

THE TRIAD ASSISTING, ADVISING, AND ASSESSMENT MODEL: ONE INSTITUTION'S ATTEMPT TO SUPPORT THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

William F. Stier, Jr.

State University of New York, Brockport

ABSTRACT

The Triad Assisting, Advising, and Assessment Model is a multi-faceted approach to meeting the needs of young men and women who are placed in the dual roles of college student and athlete. Student-athletes face numerous pressures, on and off campus, both real and perceived. To enable student-athletes to successfully meet these pressures and challenges, the State University of New York, Brockport, has instituted the Triad Model. The model, depicting a methodology of academic, personal, and athletic advising, utilizes an approach which has both traditional and innovative components.

INTRODUCTION

The Triad Assisting, Advising, and Assessment Model is a multi-faceted approach designed to meet the needs of young men and women who are placed in the dual roles of collegiate student and athlete. This model evolved in response to a need to provide growth experiences for these student-athletes in terms of the social, athletic, and academic dimensions of college life (see Figure 1). All students need assistance in making appropriate, timely, and effective decisions which facilitate their progress toward the prized diploma and their mastery of the basic skills needed for survival in our society. By assuming the dual roles of student and athlete, such individuals are often in a position of needing special support to enable them to experience success in both roles.

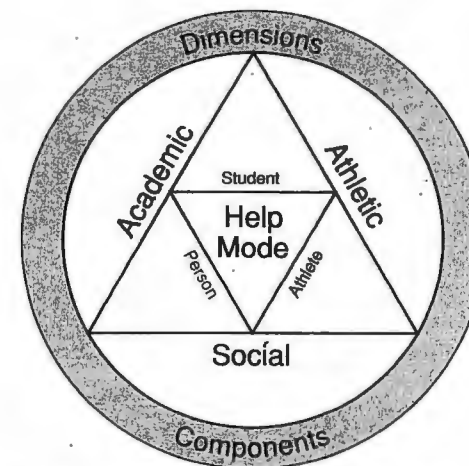


Figure 1. Viewing the Student-Athlete

As a result, institutions have a responsibility to provide a variety of meaningful and effective support mechanisms necessary to handle the challenges posed by being a student-athlete ("Study Challenges," 1990). Specifically, institutions need to adopt a proactive stance rather than a reactive posture (see Figure 2). In doing so, institutions can help individual student-athletes experience success in the classroom and in a sport as part of the total educational experience. Student-athletes can be taught to develop and refine decision making skills; to acquire an appropriate social, cultural, and moral expertise; and to develop proper self-esteem and establish appropriate personal and professional goals in light of personal, academic, and athletic priorities.

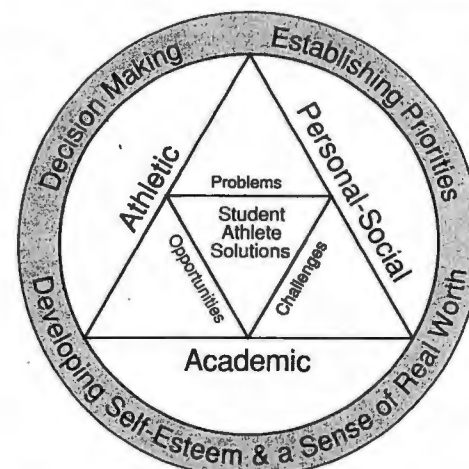


Figure 2. Being Proactive Rather than Reactive

SCOPE OF THE MODEL

The all-inclusive support program which evolved at the State University of New York, Brockport, involves academic, counseling, and athletic staff and provides opportunities for such successful experiences. The Triad Model revolves around three components: (1) the use of special advising efforts; (2) the use of special programs and tactics; and (3) the use of formalized evaluation and assessment strategies and programs. All activities are conducted with the goal of assisting student-athletes in the academic, personal/social, and athletic dimensions of college life (see Figure 3).

