

A Model of Career Development for Student-Athletes

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines a comprehensive career development model for student-athletes that is currently being utilized at a major research university in the Midwest. The model consists of six components: (1) Introduction and Orientation; (2) Self-Assessment; (3) Decision Making; (4) Educational, Occupational, and Community Information; (5) Preparation for Work, Leisure, and Retirement; and (6) Research and Evaluation. Implications for personal, academic, and career counseling professionals and educational institutions are also discussed.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

Student-athletes are receiving greater attention as issues and concerns related to their personal, academic, and career development become more prominent. Our society is challenging educational institutions at all levels to become more accountable to the academic interests of athletes. Some institutions have begun to design programs that attempt to address the special needs of this population. At Purdue University, the athletic department is beginning to explore comprehensive career development programming as a mechanism for facilitating the success of student-athletes.

STRATEGIES: A Model of Career Development for Student-Athletes (Coleman and Barker, 1990) was designed to meet the personal, academic, and career concerns of student-athletes at Purdue University.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature on the personal and career development of student-athletes does exist. Chartrand and Leng (1987) discussed the growing concern among academic administrators and student affairs professionals for the academic and personal development of student-athletes. Sparent (1985) indicated the need for developing an understanding of the links between the students' academic world and their athletic work. That academic counselors are assuming greater responsibility in the career development of student-athletes was discussed by Maud and Fletcher (1986).

Phelps (1982) discussed the growing criticism of procedures that result in student-athletes being dumped into society with no marketable skills and recommended extensive vocational counseling.

Research by Kennedy and Dimick (1987) suggested that student-athletes have lower career maturity than the general student population. Petitpas and Champagne (1988) also state this may be because the students' sports provide them with strong enough identities that they may not engage in the exploratory behavior necessary for career and personal development.

However, as long ago as 1976, McFarland found that student-athletes showed significant academic improvement after a career counseling program. Nelson (1982) had similar results.

There is not much literature on programs that help student-athletes with their academic and career concerns. A guide was developed by Schwartz (1988) to help student-athletes relate their skills to the world of work, and Petitpas and Schwartz (1990) have designed a model to help student-athletes identify their transferable skills.

Gurney, Robinson, and Fygetakis (1983) conducted a survey of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I schools and found that staffing and academic support services for student-athletes, when they existed, often used untrained staff and inadequate programs.

While the literature reflects a growing awareness of the uniqueness of career programs for student-athletes, it is also clear that much remains to be developed and researched. With the reforms and changes in policy established by the NCAA at its 1991 annual meeting, more comprehensive programs for student-athletes are imperative.

BARRIERS TO THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT-ATHLETES

Student-athletes often encounter barriers to their career development. Barriers may include low self-esteem, inappropriate decision making skills, and lack of information. Coleman (1989) has identified several barriers and categorized them as internal or external. Internal barriers are related to the self,

while external barriers tend to focus on the environment. Some internal and external barriers are highlighted below.

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| Internal barriers: | Low self-esteem
Lack of confidence
Fear of failure and/or success
Level of career maturity
Inappropriate decision making skills
Lack of marketable skills
Lack of previous work experience
Lack of information |
| External barriers: | Few role models
Lack of mentors
Stereotypes
Racism and discrimination
Family expectations
Societal expectations
Socioeconomic status
Inadequate educational preparation
Lack of career/vocational guidance
Ethnic background of counselor
Conceptualization of work ethic
Peer pressure to adapt to a particular norm |

It is important for counselors and other professionals who work with student-athletes to determine to what extent these barriers are adversely impacting on the career development of student-athletes. By making appropriate interventions, professionals will be better able to facilitate the career development of student-athletes.

STRATEGIES

STRATEGIES: A Model of Career Development for Student-Athletes (Coleman and Barker, 1990) was initially implemented with the men's basketball team at Purdue University. Methodologies and techniques utilized for implementation include individual and group counseling, workshops and seminars, and frequent consultation with the coaching staff. Long-term goals are to implement the career development program for each of the sixteen varsity sports at Purdue.

The model program at Purdue includes six components: (1) Introduction/Orientation; (2) Self-Assessment; (3) Decision Making; (4) Educational, Occupational, and Community Information; (5) Preparation for Work, Leisure, and Retirement; and (6) Research and Evaluation. Each component is discussed in detail below.

Introduction and Orientation

The purpose of this component is to introduce the concept and process of career development and to provide a working definition. Career development is defined as an ongoing, lifelong process, beginning at birth and continuing throughout life. It focuses on the acquisition of information and skills about self and the world of work. Career development is different from the traditional definition of career education/vocational guidance in that the goal of career development is to facilitate the self-actualization of the individual, rather than to respond directly to labor market demands. Career development is an integral component of academic, athletic, and personal endeavors.

