

A MODEL FOR STUDY TABLE
DESIGNED FOR FRESHMEN ATHLETES

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The freshmen year is, in many ways, the most difficult for any student. Adjustment problems for entering freshmen are well-documented (Chickering, 1969; Anderson, 1969). The added pressure of participating in an intercollegiate sport magnifies and intensifies these potential adjustment problems. Most incoming students are faced with anxieties connected with leaving home for the first time, the confusion of a large campus, the feeling of anonymity and insignificance, and the general sense of not being quite sure of what they should be doing or how they should be going about doing it.

These adjustment problems manifest themselves in academic problems for many student-athletes. The academic difficulties that arise during the first year of college frequently persist throughout their academic careers, making it difficult to make progress toward and/or complete their degrees (Pantages & Creedon, 1978).

In the past, study table has been one of the solutions used by most athletic departments to help student-athletes with their academic progress. Most study tables are designed to ensure supervised study, although some may additionally incorporate tutorial components (Nixon, 1983; Steel, 1982). One problem we at Washington State University encountered using this type of approach was that the same people were remaining in study table semester after semester. Apparently compulsory study time and tutorial help with specific subjects was not adequately preparing these individuals to become self-sufficient students.

In examining the plethora of literature on previous attempts to improve academic performance, it became evident that although there is a myriad of approaches and techniques, there is no consensus on what is most effective. (Kirschenbaum & Perri, 1982; Mitchell & Piatkowska, 1974; Robyak & Patton, 1977). Despite the lack of consistent support for the effectiveness of any of these programs, there is evidence of a highly effective means of

implementing these programs. It would appear that utilizing a highly structured and lengthy program, regardless of the focus, is likely to produce positive results. We determined, therefore, that any program we were to attempt to implement would need to have a precise framework and a protracted time frame.

We determined, and research supports, that class attendance, taking understandable notes, turning in assignments and taking tests on time were some of the factors that best distinguish good students from poor ones. These are the factors that we decided to stress. With the help of individuals from our Psychology Department we established our Freshman Athlete Scholastic Training (FAST) program. The program is based on a negative reinforcement principle, that is the removal of something noxious.

It's generally accepted that study table is viewed by most athletes as undesirable. In many cases it is seen as a punishment for poor past performance and is, therefore, something to avoid. Consequently time off from study table is used as a reinforcer. At the beginning of each year, incoming freshmen and upperclassmen in need of specialized attention are instructed in note-taking and organizational skills as well as some basic study skills. Throughout the semester, as these skills develop and improve, actual time required in study table decreases (the reinforcement).

Since class attendance is such an important ingredient in academic success, and since numerous studies have found students to be effective change agents (Gentry, 1974; Wasserman, McCarthy, & Ferree, 1975; Wrenn & Mencke, 1972; Brown, Wehe, Zunker, & Haslam, 1971), we utilize upperclassmen proctors to check class attendance on a random basis. Each evening, when the student reports to study table, he or she meets individually with one of these proctors. The students are asked to produce notes that meet the criteria established during the training period for each class. The proctor then spends approximately 15 minutes with the student-athlete quizzing the individual on the material from that day's lectures. The students are thereby getting a review during the critical first 24 hours when so much information is forgotten.

Students who have attended all of their classes and fully understand the material in their notes are excused from the remainder of study table for that evening. After two weeks of perfect adherence to the procedures students may elect to skip one night of study table entirely.

At mid-semester each student's performance is evaluated. Students showing adequate progress (last semester we used a 3.15 g.p.a. as a cut-off) are allowed to monitor their own academic conduct. These students are trained to monitor and record their

class attendance and outside-of-class preparation time. At this point attendance at study table is required only on Sunday when the individual meets with a proctor to discuss the preceding week's behavior. As long as the student continues to demonstrate proper note-taking skills, adequately monitors his/her study time, and attends all classes he/she may remain on a once-a-week schedule. If a student fails to meet one of these criteria he/she will revert to the nightly study table.

The program has proven quite effective. Athletes participating in the program during the first semester (fall, 1982) achieved a mean g.p.a. of 2.47 as compared with 2.12 for a sample of freshmen, with similar academic backgrounds, from the general student body (Harney, 1985). Not only did the athletes perform better than their non-athlete counterparts but this is also an increase of .36 from the preceding class of freshmen athletes. Freshmen g.p.a.'s seem to be maintaining or increasing slightly each year of the program. During fall, 1983 participants attained a mean g.p.a. of 2.47 and this past semester (fall, 1984) we had an overall mean of 2.52.

We are generally pleased with the program which started two and one-half years ago as a pilot project involving only freshmen football players. We now have athletes from nine sports (baseball, men's and women's basketball, football, men's and women's golf, women's track, volleyball, and wrestling) taking part in the program. We are hopeful that as the program continues to show positive results more coaches will choose to have their players be part of the program.

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