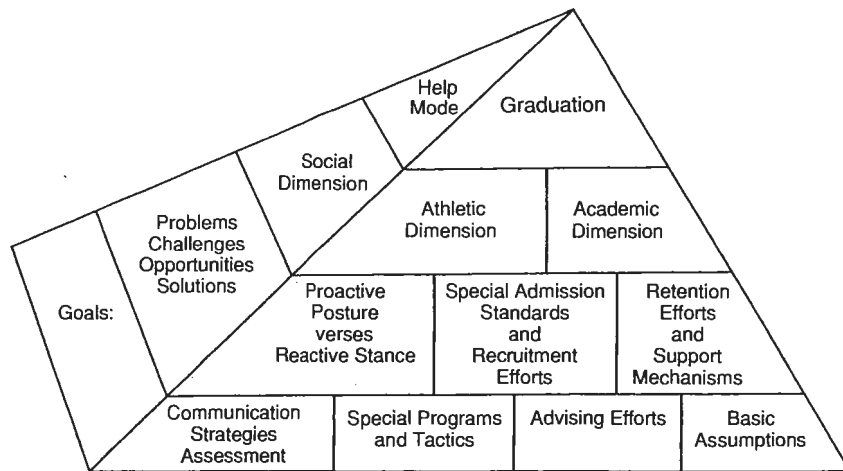


Figure 3. The TRIAD Model

The program is based on the following assumptions:

- (1) College students, in general, face many severe pressures, demands, choices, challenges, and hardships.
- (2) Student-athletes face these and additional challenges, pressures, constraints, and demands. By the very nature of being involved in athletics, student-athletes experience greater stress and have distinct needs, which in turn deserve special attention from the institution.
- (3) There is a need to demonstrate a real concern to all constituencies about the seriousness of the challenges facing student-athletes within the collegiate setting. There must be recognition of the need to develop and implement a systematic and sound mechanism to address the needs of modern day student-athletes (Ostro, 1989).

(4) Institutions need to be in a proactive posture rather than a reactive stance in terms of assisting student-athletes. Athletic departments need to remain in a helping and cooperative mode rather than a punitive mode in their relationships with student-athletes (Berg, 1989).

(5) There is a real need to inform and educate student-athletes so that they might make right choices—now and in the future (Toye, 1989).

(6) Individuals usually improve upon whatever they consciously and consistently work at improving.

(7) Public relations exposure of successful counseling and support programs is essential if such efforts are to reap the maximum benefits possible for student-athletes, the athletic department, and the institution.

SELECTION AND RETENTION PROCESS

Institutions must remain proactive rather than reactive in terms of the recruitment of qualified student-athletes, the admission of student-athletes who can earn a degree in an appropriate amount of time, and the retention of student-athletes through appropriate advising, counseling, monitoring (tracking), and encouragement.

The State University of New York, Brockport, utilizes special admissions programs for student-athletes and provides support via the Transition Program, the Equal Opportunity Program, and the Special Talent Program. Both the Transition Program and the Special Talent Program are special admissions categories which allow students who fail to meet the publicized minimum entrance requirements to gain admittance to the institution. Such admission is gained by successfully satisfying specific remedial requirements, i.e., by passing specific summer classes and/or designated first-semester courses and by obtaining endorsement by a faculty member/coach at the college.

COUNSELING STUDENT-ATHLETES

A wide variety of offices in addition to intercollegiate athletics within the school's environment are called upon to support, monitor, and guide student-athletes. Through proactive individual and group counseling, assistance is available to student-athletes in terms of decision making, establishing priorities, and developing self-esteem and a sense of real worth in the academic, athletic, and the personal/social dimensions.

Advising

Selected student-athletes, generally those at high risk, are assigned specific academic advisers from throughout the campus. Interested professors volunteer to serve in this capacity. Such efforts take place as planned, periodic occurrences and/or incidental opportunities, as well as on an unplanned basis.

