to ensure the status of the collegiate athlete as a "student-athlete". Additional measures have also been introduced in order to minimize the separation of student athletes and the general student body. Separate housing and dining facilities for collegiate athletes were abolished in 1996 through NCCA bylaws 16.5.1 and 16.5.2.2 (NCAA, 2000). One separate entity that has been allowed to continue to exist and actually grow during this same time period has been the office of athletic advisement/counseling. NCAA bylaw 16.3.1.1 allows for:

Academic counseling. Division I institutions shall make available general academic counseling and tutoring services to all recruited student-athletes. Such counseling and tutoring services may be provided by the department of athletics or through the institution's non-athletic student support services. (effective 8/1/91)

The need for separate academic services for student athletes has been justified by citing extreme time demands/constraints of student athletes, separate admission standards, separate grade eligibility requirements, and mandatory graduation progress (Gerdy, 1997). The quality and quantity of academic services available play a major role not only in a student-athlete's collegiate experience but also in his/her introduction to the professional world (Dodge, 1992). Accountability demands, decreased public confidence in athletic administration, and competition for student-athletes have served

as catalysts for evaluation of academic services (Mullins, 1999). Evaluation of advisement quality is also important due to increased scrutiny of academic institutions by legislative bodies and the general public. In order to improve academic advisement services, it is imperative that students be involved in the evaluation process. Educational research indicates that the quality of educational services in colleges and universities could be significantly improved if two critical elements of educational effectiveness; 1) student involvement and 2) assessment and feedback were consistently emphasized and utilized (Money, 1992). These elements can be incorporated into improving academic advisement programs through the implementation of student evaluations of their academic advisement experience (Juneau, Kher, & Donahue, 1998).

Student perceptions (attitudes) regarding academic advisement are important in regards to the potential effect on student satisfaction with the academic experience (WPI, 1998; Truell, Price & Joyner, 1998). A national survey of college presidents (WPI, 1998) identified academic advising as the number one factor in student retention. The relationship between attitudes and achievement has been subject to widespread study and analysis (Truell et al, 1998). The outcomes of these studies could assist in providing solutions and/or guiding principles for the development of improved academic advisement services. In addition, it is important to examine the academic advisement needs of student-athletes in comparison to those of the general student population. This comparison will further explore the need for separate academic advisement services for student-athletes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic advisement expectations of collegiate student-athletes. This paper will report the overall general findings and compare the results of the student-athletes to those of the general student population.

METHODS

Subjects

Participants in this study included 189 graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in a variety of courses offered through the Health, Physical Education, Recreation, & Sport program at a large Southeastern University. Students were instructed not to identify themselves or their advisor on the instrument in order to assure anonymity. The subjects completed the survey instrument within the class settings that required no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Instrument

Subjects were asked to supply demographic information and to indicate the approximate number of times per semester they met with their academic advisor and to indicate their overall level of satisfaction with academic advisement and their individual academic advisor. The survey instrument utilized 11 student expectations of academic advisement that had been identified in previous research (Gillentine & Hunt, 1999). Subjects were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale the degree of importance for each of the expectations. Responses were assigned the following numerical value: 1 = Very important, 2 = Important, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Unimportant, 5 =

Very Unimportant. In addition to the 11 student expectations, two survey items used a similar scale to indicate students' overall satisfaction with the academic advisement process and with their academic advisor. For these two items, responses were assigned the following numerical value: 1=very satisfied; 2=satisfied; 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4=unsatisfied; 5=very unsatisfied.

RESULTS

Demographics

One hundred and eighty nine subjects successfully completed the survey instrument. (Table I). The majority of the students, 83%, were undergraduates ($N = 156$), while 17% were graduate students ($N = 33$). Thirty-eight percent ($N = 71$) of the participants identified themselves as collegiate athletes. A wide variety of colleges throughout the university were represented, including education, business, arts and sciences, agriculture, veterinarian, and engineering. The largest representation came from the College of Education as 122 students (65%) indicated it was their college of enrollment. The largest group according to classification were seniors (39%, $N = 75$) whereas the smallest group identified themselves as freshmen (5%, $N = 11$). Of the participating subjects, 107 were male and 82 were female. Seventy-six percent identified themselves as Caucasian ($N = 144$) and 18% ($N = 35$) identified themselves as African American. Age group 18-21 represented the largest group of subjects at 47% ($N = 88$), whereas 42% of the subjects ($N = 80$) indicated they were between 22-26 years of age.

