

Athletes' Feelings of Isolation and Separateness as Determined by Campus Design: A Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Many college student-athletes feel isolated from social activities on campus and their social experiences at the university are predominately with other athletes (Pinkerton, Hinz, and Barrow, 1989). Also, student-athletes often rely on their athletic department to solve their problems and provide support, which may lead them to ignore other available services on campus (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991). When hypothesizing about student-athlete isolation it is equally important to examine the impact of environmental determinates on this behavior. The topography of the land and campus design influenced the expansion of most college campuses. Therefore, physical isolation allows the athletic department to operate somewhat free of other departments. It can keep athletes in-house, not having to rely on other campus service providers, which may impact athletes' use of counseling and support services if not offered in or near athletic departments. Presented is a new theoretical perspective on how campus design may affect student-athletes' feelings of isolation and impact service use, and will propose interventions and research specific to this theory.

Athletes' Feeling of Isolation

The college student-athlete is a unique person on a college campus. As a result of the individual attention and privileged status that student-athletes receive, some researchers have labeled them the over-privileged minority (Remer, Tongate & Watson, 1978). Others have shown that in addition to the developmental tasks that all college students must complete, the college student-athlete has even more demands placed upon them because of their athletic status (Ferrante, 1989). The demands of their athletic schedule (e.g. practices, study halls, travel, etc.) separate student-athletes from the non-athlete population (Adler & Adler, 1987).

These demands can leave athletes feeling estranged, out of touch, and isolated from their non-athletic peers on campus. In turn, there is the possibility that negative stereotypes about athletes can be formed by the non-athletic student population because they lack the opportunity to interact with them (Parham, 1993). Pinkerton, Hinz, and Barrow (1989) found that athletes feel a certain amount of isolation from social activities on campus and athlete's social experiences at the university are predominantly with other athletes. Socially, friendship that was found in high school can be lost in the collegiate environment due to isolation stemming from athletic status (Adler & Adler, 1987).

An institution's athletic department and coaching staff may further promote this feeling of isolation through their attempts to help the student-athlete succeed. On some campuses, athletic departments operate almost independently of the rest of the university (Sperber, 2000). In most cases, the athletic department has different goals and its own decision making body in place to operate somewhat free of the academic departments on campus. Athletes may internalize this "independent operation" which may non-verbally influence them to ignore other available services on campus (e.g., counseling and disability services) and instead rely on the athletic department to solve their problems and provide support (Ferrante & Etzel, 1991). Some coaches and assistants take control of athletes' class and major selection, often putting them in courses and majors that are congruent with the practice schedule but not with a particular athlete's life and career goals. When athletes are not in control of their choices, this intrusion can lead to a disconnection to the rest of the university's resources and its members. As a result of the social isolation experienced by college student-athletes, they often have few academic role models and receive little support for academic accomplishment (Adler & Adler, 1987).

There is a form of student-athlete isolation that has yet to be proposed in the counseling or student development literature that may impact athletes and further promote feelings of isolation and separateness. This form of isolation is inherent in the design, planning, and architectural make-up of the college campus. In turn, this separation allows an athletic department to operate independently as well as physically isolating athletes from their non-athletic peers. To discover the impact that the physical structures and layout of a campus can have on athletes, the theories and postulations of environmental psychology, campus planning, and campus architecture need to be addressed.

The History of Campus Architecture

A short history of campus design and architectural periods can be used to show how early campus planning influenced the physical layout of the modern university. American colonial colleges used an open design that had three individual college halls forming an academic U-shape, leaving the fourth side free to the outside community. This signified both a connection to the community as well as a connection to nature (Turner, 1984). The term campus is Latin for "field," which was used to describe this early American college tradition (Braunschweiger & Thompson, 1997). The several decades following the Revolutionary War, were a period of college expansion in which the location of new colleges was an issue (Turner, 1984). During this time period there was a strong push to make sure that the campus plan would respect the topography of the land with drives and walks following its contour, rather than impose a quadrangle on it (Schuyler, 1996). After the conclusion of the Civil War, it was thought that if a college or university was to promote the importance of community and responsibility the buildings had to be appropriately scaled to resemble a community (Schuyler, 1996).

