

# **THE STUDENT-ATHLETE LIFE/CAREER PORTFOLIO: A MULTIFACETED APPROACH TO LIFE AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The student-athlete life/career portfolio is a process that develops reflective practice and allows for an in-depth portrayal of the experiences of each person as an individual and an athlete. The contents of the life/career portfolio provide a unique document that is far more illustrative of an individual's abilities and achievements than the traditional resume.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Issues and concerns plaguing the student-athlete have been well documented (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993; Lanning, 1982; Petitpas & Champagne, 1988;). These problems involve a cadre of developmental issues (identity, personal competence, career planning) that cover the life span of the student-athlete (Jordan & Denson, 1990; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Wooten, 1994).

Coleman (1961) first identified potential developmental difficulties when he reported on the centrality of athletics in developing adolescent peer groups. Since that time, researchers (Goldberg, 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990) have described the transitional, academic, and developmental difficulties that result from over-identification with sports. As a result, athletes are often plagued with issues concerning reconstructing an identity outside athletics,

developing personal competencies, and developing career/life plans for when the "game is over."

Many career and transitional programs have been designed which address the aforementioned problems of student-athletes (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Danish, D'Augelli, & Ginsburg, 1984; Wooten & Hinkle, 1991). However, the typical approach is a "one shot" career planning program. These programs cover a plethora of topics that include self and world of work knowledge as well as decision-making skills. While occupationally-focused crash courses are a good introduction, they fall short when student-athletes' problems are more developmental in scope.

One method to expand the focus and duration of the career/life exploration process is the student-athlete life/career portfolio. This article is designed to provide an introduction to the development and application of that portfolio.

### WHAT IS A STUDENT-ATHLETE LIFE/CAREER PORTFOLIO?

Portfolios have been used historically in the fields of music, art, and drama, and more recently in the fields of teacher education, graduate education, and business. The portfolio concept is one that allows an individual, through a selection of representative work, to demonstrate competencies and accomplishments as well as reflections of these experiences. Portfolio development emerges over time, capturing the complexities of the students during their collegiate experience. Thus, the portfolio is analogous to a picture album with "snapshots" depicting the growth and development of the student-athletes.

The portfolio as a process develops reflective practice and allows for an in-depth portrayal of each person's experiences. The content of the portfolio provides evidence that is far more illustrative of the individual's abilities and achievements than the traditional resume.

The focus of a life/career portfolio for student-athletes can be facilitated to engage the process of self-definition both inside and outside the athletic milieu. Researchers (Goldberg, 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Petitpas, 1978) have outlined the deficits of individuals who over-identify with sports and as a result have foreclosed on age-appropriate exploratory activities. The portfolio concept can set into motion developmental changes in identity, competence, relationships, and different conceptions of self. The process facilitates self-reflection and critical analysis by way of sequenced assignments, journal writing, group work, and reflection. By constructing a running commentary of work done over each semester and by meeting periodically with an academic athletic adviser, student-athletes can study the parts of the portfolio (e.g., self-assessment and analysis, field of study, decision-making) to understand what meaning these components have, how they work in everyday life and in the future, and why they might be important.

### WHY CONSTRUCT THE PORTFOLIO?

Reasons for constructing the student-athlete life/career portfolio vary according to the wants and needs of the student-athletes, programming coordinator, academic and sports counselors, and athletic department. In the case of student-athletes, a life/career development portfolio could provide a comprehensive and integrated view of human growth and development over their life span. This approach addresses the developmental issues such as identity, competencies, and career planning that are often deemed deficient in student-athletes. The life/career development perspective provides a framework to develop life and career consciousness. This awareness allows student-athletes to explore the possibilities of new identities, develop new competencies, plan short- and long-range goals, and make decisions based on new data. The portfolio process of life/career development is a holistic approach to development that recognizes the interactive nature of all aspects of a person's life.

Furthermore, with a general life/career focus, pertinent mental health issues can arise from this process. Corbishley and Yost (1989) suggested that during the career development process certain issues and concerns (e.g., low self-esteem, cognitive dysfunctions, ineffective coping styles, unsatisfactory relationships) cannot be ignored because they may interfere with the life/career goals and process. These issues and concerns, in turn, can be simultaneously integrated into the life/career development portfolio process. Through reflection, self-awareness, understanding, and enhanced personal competence, student-athletes can learn new ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling. They can come to understand that changes due to the life/career portfolio process will result in changes in other parts of their lives.

A life/career portfolio, developed over time, integrates an individual's life roles and explores various aspects of life to discover sources of satisfaction that heretofore may have been neglected. A multifaceted approach expands the possibility of personal choice to include occupational, social, personal, educational, and leisure interests.