Monitoring

Student-athletes and their activities are monitored weekly by the Dean's office (Arts and Performance) and the athletic director's office. Attention is given to suitable class selection, class attendance, study habits, completion of assignments, suitable academic progress in each class, academic progress towards graduation, mandatory study hall attendance, and general behavior in and out of classes.

Student-athletes are able to receive specific assistance from other areas on campus, including testing and diagnostic services available in the counseling center, remedial assistance from the learning skills center, and job placement assistance from the career placement office.

In terms of the timing of advising and counseling efforts by athletic personnel, it has proven essential that the staff obtain feedback from student-athletes on a consistent basis. Additionally, all questions from student-athletes are fully answered in a forthright manner. The gathering of data, exchange of information, and sharing of feelings and ideas take place during the actual recruitment of the student-athlete, while the individual remains a student-athlete (pre-season, in season, and post-season), and following the conclusion of the student-athlete's eligibility to compete.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS: INPUT FROM STUDENT-ATHLETES

In an attempt to secure consistent and reliable feedback from student-athletes on their total athletic and educational experience, the athletic department conducts periodic open forums, drop-in opportunities, and planned meetings with teams and with individuals. These opportunities enable the athletic director to meet student-athletes on an individual basis, in small group meetings, and on a team-by-team basis. To establish a relationship with student-athletes, the athletic director meets at least three times with each team (pre-season, in season, and post-season).

During the process of seeking input from individual student-athletes, the athletic department utilizes a variety of tools to gain a snapshot of the student-athletes' perceptions of their own athletic, academic, and social experiences. The department has established an assessment or evaluation system which involves face-to-face meetings with individual student-athletes and with teams. During these meetings, verbal comments are solicited from the student-athletes; open-ended, written questions are answered in writing by the student-athletes; and a formal, computer-scored instrument called the Student-Athletic Assessment Form (SAAF) is used (Stier & Humm, 1988).

The efforts of the athletic department to support student-athletes can be categorized into three areas: (1) actions taken in terms of athletic and institutional policies; (2) actions taken in terms of the student-athletes themselves; and (3) actions taken in terms of the coaches. Specifically, the

following are some of the actions taken by the department to provide appropriate and timely support for student-athletes at the university.

Policies for the Department and the Institution

(1) A combined Physical Education and Sport Department was established in 1983 as an academic department. Full-time employees (athletic director, coaches and teachers) can be tenured as teachers within that department.

(2) Special academic advisers interested in helping student-athletes were secured for many athletic teams.

(3) Faculty senate approval was obtained for fifty "special admission slots" for students with special talents in such areas as drama, sports, communication, and dance.

(4) Policy was established regarding class attendance by student-athletes.

(5) One of the first comprehensive drug education programs for a Division III institution was established in 1987. The program consists of workshops, clinics, guest speakers funded through an NCAA grant, and individual counseling and referral services.

(6) The support of a large number of other institutional offices in assisting intercollegiate athletics was secured. Included are the offices of the vice president for academic affairs, the dean of Arts and Performance, the registrar, career counseling, public relations, financial aid, admissions, library (study hall program), residential life, learning skills lab, writing clinic lab, public safety and health center, and the office of the president.

(7) A system of more accurate data collection was developed to gather information on team and individual grade point averages, standards, and achievements.

(8) The effectiveness in monitoring and detecting potential problems in terms of individual behavior and academic progress was increased.

(9) A department handbook was created, containing the policies, practices, procedures, and priorities of the department, including academic support policies such as academic standards and academic support, the department's mission and philosophy statement, and orientation materials for staff and student-athletes (Stier, 1988).

(10) So-called "mickey mouse" courses available for student-athletes were eliminated ("Athletes More Likely", 1989).