Following the Reconstruction of the southern states, the American university was born when previous German design merged with the classic style of architecture and as a result, universities were able to accommodate a large number of students with diffuse goals (Turner, 1984). In turn, the universities expanded to provide more services and more physical structures. During this period, the beaux-arts style of architecture had a strong influence over the design of college campuses (Braunschweiger & Thompson, 1997; Turner, 1984). The beaux-arts style uses the physical campus to represent the ideals and mission of the university and as a public display dictating admiration. It relied much on a master plan to provide a sense of unity throughout the campus. The college campus contained many different types of buildings such as classrooms, recreation centers, and dorms and its unity in design could be achieved by lawns, malls, quads, and avenues to create a sense of community between the physical structures and the individuals in the environment (Braunschweiger & Thompson, 1997).

During the modern architecture period of 1936 through 1990, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, which greatly increased the demand for higher education. As a result, the university system could not keep up with the influx of students and most colleges and universities were unable to stick to a unifying architectural plan. The design focus of the period was to build whatever was necessary, wherever necessary (Turner, 1984). The concept of master planning was all

but abandoned during this period. Modern, unadorned, form-follows-function architecture easily invaded American campuses. Large, squat, air-conditioned research and classroom structures succeeded the traditional, single corridor, cross-ventilated college buildings. In the process, they all but abandoned the ambiance, the intimate spaces, the careful landscaping inherent in the old campus core (Turner, 1984). Building fast and cheap, many of the open spaces and design "flow" of the campus was lost in this period. Uninspiring buildings and expansive parking lots replaced it. The rise of college sports, namely football, coincided with this period of expansion (Rader, 2004) and the appearance of stadiums and arenas towering over a college campus became commonplace (Gumprecht, 2003). Due to the size of these stadiums, they were most often built on the outskirts of campus or the edge of town where space was plenty and land was cheap. Because stadiums were built on such a grand scale, small towns like Auburn, Alabama had to accommodate crowds estimated to be three times as large as the town itself (Beard, 1989 as cited in Gumprecht, 2003). As a result, student-athletes must travel from the campus core (i.e., class, dorm) to practice and games, often in the opposite direction from their non-athlete peers.

Influences of Physical Environments

The ecological perspective states that there is an influence of environments on people, and people on their environments (Banning & Kaiser, 1974). It is important when hypothesizing about feelings of isolation and separateness by college student-athletes to look at the environmental determinates of human behavior. Moos (1986) postulates that the arrangement of environments can be the most powerful technique for influencing human behavior. Dewey (1933) stated some time ago that we never educate directly, but indirectly by use of the environment. Whether it is chance environments that do this, or whether they are designed for this purpose, makes all the difference. People often become insensitive to or unaware of the pieces of our environment, but the actions of the persons contained in the environment will reveal its effects (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Environments, such as an athletic department, maintain a level of organization in order to meet certain implicit or explicit goals. Porteus (1977) described three distinct positions about how physical environments affect behavior. First, architectural determinism states that behavior is determined in a direct causal way by the environment (Ellen, 1982). People act in predictable ways because that is the only way the environ-

ment lets them behave. If there are no counseling services directed toward or for athletes, when this specific population needs help they will most likely turn to coaches or someone else in the athletic department. Second, architectural possibilism (Ellen, 1982) states the physical environment has a set of possible opportunities contained in it that may set limits on, but not restrict behavior. If a campus has two student support centers, one for athletes housed in an athletic facility and one across campus for regular students, the athletes will most likely stay in-house in the athletic department and not have the possibility to interact with the rest of the student body or seek out opportunities or experiences outside of athletics. Third, architectural probablism states that layout, location, and arrangement of space and facilities make some behaviors more probable. If there is a centrally located student support center that markets itself to all sub-populations including athletes, there is an expectation of a highly developed culture of interaction and support.

Physical environments communicate nonverbally in many ways. They offer many possibilities for human response, some more probable than others. This influence is both functional and symbolic (Strange & Banning, 2001). The link between the functional and symbolic aspects of the campus physical environment leads to an understanding of how the campus' physical environments impact behavior (Strange & Banning, 2001). If a college's counseling center is located on the far side of campus from the athletic department, its location can send the message that athletes should not seek help outside of the athletic department.

