

How to Build a Winning Climate in Academic Support Services

Dr. Lee A. McElroy
Assistant Athletic Director
University of Houston

The theme of the 80's for intercollegiate athletics programs is academic integrity. For those of us in the area of academic support services, the academic integrity issue translates into a major emphasis on the academic path of student-athletes. The function of academic support services has evolved from the retention of eligibility for student-athletes to the academic development and progress. Are we equipped to meet this colossal challenge or will we simply reinvent the wheel?

The recent growth and proliferation of academic support services has paralleled the emphasis on academic integrity and the quality of academic support services offered student-athletes. Underwood (1984) asserted that academic support services is the key determinant in the overall success of the student-athlete. Professionals in the field of academic support services can readily identify the qualities required to operate an effective academic support program. A few of these attributes are: outreach services, personnel, coaches support, objectives, fiscal resources, and recruiting. One quality that is seldom mentioned is Organizational Climate.

One of the more accurate mechanisms for gauging the effectiveness of a program is the Organizational Climate. Pritchard and Karasick (1973) defined Organizational Climate as "a relatively enduring quality of an organization's internal environment distinguishing it from other organizations which (a) results from behavior and policies of members of the organization, (b) is perceived by members of the organization, (c) serves as a basis for interpreting the situation, and (d) acts as a source of pressure for directing activity." One can conclude from this definitive statement that the behavior of members in the organization is influenced through Organizational Climate.

Organizational Climate impacts the direction and outcome of the organization. Before we can attain some measure of success in the academic

support services area, the Organizational Climate must be designed to facilitate organizational effectiveness and to permeate the total Athletics program. Once the ingredients are included in the operational activities of academic support services, Organizational Climate will become a major factor in determining the framework for the student-athlete's academic success.

There are several elements which comprise an effective Organizational Climate. For the academic support services program to attain a measure of effectiveness, these qualities should become woven into the program's functional activities. There are five key elements in the Organizational Climate Construct:

1. **Commitment.** Academic support services must be organized through commitment. Professionals in the field must demonstrate commitment in spirit and operational activities. Commitment comes in the form of attitudes, promotion of goals, and dissemination of results. In short, commitment is difficult to measure if academic support service officials do not consistently highlight and visualize the results and direction of their program.
2. **Enthusiasm.** The academic support program must have infectious enthusiasm. Most successful academic support programs will organize activities to express the zest and excitement of the contributions made to the lives of student-athletes. Words, symbols and articulation of student-athlete academic achievement should become standard procedure. Academic support services professionals must believe in people and believe that people like to be around people and share the celebration of success.
3. **Vision.** A vision must be developed of a desired future state with key members of the academic support services network. Athletic administrators and coaches must be mobilized to support this vision. Academic support professionals must communicate their vision consistently and with fervor.
4. **Values.** An academic support program must have a sound set of beliefs on which it bases all its policies and actions. A guiding principle is that each student-athlete has the capacity to encounter a successful educational experience as a result of participation in your academic support program. Once the values are firmly in place, a consistent channel of communication is essential to maintain the effectiveness of your program.
5. **Structure.** A key premise to guide your thinking on structure is to "Keep it Simple Stupid (Kiss)." Structure in the academic support area must embrace creativity, informality, competence, systematic planning, and assessment. The design and implementation of structure into the academic

support program greatly increases the opportunity for the attainment of successful results.

Organizational Climate has seldom been considered as a key variable in the efficient operation of academic support service activities. Obviously, administrative support and human and fiscal resources are essential variables in the academic support program. With the intensity and pressure of academic integrity expanding at a rapid rate, academic support service professionals must incorporate Organizational Climate as a key component in their quest to enhance the academic success of student-athletes.

REFERENCES

Pritchard, Robert D. and Karasick, Bernard W. "The Effects of Organizational Climate on Managerial Job Performance and Job Satisfaction." *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*. (1973) pp. 126-146.

Underwood, Clarence. *The Student-Athlete: Eligibility and Academic Integrity*. Michigan State Press, 1984.