

The Impact of Organizational Culture on the Graduation Rates of HBCU Athletes

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Increasing the graduation rates of student athletes is one of the more visible NCAA academic goals. Overall student-athlete graduation rates have improved significantly among many institutional members. However, Historically Black College and University (HBCU) student-athlete graduation rates lag considerably behind. Although the NCAA identified a causal relationship exists between lack of economic resources and lower student-athlete graduation rate for HBCUs, correlational analysis within Division I HBCUs indicates no relationship between overall per student academic spending and the student-athlete graduation rates. Seeking an additional explanation for the disparate graduation rates, this NCAA grant funded case study examined the organizational culture of an HBCU athletic department with an exceptionally high student-athlete graduation rate. Framework for the study is based on historical research connecting performance to culture and understanding how culture is transmitted through socialization. A modified model based on Wiedman's (1989) undergraduate model of socialization was utilized as a conceptual framework.

Results indicate that a congruent culture emphasizing academics exists and thrives in the organization studied. Administrators, coaches, and student-athletes express a strong belief in the necessity to excel in academics and in athletics. They embrace and enact four core organizational values that serve as impetus for a positive academic culture: commitment, competition, compassion, and citizenship development. The culture originates with and is sustained by visionary leaders who ensure with purposeful design that like-minded staff socialize student-athletes into the culture. Emerging from the research data, key interacting components of the positive academic culture at this exemplary organization surface to create a model: strong visionary leadership, positive core values, purposeful design, caring individuals, walking the walk. Systematic consideration for all values, cultural content and socialization processes is the applicable lesson for similar organizations provided by the emergent data.

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