The environment communicates to those in it, through simple and complex cues, the most appropriate emotions, interpretations, and behaviors by setting up the appropriate situations and contexts. Environments can achieve more than just inhibit or promote; they not only remind, they can predict (Rappaport, 1982). Often, these non-verbal messages are more truthful than verbal or written messages (Mehrabian, 1981). As an example, after practice, if a coach's door is open to talk or the athlete has to walk across campus to talk about homesickness and depression it seems that the athlete would be more likely to talk to the coach who might not be trained or effective in such an arena. When double messages, both verbal and non-verbal are received, the non-verbal messages are often more believable and effective (Eckman, 1985).

Environments are transmitted through people, and the dominant features of a particular environment are partially a function of the collective characteristics of the individuals who inhabit it (Holland, 1973). The human (i.e., social aspect of the setting) and the non-human (i.e., physical aspects of the setting) make the college campus a classic behavioral set-

ting (Strange & Banning, 2001). The mutually influential relationship between the human and physical elements contained in the behavioral setting shapes behavior. The sometimes supportive, sometimes unsupportive relationship between the human and physical aspects of the campus environment can greatly affect behavior (Strange & Banning, 2001). The physical features of the collegiate environment can set broad limits on behaviors, making some more likely to occur than others. If there are two dining halls on campus, one being located near a major walkway on campus and the other located in a varsity practice facility, the physical environment dictates that the remote dining hall will have less non-athlete students using it. This is called intersystems congruence (Michelson, 1970). When the physical structures and design of the setting allow participants to do what they desire, while participants take full advantage of the possibilities of the setting, is termed a synomorph relationship. In turn, the behavioral setting of a campus, buildings and spaces do not just create functional space, mood, or atmosphere, they can facilitate certain behaviors (Wicker, 1984).

Intertwined in this synomorph relationship are the ideas of proxemics and the social implications of the use of physical space and how they affect behavior. Spatial zones and social interaction between people are an important part of this study (Hall, 1996). These social and psychological aspects of physical space communicate messages to the people in the campus physical environment. If all the student-athlete services are located in the athletic department, then the message is sent to the athlete that they do not have to go outside of the department to receive help. By not needing to interact with the rest of campus, isolation ensues.

Campus physical artifacts have intended purposes that impact the environment. They send strong non-verbal messages about campus culture and the individuals functioning within it. There are two types of campus artifacts that specifically influence student-athlete isolation: 1) signs and symbols and 2) specific physical structures such as stadiums, libraries, and bridges (Banning & Bartels, 1993). Signs such as "athletes only" in the dining hall, symbols such as statues of athletic heroes surrounding the athletic department and large, newly built stadiums send non-verbal cues about important campus values and expectations of an athletic culture. Zeisel (1981) describes how physical environment can be used to convey messages about individual and group ownership and terms this concept the "display of self." An example of this is the prominent display of Greek letters on a fraternity house or "team" shirts for athletes.

Consider the viewpoint of a male student-athlete walking around campus. He encounters non-verbal cues embedded in the buildings, pathways, signs, and symbols (Banning, 1993). Through these non-verbals, he learns the important cultural messages contained in the campus atmosphere. What is communicated to this athlete might be much different if he encounters numerous statues of the university's sports heroes versus signs marking the route to university-sponsored tutoring sessions. The convenience of this athlete's walk or ride to his athletic facilities is part of the overall campus design and it depends on the directness, continuity, and availability (Untermann, 1984). However, while the walk or ride may be convenient, it more than likely does little to promote an interaction between him and the general students. In the early afternoon when the student-athlete reports to the locker-room for practice, he often passes his non-athletic peers going the opposite direction to classes or dorms. They both may be going in direct, available, and convenient paths, but in this experience, the athlete gains a sense that he is different than, and separate from, his peers.

Constructed Environment of the Student Athlete

All environments have a purpose, expressed or implied. Environments are best understood by the collective perceptions, or subjective views, of the individuals in them. The perceived campus culture is an example of this idea. Someone might think the university is a "jock school" while another person might think the same university is known for its academics. How individuals perceive, evaluate, or construct the environment will affect if they are attracted, satisfied, or stable in it (Strange & Banning, 2001).

