

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS: A NURTURING COLLABORATION

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ABSTRACT

Student-athletes must meet the demands of the NCAA regulations known as Propositions 48, 42, and 16 to be eligible for athletic scholarships. University libraries can develop nurturing relationships with athletic departments. This article describes how College Library at the University of Wisconsin, Madison helps with recruitment of "at-risk" student-athletes through precollege outreach programs and with retention by initiating contact and by presenting library user skill modules for student-athletes.

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities have revenue-generating sports such as football and men's basketball as an integral part of the educational system. Since the 1980's, there has been severe criticism of intercollegiate athletics based on graduation rates of student-athletes. Many consider the hyphenated term "student-athlete" inherently contradictory since they find that the "athlete" part often outweighs the "student" part (Ross, 1983). Educators and the public became greatly concerned when they learned that only a low percentage of student-athletes graduate. For example, it was found (Blum, 1992) that a graduation rate of only 36.4 percent accounts for all scholarship athletes who entered the University of Central Florida as freshmen in 1983 and 1984 and graduated within six years.

Criticism is harsher about the graduation rates of African American student-athletes who represent a large percentage of football and men's basketball players. In 1989, even though African Americans received only 10 percent of all college athletic scholarships awarded, they represented 52 percent of all Division I men's basketball players and 36 percent of its football players (Ashe, 1989). According to Richard Lapchik at Northeastern University's Center for the Study of Sport in Society (cited in Ashe, 1989), 80-85 percent of

African American football and men's basketball players never graduate from college.

This article will explore the effect of Propositions 48, 42, and 16 as well as the "Student 'Right To Know' Bill" on the eligibility of African American student-athletes for athletic scholarships. Then, it will show how academic libraries can help in the recruitment and retention of these "at risk" African American student-athletes. It will focus on the importance of building a nurturing collaboration between academic libraries and athletic departments (especially the academic counseling sections) to assist student-athletes in keeping their academic eligibility by using the electronic library. The University of Wisconsin's College Library program for student-athletes is described as a model for developing such relationships between university libraries and athletic departments. The article will conclude by explaining how such a collaboration between academic libraries and athletics helps everyone.

REGULATIONS FOR REFORM

The public outcry about the low graduation rates of student-athletes has resulted in Congressional and NCAA efforts to take remedial steps. The "Student 'Right To Know' Bill" requires colleges and universities awarding athletic scholarships to disclose annually the graduation rates, broken down by race and sex, of the students who received such aid. This landmark legislation was designed to make it easier for student-athletes to assess their prospects for obtaining a degree at any given school (Angle, 1993).

Proposition 48 (P48) was enacted by the NCAA as an initial step in reforming the state of intercollegiate athletics by mandating certain minimum requirements for high school coursework and grades as well as a minimum score on a standardized test (Jesudason, 1991). Despite its restrictive requirements, P48 provided a loophole of sorts—a "partial eligibility" clause which allowed student-athletes who did not meet all its requirements to be recruited on athletic scholarships but to sit out their freshman seasons. To close this loophole, the NCAA passed another ruling named Proposition 42 (P42), stating that student-athletes cannot receive any financial aid if they do not meet all the requirements of P48 (Jesudason, 1990). A new reform, Proposition 16 (P16), has been enacted to tighten the admissions requirement and will become effective in August 1995 (Lederman, 1993).

CRITICISMS AGAINST PROPOSITIONS 48, 42, AND 16

Severe criticism has been leveled against all three propositions. One outspoken critic of P48 is Joseph P. Johnson, President of Grambling State University, who argues that an NCAA survey proved P48 is a racist rule instituted by racist people intent on denying black students an education (cited in Farrell, 1987). According to the Knight Foundation Report issued in 1990, 86.5 percent of the football and men's basketball players who have been affected by P48 are African Americans (cited in Wiley, 1991).

Most of the uproar has centered on the NCAA's use of standardized test scores as an absolute cut-off for eligibility. African American coaches argue that the tests are culturally biased, while testing company officials insist that their tests were never intended to serve that function (Lederman, 1991). Many African American student-athletes come from backgrounds in which drugs, poverty, large families, violence, and fatherless homes are a way of life. Disparities in the way of life and educational facilities are reflected by Kelly C. Richards (personal communication, November 11, 1992), an African American library science student at the University of Pittsburgh:

I was raised in a city of about 150,000 people that is about 60% African American. I was raised in an all-black neighborhood and the only time I saw any white people were my teachers in school. I can't remember a time when I was told to go to the library or taken to the library by the teacher in elementary school. . . . In class, I am astonished at the amount of the white students who read some of these books when they were kids and the teachers in my class that assign these books to their 6th grade classes.