Self-Assessment

In this component, the foundation of the career development process, one carefully examines four personal variables (values, interests, abilities, and personality) as they relate to career development. Values are significant in that when one chooses a career, one is choosing a value system and a lifestyle. Not only are vocational interests explored, but also avocational interests, i.e., what does one like to do for fun? Abilities, achievements, and accomplishments are important, along with the type of personality.

Academic assessment with respect to intelligence, learning styles, academic deficiencies, and cultural influences is determined in relationship to the aforementioned personal factors. From the academic and personal information, an individual learning plan is designed and correlated with athletic performance.

All of this information should assist an individual in responding appropriately to the question, "Who am I?" Coleman (1989) believes that self-assessment is the most critical element in the career development process.

Decision Making

Decision making is also a critical component and is a skill that can be learned. Principles, strategies, and styles are explored, with particular emphasis being placed on the student-athlete's strategies and styles. The authors do not suggest that one strategy or style is better than another, but that any given strategy or style may afford one the opportunity to make positive, satisfying, and appropriate decisions. For example, individuals may utilize one strategy for career decisions, another strategy for decisions related to the family, and yet a third for decisions involving their athletic performance.

Educational, Occupational, and Community Information

Educational, occupational, and community information relates to the identification of occupational and professional opportunities for the 1990's and the 21st century and includes the educational requirements to pursue those opportunities. Resources such as educational institutions, business and industry,

fraternal and athletic organizations, alumni, and community agencies are highlighted for their contributions to the career development process.

Preparation for Work, Leisure, and Retirement

This component focuses on the nuts and bolts of the job search, such as resume preparation, interviewing, and job maintenance skills. As leisure becomes more prominent in one's life, a discussion of the importance of recreational activities is included. With an increased life span and with retirement assuming a different role in one's life, it is apparent that one can also prepare for that life stage. Student-athletes must understand that their athletic skills and talents are transferable to other career and recreational opportunities.

Research and Evaluation

Research and evaluation are essential components of the career development model for student-athletes. The authors examine the self-esteem, vocational maturity, and decision making skills of student-athletes, utilizing a pre-/post-test methodology (i.e., pre-season versus post-season). The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (Roid and Fitts, 1988) is used to measure self-esteem; the Attitude Scale of the Career Maturity Inventory (Crites, 1973) measures vocational maturity; the Problem Solving Inventory (Heppner, 1988) examines the student-athletes' decision making skills.

DISCUSSION

There are significant implications for personal, academic, and career counselors who want to affect the success of student-athletes. Implications related to counseling, training, research, program development, and policy are discussed below.

Counseling

It is apparent that student-athletes require personal, academic, and career counseling in order to facilitate their success in higher education and in the work force following their graduation from college or the conclusion of their academic careers. Colleges and universities must take the initiative and responsibility for establishing and implementing programs that provide the necessary support systems for this special population.

Training

The authors strongly recommend that individuals who plan to provide services for student-athletes receive specialized training in order to work with this population. Since student-athletes have special issues, needs, and concerns, traditional training in counseling and related areas may not be sufficient. Of particular interest is training in multicultural relations and cross-cultural

communication, since an increasing number of student-athletes come from diverse, multicultural backgrounds. Counselor-educators should consider the expansion of curricula to include the study and examination of special populations, especially the student-athletes.

Research

Opportunities for research are abundant, and there is considerable need for research related to student-athletes. While literature does exist, there is a dearth of research related to the concerns of student-athletes and their success in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. New paradigms and models must be created and designed in order to facilitate and incorporate a better understanding of student-athletes. Developmental problems, the effects of academic and psychological support services, and the intensity of cross-cultural training are but a few of the topics requiring further investigation.

Program Development

The literature indicates that programs related to the issues, needs, and concerns of student-athletes can have a significant impact on their personal, academic, and career development. However, there is still a tremendous void in this area; counseling and development professionals should critically examine their roles in designing personal, academic, and career counseling programs for student-athletes.

Policy

As the NCAA, colleges, and universities across the nation become more involved in establishing legislation, policy, and guidelines for student-athletes, professionals who work with this population must take an active role in advocating specific policies for this special group. Counseling and development personnel possess the knowledge, skills, and talents to influence the policies that will affect student-athletes.

Academia and athletics are facing new challenges for the 1990's and the 21st century as the public is demanding more accountability from educational institutions. Consequently, there is a growing institutional response to the special needs of student-athletes and an acceptance of the concept that solely addressing academics is inappropriate. Holistic approaches and comprehensive models like STRATEGIES allow student-athletes to build on those skills that have contributed to present successes while addressing those areas that are problematic. Accordingly, the task of improving the quality of personal, academic, and career services for student-athletes is an institutional responsibility.

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