The university system can contain many distinct and different sub-cultures, which can have their own purposes and can interfere with the primary goals of the institution (Strange & Banning, 2001). The athletic department is a good example of this idea. Not only can it be separated physically from the rest of campus; it can contain goals that might undermine the stated goals of the institution. These goals can take the form of bringing in athletes that are unprepared to achieve in college or it can require the student-athlete to prematurely commit to athletics and not to develop the role of student (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). In turn, athletic departments can be wary of outsiders whose mission is not winning on the field but helping athletes succeed in life (Sperber, 2000).

This separateness can lead to perceptions of what is deemed important by the sub-culture contained in it, called "environmental press." It

suggests that if a majority of individuals have a certain perception, then this will be seen as important (Stern, 1970). An environmental press has the ability to influence the environment but it also has the ability to create stereotypes. If 80% of the campus population believes that academics are important, then this most likely will be seen as a goal of the university. In turn there is the possibility that stereotypes about student-athletes as well as the reasons for their admission to the university might be formed. Various environmental presses can be a function of sub-environments. Overall campus environment might have an environmental press towards academic quality, but a particular sub-environment, such as the athletic department's goal of winning at all costs, might exert another environmental press in a different direction determining an athlete's enrollment into an easy major (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Implications for Athlete Support Providers

There are a number of ways that an institution can encourage participation and involvement on campus. Each physical space on campus has a certain amount of influence on the individuals contained in and around it. This influence is the degree of attraction or repulsion for a particular setting. For student-athletes who have a strong athletic role and identity, the athletic department can be an attractive place to spend time while the physics lab or the student center might represent a degree of repulsion. Astin (1985) believes what an individual does, more than what is thought or felt, defines involvement. This makes particular sense when looking at the stereotypes formulated by the general student population with respect to college student-athletes. By not seeing athletes on campus, involved in dorm activities, or in certain majors, the non-athletic population could make assumptions that the athletes are just there to compete for the university in an attempt to make it to the professional leagues and not to receive an education. Campus environments that make available and encourage certain activities are considered "involving." Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) believe that a peer culture can help foster involvement where students develop close on-campus friendships, perceive the college is highly concerned about individual students, and witness institutional emphasis on support services. By not attempting to reach out and encourage student-athlete involvement and by promoting certain "easy" majors, the institution might be discouraging, not promoting, participation.

Athletes enjoy being around other athletes because of their shared goals and experiences (Adler & Adler, 1987). Therefore, they create an environment that is cyclical in nature; one that attracts new ath-

letes and perpetuates its current sub-culture. This can have either a positive or a negative impact on the university culture. It can be negative if the culture of athletes is to blow off class and only concentrate on winning, conversely it can be positive if the culture is one of personal development and growth. Specialized offices and organizations like athletic departments or athletic student services can function as a supportive body that in turn encourages involvement. The institutions that are most successful at enculturating a tradition of involvement among students, such as promoting the "student" in student-athlete, are culturally distinctive in the sense that they create a powerful "feel" that new members can sense (Strange & Banning, 2001). There are many factors that can affect the physical dimensions of involvement.

Campus location and design can enhance involvement. If it is a rural campus, it can have plenty of space to grow without inhibiting its flow and maximizing its physical influence on its community. If it is an urban campus, there might not be the available space to grow, but by making sure that student-athletes can interact with other students a sense of community can be increased. Topography of the land can have an inhibiting effect on involvement as well. In the case of Harvard University, the Charles River bisects the campus (Harvard University, 2004). This can have a significant impact on involvement, especially when the athletic department is on the opposite side of the river from most of the student body. Effective ways to counter the river's impact on involvement could be mass transportation systems and major walkways to involve all students.

