

Student-Athlete Success in Division III: Faculty Interactions and Academic Support Programs

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Student-athlete success, particularly academic performance, is an on-going concern for university administrators and athletic department personnel. Interactions with faculty and utilization of academic support services are important factors impacting student-athlete performance. Baucom and Lantz (2007) and Cotton and Wilson (2006) suggested that stereotypical views of student-athletes may exist leading to misconceptions about academic ability and motivation. According to Simons, Bosworth, Fujita and Jensen (2007) student-athletes reported both positive and negative reactions from faculty but were regularly stigmatized and often perceived to be less capable academically. Most of the previous work in this area focused on Division I and II with little attention given to the experiences of Division III student-athletes or to the implications for administrators, faculty and staff. (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey & Banaji, 2004); Knapp, Rasmussen & Barnhardt, 2001; Pierce, 2007; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of faculty involvement and academic support structures on student-athlete success in Division III. The general hypothesis is that student-athlete interactions with faculty are different from those of non-athletes. In addition, the academic success of student-athletes is impacted by factors such as athletic identity, and institutional and departmental support programs.

Division III student-athletes at three Northeastern institutions completed web-based surveys providing data in the following areas: a) demographic information; b) faculty interactions; c) student-athlete perceptions; d) athletic identity; and e) academic support services. Following initial analysis of the survey data, focus groups were held at each campus to collect additional qualitative data on key issues.

Initial results indicated that participants strongly identified with their athletic roles particularly in social contexts. Faculty interactions with student-athletes were generally positive, however a significant negative relationship was found between GPA and student perceptions of these relationships. Descriptive data revealed incidents of perceived discrimination towards student-athletes (19%) and negative responses to requests for accommodations related to athletic participation (28%). Student-athletes across all sports recognized the importance of faculty in providing academic advising support; however few student-athletes reported regular interaction outside the classroom setting. Teammates were also recognized as providing significant levels of academic advice.

From a practical standpoint, these results offer value to university personnel in providing further understanding of the perceptions of student-athletes. It also provides a platform on which to

develop and/or strengthen programs aimed at increasing student-athlete success in Division III. Qualitative and quantitative research findings will be discussed and along with recommendations.