Harry Edwards (1983), a sociologist at the University of California, Berkeley argues that the issue centers on the controversy over the parity between black and white institutions involved in the collegiate athletic race. Edwards insists that measures such as the SAT and ACT discriminate principally on the basis of social class, not on the basis of race. He also contends that class-specific values can be learned and that the test standards should be set as post-enrollment goals and not as pre-enrollment obstacles. Temple University head men's basketball coach John Chaney (Davis, 1992) vehemently opposes all three propositions, calling this a game between "the haves and the have-nots:"

What it [all propositions] would mean is that a youngster would have to pay his way to go to school or we end up without him. The only chance for the small school is to get the hell out of the NCAA. That's the only chance they've got. All of the black schools should get out and some of the other small schools should get out of the NCAA. Just formulate their own policies. (p. 10C)

Both Harry Edwards and Arthur Ashe, the renowned African American tennis player, contend that setting up academic standards for admission with athletic scholarships sends the right message to prospective student-athletes. They need their education just as much as any other student on campus for life after their college days. Myles Gordon (1992) states that many high school student-athletes think that they are going to be the next Michael Jordan or Barry Sanders and adds that the chances of a high school athlete getting to the pros are 1 in 10,000. Ashe (1989) points out the cold hard facts that, of the roughly 5.5 million high school varsity and junior varsity athletes, about 1 in 50 will make a college team and 1 in 1000 will sign a professional contract. Ashe also predicts that the ratio of African American male varsity athletes in football and basketball as compared to the total number of African American males in

college will rise within five years in spite of P48 and P42 because African American high school student-athletes will finally realize that their grade point averages are more important than their points-per-game average.

HOW LIBRARIES AID RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Recruitment

Since all three propositions aim at academic preparation with required grade point averages in high school and certain scores at or above a required minimum on standardized tests, it has become necessary for academic librarians to do outreach programs to high school "at risk" students as well as academically excellent ones. In addition, as part of the educational reform in the 1990's, outreach programs at colleges and universities seek out "at risk" school populations at an earlier age. It is also part of some strategic planning at the national level, as reflected in various reports from the United States Department of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, to keep the work force in the year 2000 literate and productive in the global market when one-third of United States employees will be minorities. It has been found that the earlier the outreach, the better the chances are of helping students with their grades. Academic libraries are beginning to be team players in outreach programs to middle schools.

The College Library at the University of Wisconsin, Madison provides a library user skills module for many outreach programs such as Upward Bound, Academic Advancement Program, and Summer College Experience Programs. These are special summer programs for students, grades 6 through 12, in target minority groups, namely African American, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Southeast Asian Americans (Hmong, Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese). Some programs are residential and others non-residential; the programs vary in the length of time that students spend on campus. Librarians in the College Library work with the coordinators of these programs and arrange for students to attend library orientation tours and use self-instructional library skills worksheets.

The library skills module consists of 90 minutes of locational tour and hands-on exercises to familiarize students with on-line computer catalogs for books on Network Library System (NLS) and periodical indexes in CD-ROM (Computer Disc-Read Only Memory) for magazine and journal articles. This module teaches students the basic library search strategy using author, title, subject, and keyword searches. The library orientation tour and hands-on exercises using the computers are designed to achieve the following five goals:

(1) An understanding that academic libraries are user-friendly and not discipline-oriented areas in colleges and universities.

(2) Knowledge of the many service desks such as Reference, Information, Circulation, Media, and Microcomputers.

(3) Awareness of special collections in areas such as ethnic studies, women's studies, careers, and recreational reading.

(4) Familiarity with various aspects of library research on their own, encouraging them to build independent study skills and thus their self-esteem.

(5) Consideration of attending this university which has such rich library resources to help them excel academically.

Retention

For many reasons, a large number of minority student-athletes are admitted to colleges and universities ill-prepared to meet the academic demands of the institutions they have chosen. To help these student-athletes meet such rigorous academic standards, there is a need for a network of support services in addition to the individual tutoring provided by athletic departments. These support networks consist of tutoring programs in areas such as mathematics, chemistry, and other subject departments; term paper counseling; study skills; and library skills workshops offered by academic libraries. Student-athletes are at times not able to take advantage of these workshops because of their practice and competition schedules, so special efforts are needed to see that opportunities offered to other students to enhance their academic acumen are also offered to student-athletes at convenient times. Academic libraries play an important role as one of the support services to help student-athletes excel academically.

ONE USER EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

Most people will agree that during recent decades there has been an explosion of knowledge and that to be able to graduate by using the rich resources of colleges and universities, students need to be library-literate in the electronic libraries of this decade. To achieve the goal of making student-athletes library-literate, the first step is collaboration between academic libraries and athletic departments.

At the University of Wisconsin, Madison, arrangements for library user education classes for football players start even before the end of their summer practice session. This schedule was initiated by the librarians and athletic academic advisors in 1985. Early in September each year, the librarian and athletic advisor negotiate a suitable date for the class to begin.

For sports other than football, a brochure entitled "Library Instruction: A Guide for Coaches" is sent to the coordinator of athletic advisors for distribution. The body of the brochure explains how library user skills are needed to maintain academic eligibility under P48. This is followed by a description of the basic library skills or course-related instruction, giving various components to choose from: (1) learning to use computer catalogs to find books, magazine or journal articles, and newspapers; (2) individual

counseling on researching term papers; and (3) learning the library search strategy. The fourth page is a tear-off sheet with the name of the coach/contact person, office phone number, best time to call, preferred date and time for classes, alternate date and time, number of students, preferred components to be covered in the library user education class, and the address to which the tear-off sheet is to be returned. The library education coordinator then assigns the classes to librarians on the days that classes are requested by the athletic department and academic advisor.