Student Expectations of Academic Advisement

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on the 11 student expectations of academic advisement to examine the effect of group on expectations. Log linear transformations were performed to account for the normalcy of the data. Results indicated that there was no significant group effect ($\text{Lambda}(11, 177)=1.669, p>.05$) on expectations. Athletes and non-athletes did not significantly differ on academic advisement expectations.

Table II illustrates the percentage of all students responding to each expectation as important, unsure, and unimportant. The category *important* is the result of combining the responses very important and important for each subject. *Unimportant* combines unimportant and very unimportant responses while unsure remains an exclusive category.

TABLE I

Demographic Characteristics by Group

	ATHLETES		NON-ATHLETES	
GENDER	N	%	N	%
Male	45	63	65	55
Female	26	37	53	45
	RACE			
Caucasian	56	79	88	75
African American	14	20	24	21
Hispanic	1	1	0	
Native American	0		0	
Asian American	0		3	3
Other	0		2	2
	CLASSIFICATION			
Freshman	5	7	6	5
Sophomore	6	9	14	12
Junior	24	34	26	22
Senior	23	32	52	44
Graduate Student	13	18	20	17
	AGE			
18-21	36	51	52	44
22-26	29	41	51	43
27-30	3	4	6	5
31-35	0		6	5
36+	3	4	3	3
	COLLEGE ENROLLED			
College of Education	47	67	74	63
College of Engineering	2	3	5	4
College of Business	12	17	16	14
College of Agriculture	0		4	3
College of Arts & Sciences	8	11	18	15
College of Architecture	1	1	0	
College of Veterinary Med.	1	1	1	1

TABLE II

Comparison of Student Response Percentages

Item	Important	Unsure	Unimportant
<i>Advisor's knowledge of course offerings within the department</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	92.6	2.6	4.7
ATHLETES (N = 71)	91.5	2.8	5.6
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	93.2	2.5	4.2
<i>Advisor's knowledge of course offering schedule</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	90.5	5.3	4.3
ATHLETES (N = 71)	87.3	7.0	5.6
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	92.3	4.2	3.4
<i>Advisor's sensitivity to student needs</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	90.0	4.2	5.8
ATHLETES (N = 71)	87.3	5.6	7.0
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	91.5	3.4	5.0
<i>Advisors ability to identify potential job opportunities</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	86.3	5.8	8.0
ATHLETES (N = 71)	83.0	9.9	7.0
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	88.1	3.4	8.4
<i>Advisor's willingness to offer suggestions and stimulate conversation</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	86.2	5.3	8.5
ATHLETES (N = 71)	83.0	7.0	9.8
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	88.1	3.4	8.4
<i>Advisors familiarity with student</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	85.2	7.9	6.8
ATHLETES (N = 71)	81.6	11.3	7.0
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	87.2	5.9	6.8
<i>Advisor's knowledge of course offerings outside the department</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	84.2	10.1	5.8
ATHLETES (N = 71)	83.0	11.3	5.6
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	84.7	9.3	5.9
<i>Advisors knowledge of other instructors</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	79.9	11.6	8.4
ATHLETES (N = 71)	83.0	7.0	9.8
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	77.9	14.4	7.6

TABLE II (cont.)

Comparison of Student Response Percentages

Item	Important	Unsure	Unimportant
<i>Professional approach to advisement</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	77.8	14.3	7.9
ATHLETES (N = 71)	73.2	14.1	12.7
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	80.5	14.4	5.0
<i>Ability to reflect current trends</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	56.6	29.6	13.7
ATHLETES (N = 71)	49.2	29.6	21.1
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	61.0	29.7	9.3
<i>Length of advisement session</i>			
TOTAL (N = 189)	51.9	22.2	25.9
ATHLETES (N = 71)	49.2	22.5	28.2
NON-ATHLETES (N = 118)	53.3	22.0	24.5

Advisor's knowledge of course offerings within the department was considered important by 92.6% of all students. This reflects the highest ranking of all expectations by both athletes (91.5%) and non-athletes (93.2%). Nine of the expectations of academic advisement were rated important by 77% or more of all students (range 77.0-92.5%). The two remaining expectations, *Ability to reflect current trends* (56.6%) and *Length of advisement session* (51.9%) were considered important by slightly more than half of all respondents. Over one fourth (29.6%) of all students were unsure whether *Ability to reflect current trends* was an important or unimportant expectation and 25.9% felt that *Length of advisement session* was unimportant.