The layout of physical space, as mentioned previously, can impact involvement. Large, squat buildings or small appealing ones can both inhibit involvement. The way these campus buildings are laid out is just as important as their design. If the athletic departments and facilities are on a remote side of campus from buildings that non-athletic students use, this can decrease involvement. Included in the layout of the buildings, the layout of open spaces can affect the degree of involvement. Open spaces, when used in an effective manner on a college campus can increase the likelihood of interaction between all students. These open spaces must be accessible and inviting to be involving. In summary, open and inviting spaces promote involvement while the barriers dividing physical spaces, such as busy roads or even rivers, can disrupt the flow of campus and inhibit involvement. Therefore, campus service providers need to become aware of the impact physical barriers can have on student-athlete isolation. With this awareness, proactive steps can be taken to provide outreach and inclusion for this sub-population at the university.

Ideas for Future Research

How might we assess the ability of the design of a campus to encourage involvement or isolation and separateness? The college campus and the individuals contained in it share a dichotomous relationship, and it is the basis of this relationship that should be the beginning point for research in this area. To study this relationship, we must look specifically at each piece and how it contributes to the whole.

The physical campus environment should be studied through an analysis of NCAA Division IA campus maps. To achieve a sample of maps that represent schools that have a high level of success in all sports, using the top twenty-five schools from the 2004-05 Sports Academy Directors' Cup (formerly the Sears Cup) would provide a solid point of reference. When analyzing each individual map, there are a number of specific issues that need to be addressed. Where the campus is located, either in an urban or rural area, can play a role in how it expanded during the influx of college students during the mid-twentieth century. The question to be answered here is if the college expanded in a manner that promoted involvement or increased isolation of its student-athletes. By studying the institution's campus map, the traffic patterns of those who participate in the setting can be a key to how well the campus flows from building to building, in turn increasing total involvement (Strange & Banning, 2001). It is important to investigate the level of involvement of the student athletes with the rest of the university population when traveling from the campus core to practice facilities. Also, the way that participation on campus facilitated, recognized, and rewarded can also promote or discourage involvement. Combined in this is the physical layout of the campus and how it interacts with the topography of the land. Are there any major natural or man-made barriers that can inhibit the involvement of student-athletes with the rest of the institution? Finally, it is important to investigate where the counseling and support services for student athletes are located and if they increase or decrease involvement with the culture of the university. Specifically, are these services well advertised and accessible to the student athlete or are they located cross-campus from the normal routes of athletes? By assessing the top twenty-five schools in the 2004-05 Sports Academy Directors' Cup, a rubric can be established to place schools into different categories based on their physical environments and how well or poorly they promote the involvement of their student-athletes with the rest of the campus environment.

The other half of this relationship is the student-athlete population contained in the college campus environment. To get the best description of how a campus environment can impact a student-athlete is to ask them to describe it. By using student-athlete focus groups, researchers can discover what types of environments, more specifically, what types of barriers inhibit involvement. The perceived level of impact that the environment has on the student-athlete is his or her reality. Because there has yet to be any assessments or surveys constructed to measure this phenomenon of campus isolation, we should turn to established measures of social support as a guide. Like campus isolation, social support relies upon individual perception. By looking at these established social support measures, such as the Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983), the same type of scale can be developed with the ability to measure the phenomenon of campus isolation. This measure could be effective as a Likert-type, self-report scale, or one that involves a phenomenological interview the student-athlete.

After developing a campus isolation scale, it can be used to find differences in the isolation experiences of athletes. As an example, two athletes on the same team at an urban college might have very different perceptions of how the campus promotes involvement. If student-athlete "A" is from the city where the college is located, he might be used to riding a train to get to practice where student-athlete "B" who is from a small, Midwest town, might feel isolated having to ride a train or drive to practice. It is these types of personal experiences that need to be explored individually to get at the root of how campus design can influence a student-athlete's feelings of isolation.

After initial research has been conducted on this subject of campus isolation, there are a number of directions that this research can progress. A closer look at the difference between feelings of isolation at urban and rural campuses could be explored. It would also be beneficial to look at all three NCAA Divisions (I, II, and III) and determine if there is any difference between them in levels of involvement. Finally, with initial research to rely on, it would make sense to look for ways to improve involvement for student-athletes. Since the campus physical environment is essentially set in stone, ways to increase involvement through intervention by service providers need to be found and integrated into student-athlete service programs.

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