

The Genesis of a New Profession: Athletic Academic Counseling

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The ancient Greeks with their maxim "sound mind in sound body" expressed their position about the importance of physical activity in the educational system. They were also the first society to glorify athletic achievement, a legacy and tradition that are still important to us (Ryan, 1981).

A unique characteristic of today's American sports, when compared to other nations where sports are organized by the armed forces or private clubs, is that they are sponsored by academic institutions. In the late 1800's American college sports were organized in clubs and played for fun and leisure. During the current century, colleges discovered that funding and supporting highly competitive and winning teams could provide significant profits (C. Underwood, 1984).

In an attempt to protect student-athletes and promote amateur intercollegiate athletics, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was founded in 1906. The NCAA's fundamental policy states that: "A basic purpose of this Association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body . . . to encourage its members to adopt eligibility rules to comply with satisfactory standards of scholarship, sportsmanship and amateurism" (NCAA Manual 1986-87, p. 5).

College athletics took a dramatic turn with the introduction of television, the basic agent in the rapid expansion of commercialization and profit-making. Rapidly, intercollegiate sports became "big business". Profits generated by football and basketball helped finance a larger part of the athletic program of many universities (Michener, 1976).

Unfortunately, in this process the student-athlete has been neglected academically and in some instances exploited (J. Underwood, 1979). When student-athletes earn athletic scholarships, they sign a contract which binds the institutions to provide them an opportunity for a quality education in exchange for their representing the university on the playing field. But student-athletes

are neglected educationally when they are not given the time to study or the academic support to succeed (McAllister, 1985). Student-athletes are also exploited athletically when their training program pushes them beyond their natural capacity (Shaw, 1972). Further, most colleges' strong desire to win has gone beyond the playing field boundaries. An endless list of recruiting, academic and financial aid abuses (Underwood, 1980; Biemidler, 1983; Williams, et al., 1985; Bowen, 1985; Leonard, 1986; Hanford, 1979; Kirkpatrick and Keteyian, 1985; Edwards, 1985; Reid, 1986) have been highly publicized because student-athletes have been hurt educationally and emotionally. Once their college athletic careers are over, many of them have few academic skills with which to earn a living and pursue their desired careers (Bayles, 1986; Marantz, 1987). Without these skills, the former student-athlete becomes frustrated, and his or her self-esteem is highly diminished (Kelley, 1981 in C. Underwood, 1984).

The highly publicized abuses have been a constant threat to the integrity of higher education. These abuses shadow an institution's academic image and contradict the university's commitment to ethics, honesty and scholarly classwork. For example, at the University of Georgia, an English professor was dismissed for resisting pressure to give passing grades to student-athletes taking remedial courses. She sued the University and won, and was awarded a large sum of money in the settlement. This scandal forced the president of the university to resign (Sack, 1986). To avoid the recurrence of such scandalous situations, the NCAA has adopted stricter academic standards such as Proposition 48 and the Satisfactory Progress Rule. Also college presidents have stepped in to assert more control (Williams, et al., 1985). As a consequence, many universities have hired professional academic counselors to work exclusively with student-athletes.

Formal recognition of athletic academic counseling occurred when a group of athletic academic counselors founded the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (NAAAA) in 1976. The purpose of this association is "to cultivate and improve the opportunities for academic success for student-athletes in universities and colleges by providing informed, competent and holistic advising" (NAAAA constitution, 1985, p. 41). In the past two years membership in the association has doubled. Presently there are 346 members (Monaghan, 1985).

In an attempt to keep up with this swift growth, the association has upgraded its biannual publication to a professional journal called the Academic Athletic Journal. The association has adopted a goal to establish itself as a professional nonprofit organization (Esquinas, 1986). A certification program and a code of ethics are also being studied (Lashbrook, 1986, Athletic Advisor, 1986).

The fast growth described above has resulted in the need for an enhancement of the association's credibility. In order to maintain and increase credibility and to ensure survival, we may reasonably assume that association members in all regions must have the following: (1) Support of the university's administrators and faculty and the appropriate resources to enable them to perform their duties accordingly. (2) Respect as professionals from the university community. (3) Status necessary to introduce new ideas and challenging plans of action.

Once the above are provided in each institution, members must develop the following within the association in order to strengthen the profession nationally:

1. Identification

Members of the association must be secure in their knowledge that professionals in their field will have similar duties and work atmospheres, as well as aware that others have similar problems. This creates cohesiveness within the association, producing the energy and pride necessary to strengthen professional identity.

2. National Communication Network

Active and regular communication among members of the association will provide exchanges of information. A national communication network will heighten the probability of future growth and stability of the association.

In addition to these principles, athletic academic counselors must make an effort to provide services above and beyond the present scope of their duties. In keeping with the holistic approach inherent in athletic academic counseling, athletic academic counselors must assist student-athletes with their psychosocial development in order for them to become role model citizens. To reach such a goal requires an interdisciplinary model encompassing faculty, administrators, coaches, trainers and others involved in the university community.

Based upon the previous statements, we may conclude that the essence of athletic academic counseling is to provide student-athletes with an opportunity to acquire the academic and social skills necessary to enable them to pursue their desired careers. In achieving these goals, athletic academic counselors must use an interdisciplinary approach and earn the professional credibility that will allow them to gain the support needed to assist student-athletes. This credibility may be argued to rest upon professional identity and a national communication network.

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