When asked to rate their *overall satisfaction with academic advisement*, 68.8% of all students indicated that they were satisfied (the category satisfied is the result of combining the responses very satisfied and satisfied for each subject). Over 17 percent were unsatisfied and 13.8% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with academic advisement. The response to the item *satisfaction with the academic advisor* had similar findings. Nearly 70% of all students were satisfied with their academic advisor while 22.8% were unsatisfied. Only 7.4% indicated being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

A Mann-Whitney \bar{U} test was used to determine if athletes differed from non-athletes in their level of satisfaction with academic advisement. No significant difference was found between athletes and non-athletes ($\bar{U}=3787, p>.025$). Similarly, no significant difference was found between the two groups when comparing their satisfaction with their academic advisor ($\bar{U}=3654.5, p>.025$). Table III illustrates the percent satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction of the academic advisement process by group.

TABLE III
Level of Satisfaction with Academic Advisement
and Advisor by Group

Item	Satisfied %	Neither%	Unsatisfied%
Athletes (N = 71)			
Overall Satisfaction With Academic Advisement	74.7	8.5	16.8
Overall Satisfaction With Academic Advisor	74.7	7.0	18.3
Non Athletes (N = 118)			
Overall Satisfaction With Academic Advisement	65.3	16.9	17.8
Overall Satisfaction With Academic Advisor	68.9	7.6	25.5

DISCUSSION

Student-athletes surveyed in this study demonstrated advisement expectations similar to those of the general student population. Similarities between the two groups were also evident upon examination of percentages of important, unsure, and unimportant responses (Table II). While there were no statistically significant differences between athletes and non-athletes in their advisement expectations, non-athletes consistently demonstrated a higher level of importance on most items. The only inconsistency was *"Advisor's knowledge of other instructors"*. Overall, 83.0% of the student athletes viewed this as important compared to 77.9% of the non-athletes (Table II). This difference may reflect student-athletes' perceived need for instructor understanding of the demands of participation in collegiate sport previously reported by Byers (1995) and Chu (1994). This finding does seem paradoxical in that response to *"Advisor's sensitivity to student needs"* 87.3% of the athletes felt this expectation was of importance compared to 91.5% of the non-athletes.

The length of advisement sessions was considered least important by both groups. Fifty-one percent of the total respondents indicated this was of importance in academic advisement. Advisors are often warned that students do not want to feel hurried or under time constraints during advisement sessions. This finding may indicate however, that students are more interested in quality of advisement over quantity. This interpretation is further supported by student response to number of times they consulted with student advisor. Eighty-one percent of all students met with their

advisor three or less times per semester. Eighty-four percent non-athletes visited their advisor 1-3 times per semester, seven percent more than non-athletes.

The students also reported that the "*Ability to reflect current trends*" was low in order of importance. Only 49.2 % of the athletes felt this expectation was important, whereas 56.6 % the entire student population indicated this was of importance. This result seems to be contradictory when compared to the expectation "*Advisor's ability to identify potential job opportunities.*" A great majority of subjects(86.3%) indicated this was an important expectation of their advisor. This is seemingly inconsistent with the previous findings concerning current trends. If the advisor is not knowledgeable of current trends within the student's field, how can the advisor meet student expectations regarding job opportunities? Additionally, is this expectation of job opportunity knowledge realistic if the advisor is not connected with a specific academic discipline? Can athletic academic advisors provide current and relevant career information as adequately as discipline specific advisors?

While the responses of the non-athletes were consistent in their indication of higher levels of perceived importance for 10 of the 11 expectations, the overall level of satisfaction of student-athletes with *academic advisement* and overall level of satisfaction with their *academic advisor* were higher than those of non-athletes. Seventy-five percent of the student-athletes indicated they were satisfied to both survey items. Interestingly, 17 % of the non-athletes were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with academic advisement, whereas 25 % were unsatisfied with their academic advisor. The question must be investigated to determine if these responses reflect the use of separate athletic academic advisement services versus the academic services used by the general student body.

The findings of this study support earlier findings regarding student perceptions of areas of importance in student advisement (Gillentine & Hunt, 1999). Each of the items utilized in the survey instrument were perceived as important to academic advisement by over fifty percent of the sample population. The findings also generate areas in need of further study. Given that the levels of importance were similar for both groups, is there a need for separate academic advisement for student-athletes? Also, is the overall perceived level of satisfaction of student athletes due to separate academic services or other unidentified factors? Further, can academic advisement services offered outside the academic department be as effective as those offered through an academic department?

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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