(11) Informational recruiting and public relations workshops were established for various high schools in central and western New York on the topic, "Everything the Student-Athlete and Parents Wanted To Know about

Selecting a College—But Were Afraid To Ask” (Stier, 1974). This series of workshops was funded by a grant from the western New York physical education professional organization.

Policies for the Student-Athletes

(1) Minimum academic and personal standards were established for eligibility to practice and play on an athletic team.

(2) Support mechanisms such as study hall, a monitoring system, and advising assistance were established for student-athletes.

(3) A true open door policy for all student-athletes was created, i.e., the home phone number of the athletic director is given to all 600+ student-athletes each year, and arrangements are made for immediate access to the athletic director by any student-athlete on a confidential basis.

(4) The amount of time student-athletes missed class was reduced by providing limits on pre-season, in-season and out-of-season involvement (practice and game opportunities); by limiting the times and numbers of days each week for practices; and by reducing overnight trips and the number of contests.

Policies for the Coaches

(1) The minimum qualifications used in selecting coaches were raised.

(2) In-service workshops and educational experiences in counseling and advising were established for all athletic staff members.

(3) Salaries for part-time coaches were raised, thereby attracting a higher caliber of coaching candidates.

(4) More full-time faculty became coaches. Only seven of the twenty teams had full-time employees coaching in 1989-90.

(5) More administrative and recruitment support for full- and part-time coaches was provided.

(6) Full- and part-time athletic staff, other staff, and administrators were educated in terms of the mission and philosophy of the athletic department and its priorities and efforts concerning the successful academic progress of student-athletes.

THE NEED FOR AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORT

Public relations, both internal and external, is an essential component of these efforts. Great strides are taken to make others—student-athletes, parents, faculty, administrators, and the general public—aware of the programs

and the achievements realized under the Triad Model. This awareness plays no small part in the success of the model. Attempts are made to publicize activities in these seven ways:

(1) Academic and athletic honor rolls announced on a semester basis and publication of student-athletes' names and actual policies in news releases and in an annual informational brochure (Andriatch, 1990)

(2) Special displays on campus highlighting programs and selected student-athletes

(3) Personalized letters from the athletic director to parents congratulating them on behalf of the achievements of their sons or daughters

(4) Scholar-athlete honors on campus and for conference and NCAA recognition

(5) "Athlete of the Week" designation

(6) "Academic All-American" recognition

(7) Periodic publicity in the form of news releases about the components of the support program and about successful present and former student-athletes

PRODUCTIVITY OF THE PROGRAM

What have been the results of all of the institution's activities? Have they been worthwhile in terms of efforts expended and costs incurred? The answer is a resounding YES. Four major consequences have been deemed to be direct or indirect results of the implementation of the Triad Model. First, admission and retention standards were raised for all student-athletes, and better qualified student-athletes were recruited by coaches and admitted by the institution. Second, the average grade point average of the majority of student-athletes and the majority of athletic teams increased. Third, the retention rate of freshman and sophomore student-athletes increased. Finally, the image of the athletic department improved on and off campus as a result of the athletic staff's work with the Triad Model.

SUMMARY

The Triad Assisting, Advising, and Assessment Model involved a conscious, proactive effort to help student-athletes experience success in the academic, athletic, and social dimensions of college life. This has been accomplished by using a multi-faceted approach to the problem of monitoring the activities of student-athletes and providing them with definitive support.

The use of special admission criteria, coupled with appropriate support mechanisms and special programs, has proved effective in assisting student-athletes to make right choices in terms of the total college experience.

Intelligent, frequent, and non-threatening use of evaluation and assessment strategies has enabled the athletic staff to obtain a realistic picture of how student-athletes view their total athletic and academic experience. And, of course, effective publicity and public relations efforts have enhanced all of these efforts by making others in and out of the college setting aware that the athletic department has earnestly attempted to assist student-athletes meet the vigorous challenges of college life. Generally speaking, one tends to improve in that which one works at improving. In the case of the Triad Model, this is indeed the case.

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