Library user education modules are scheduled for student-athletes from 7:30 PM to 9:00 PM since they are in practice during the early afternoon hours. Only librarians who are willing to volunteer for after-hours library skills classes and who believe in the need to help student-athletes as a special group are encouraged to participate in this program. These librarians must also understand the group dynamics among student-athletes who spend numerous hours together and hence "jive and josh" around, unlike students in course-related classes who sit quietly and listen to the presentation. Class sessions for student-athletes may at times appear to be boisterous. Librarians who are used to orderly and quiet participation by students may find classes for student-athletes to be different.

At the beginning of the fall semester, the student-athletes are sent as a group with a monitor for their study hall in the athletic facility. Usually two groups of 10-15 students each attend the library skills classes; each group has two sessions, and each session lasts one hour. The first session is comprised of basic steps in library search strategy, library survival tips, and using the on-line computer catalog to find books by author, title, subject, and keyword searches. The computer catalog search skills are taught using a microcomputer and a crystal display panel to project the computer screen display on the screen while the librarian does a search for a book using author, title, keyword, or subject access. The student-athletes are given a worksheet to search for books on football and other athletics-related topics to keep their interest levels high while searching. It takes about 30 minutes to do the hands-on exercises and locate a title on the shelf using the call number.

The second session is held on the third day from 7:30 to 8:30 PM and covers how to find relevant articles using CD-ROM periodical indexes. Student-athletes are taught Boolean strategy using the connector words "and" or "or;" they prepare sets of concepts and combine sets. They are also taught the mechanics of using the PROQUEST full text database and print out full articles or find them in print in the various libraries.

At present, because student-athletes have little free time, the library at times has combined both sessions into a single session of ninety minutes. The hands-on session at CD-ROM indexes is left to the discretion of the student-athletes to complete on their own at a later date.

The library and the athletic department have worked out an arrangement of passes for football players to be excused from monitored study

hall to use the library. This is usually done when the players need to give speeches or write term papers for their subject courses. It is another effort to integrate student-athletes with the student population which uses the library frequently with ease for studying or for library research. College Library also conducts sessions for basketball, soccer, and volleyball players when their academic advisors request such classes.

The two instructional sessions help student-athletes feel confident of their skills in finding library resources like any other student. They feel that they do not stand out as "dumb jocks," and they learn to approach the librarians for help without hesitation. Thus, the librarians and libraries build a nurturing relationship with student-athletes and the athletic department.

RATIONALE FOR THIS COLLABORATION

For student-athletes, like other students on campus, graduation is crucial in order to lead a meaningful, financially comfortable life after college days. Frequent visits to the library help with getting better grades and improving the ability to graduate. There is also the additional advantage of integrating student-athletes with the rest of the student population on campus by their frequent visits to the library for research and preparation for classes. For minority children in elementary, middle, and high schools aspiring to go to college, student-athletes on campus will be excellent role models with their good academic and athletic skills and continue in that role as productive citizens in society after graduation.

For institutions, the athletic skills of student-athletes bring prestige and rank in the sports world. But the graduation rates of student-athletes give a sense of pride to the athletic departments of the colleges and universities, making them feel that they have met their obligation to the student-athletes who work so hard to meet the departments' expectations athletically. When critics raise questions about the graduation rates of student-athletes, such library user education programs bring prestige to institutions for their commitment to helping in every possible way all its students, including student-athletes, to graduate. Libraries are recognized for their assistance in achieving some of the goals of their parent institutions, namely, minority recruitment and retention plus an increase in the graduation rates of student-athletes. Such programs also give a sense of pride to the athletic departments and other support services by helping a segment of the "at risk" student population to graduate and become contributing citizens of society, since, according to the American Library Association (1990), "the society, at large, gains when we send student-athletes information literate into the world to cancel out their traditional 'dumb jock' image." Yet because of the current explosion of knowledge, it is important for all students (and perhaps especially student-athletes) to be information literate:

Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how information is organized, how to find information, and how to use information in

such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand. (Mensching, 1988, p. 95)

CONCLUSION

With Propositions 48 and 42 implemented and Proposition 16 becoming effective in August 1995, it becomes crucial that college and university athletic departments build collaborative programs with academic support services such as libraries to help student-athletes (and especially "at risk" groups) upgrade their academic skills and earn at least the minimum required grade point average to be eligible for athletic scholarships. Most prospective "at risk" student-athletes cannot otherwise afford to attend college because of their low socioeconomic status. Such programs will help in the recruitment of student-athletes, and continued support of libraries will help not only with the retention of student-athletes, but also with increasing the graduation rates of minority student-athletes. Academic libraries fulfill a nurturing role in support of their universities' athletic programs.

This article is written with the hope that other colleges and universities will be able to use the library user education program for student-athletes at the University of Wisconsin, Madison as a model for developing their own programs to increase the graduation rates of their student-athletes. It is also hoped that successful programs will be shared with others so that academic libraries can modify their programs to meet the changes and challenges of electronic libraries in the decades to come.

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