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Claudia Powell
University of Washington

Ed Taylor
University of Washington

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Are Institutions of Higher Education Meeting the Needs of African-American Student Athletes? A Comparative Case Study of Student-Athlete Service Programs

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Purpose of Session

Across the United States, African-Americans, particularly males, are over-represented of all students on athletic scholarships in revenue generating sports at colleges and universities in the United States. While these scholarships may assure the institutions a wealth of highly talented athletes, they do not assure a college diploma for the student-athlete. Many of the students who are recruited to play a sport at the university level may be under-prepared for the academic rigors of the institution they will choose to attend. Some students may be capable of the challenges with which they are presented, coupled with the responsibilities of an athletic scholarship, meeting academic standards can be a very difficult task.

Since their inception in high schools and colleges student athletics and student-athletes have been a source of bewilderment and consternation for faculty and administrators. Considerable attention has been paid to the entrenched problems of academic achievement, social status and graduation rates of student athletes, yet the problems in these areas remain entrenched. It would be naive to assume that all high school students are offered an equal education and unrealistic to assume that students will equally take advantage of the educational opportunities they are presented with before college. These factors can lead to student athletes at the university level who are at the academic level of non-athletes. This can create academic disappointment and can be harmful to their self-esteem and their image of themselves as scholars. Students who have never been confident with their academic ability, this immediate lack of validation can be permanently damaging and set the stage for future academic failure.

For student service professionals, professors and coaches this creates an equally challenging task. What is the best way to meet the needs of students who are under prepared without compromising the integrity of the university? Rather than look towards a track of remedial education, under prepared students need more work directly targeted at their deficient areas. Attempting to provide students with more academic instruction brings about an additional set of questions. Who is capable of providing this education and who has the time to work individually with students? Will students be willing to put forth the extra time, energy and effort it takes to make up the deficient areas? Should this be the responsibility of the university? Who is best suited to address the needs of African-

American student-athletes on predominantly white campuses? These are some of the questions that arise when we begin to look at meeting the actual needs of African-American student-athletes.

This session will present data from our study comparing African American student athlete satisfaction and perception of academic services at three universities. Programs will be examined for effectiveness, graduation rates, and academic success. Not only will we look at the graduation rates of different groups of students at universities, but we will also look at the African-American student athletes satisfaction and perception of the services provided. By looking at the overall structure of programs, we will attempt to compare the organizations and determine best practices for meeting the academic and social needs of African American student-athletes at large athletic programs.

Target Audience

This session will be useful to college and university administrators, faculty members and student service professionals. Providing services to student athletes is not limited to student-athlete service professionals. There are many groups on university campuses that should take an interest in the affairs of these students. Officers of multicultural affairs and diversity programs should be directly involved with this group should find this session of interest. This session will also benefit policy makers by providing them with information and a foundation for creating policies that may possibly have an affect on student-athletes.

Content

This session will contain a succinct presentation on three Student-Athlete Service departments and some brief statistics about how these schools compare to universities nationwide. I attempt to examine the philosophies of the different programs and the overall structure of the departments that address the academic needs of student athletes. These facts will be joined with information obtained from interviews with student athletes from different universities. The interviews will uncover some of the underlying feelings of being an athlete at a major university and attempt to find out, from the student's perspective, which services benefit them the most. This section will provide the audience with an actual sense of the student-athlete experience, and will inform the audience about some of the concerns of student-athletes.

Teaching Methods

The primary goal of this session is to generate a discussion of how to best meet the academic needs of African-American student-athletes at the university level. The objectives are: (a) to present a few of the current models for addressing the needs of these students, and to discuss the effectiveness of the models from both the perspective of the student and from the perspective of the university; and (b) to have critical dialogue among the group about the issues surrounding student athletes, and in particular best practices for addressing the academic needs of student-athletes with academic deficiencies.

Because the goal of the session is to generate discussion, the presentation will be brief and will provide the foundation for the discussion that will aim to include professionals in different areas of higher education, and those who develop policy for institutions of higher education. Active participation will be encouraged throughout the conference and will be directly requested during the problem solving session. Questions may be posed throughout the presentation to stimulate audience participation.

PRESENTERS:

Claudia Powell is a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at the University of Washington. Her focus areas include the success of African-American Student-Athletes at predominantly white universities. She was a student-athlete at New Mexico State University while obtaining her B.S. in Special Education.

Ed Taylor is an assistant professor in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. His research includes policies and programs servicing disenfranchised groups in post-secondary settings and the construction of race-based policy. Dr. Taylor recently co-authored an article entitled "Crossing the Color Line: African Americans and Predominantly White Universities" in *College Student Journal* (1996).