### INFORMATION NEEDED FOR THE PORTFOLIO

The student-athlete life/career portfolio should be designed initially to collect the information needed to address fairly broad areas, including educational and academic experiences, athletic experiences, career development, and self-improvement. After sufficient time is spent on collection and reflection, student-athletes may develop more specific areas of concentration within the broader areas of development. For example, a student-athlete might have aspirations of becoming a sports journalist. With guidance from the academic athletic adviser, the student-athlete can be directed to investigate personal strengths and weaknesses in this field. If the area of writing continues to be of interest, the student-athlete might focus on the structure and strategies of writing as well as the process of discovery and the

development of ideas. This concentration on good writing, regardless of the class in which it is assigned, demonstrates to potential employers the student-athlete's strengths and commitment.

The basic task is to gather the documentation needed and begin to collate the material that best represents each person. While many sources for potential documentation and reflection can be utilized, the most common are autobiography or lifeline, career and personal inventories, perceived abilities and skills, and personal achievements. The documentation can be kept in a three-ring binder, expandable file, or any other organizational system. Written documents can be stored on computer disk for continuous updating and reflection.

The goals in the collection of documentation and reflection are as follows: (a) to integrate these sources of information in order to help gain insight into the past, present, and future; (b) to help identify strengths and abilities, as well as difficulties or deficits that may impede current or future functioning in the athletic, academic, or occupational world; (c) to develop short- and long-range goals; and (d) to make decisions based on these goals for the next semester, the next year, and the more distant future.

The use of several sources of information can help develop a more accurate picture of each student-athlete. The portfolio provides a rich description of the separate aspects which make up the individual's work and progress. A good portfolio will have not only balance but cohesion. The triangulation of the data from different sources and different methods helps to minimize distortions and leads to a more credible portrayal of the student-athlete.

A typical student-athlete life/career portfolio might include the following elements:

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- \* Title page
- \* Table of contents
- \* Introductory comments

#### II. SELF

- \* Autobiography
- \* Genogram
- \* Cultural and personal values
- \* Life roles
- \* Goals, motives, wants, values
- \* Personality inventories (e.g., MBTI)

- \* Abilities
- \* Aptitude
- \* Achievements

#### III. EDUCATION

- \* Schools attended
- \* Favorite courses and teachers
- \* Special abilities  
(e.g., writing, research, speaking, organizing)
- \* Skills  
(e.g., computer skills)
- \* Achievements  
(e.g., high grades, significant reports, outstanding projects)

#### IV. ATHLETICS

- \* Past athletic achievements as individual and team
- \* Individual goals for future athletic accomplishments
- \* Goals for fitness training

#### V. CAREER

- \* Ideal job description
- \* Volunteer/work achievements
- \* Interests inventory
- \* Work values clarification
- \* Investigation and reflection on occupational information  
(e.g., publications, audio-visual aids, programmed instructional materials)
- \* Direct observation, internship, externship, co-op, information interviews

#### VI. SUMMARY

- \* Setting goals for next term  
(e.g., academic, personal, athletic)

\* Evaluation and reflection on content and process of past term  
(e.g., academic, personal, athletic)

Student-athletes meet with academic athletic advisers, sports counselors, career counselors, or faculty advisers on a periodic basis to discuss and reflect on pertinent issues and concerns. These meetings can include discussion concerning self-appraisal, role-clarification, performance expectations in classroom and sport, and parameters for evaluation. Evaluation of the portfolio can include a self-evaluation by the student-athlete at the end of each semester as to how the expectations of the semester were met. The self-evaluation is a learning process for the student-athlete and also gives the academic athletic adviser feedback on the individual's progress. Student-athletes are accustomed to developing goals and strategies for effective performance in sports and can likely transfer that attitude towards the development of self.

### SUMMARY

Life/career portfolios are good vehicles for discussion in meetings with student-athletes. The portfolios are diagnostic in that they do not develop by chance, but are put together by design. The portfolio process can lend insight into the individual's philosophy, sense of self, motivation and resistance, expectations, and priorities. Feedback can be given to help facilitate readiness, provide motivation, elicit thoughts and feelings, and offer support.

Results of the life/career portfolio process will be unique documents that illustrate the complexities of each student-athlete. As the student-athletes construct their portfolios, their reflections and evidence will mutually illuminate experience, development, and a multifaceted portrayal of their present and future selves. The "one shot" crash course on career planning, the traditional resume, or transcript cannot compare to the construction of the life/career portfolio.

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