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Diversity, Athletics, and Mentoring: Creating New Academic Avenues

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Culture shock, academic stress, making the transition, and high athletic performance expectations are just some of the things student-athletes experience.

Retention of students is a priority for most colleges. Keeping retention as the focus, we have devised a pilot program for retaining at-risk student-athletes in general. A bonus of the program from minority student-athletes' perspective is how it helps dispel specific negative images of small Midwestern colleges as predominantly White institutions which care about their student-athletes only for their athletic ability. When we demonstrate more clearly our commitment to our students as scholars, we can accomplish two goals with one program: retention of at-risk student-athletes and higher graduation rates for minority students. Student-athletes do not live in a vacuum of only athletic friends. If the institution is supportive, they recommend the college to their family and friends. They will relay the message that people care about them as college students with futures and not just as those who perform well on the field. This improves admission possibilities in recruiting students as a whole from far-reaching regions and continues to improve the diverse climate on campus.

Recruiting at-risk athletes lends itself to needing more resources to develop their academic potential. At a small Midwestern college, the majority of the at-risk students are coming from the coasts and larger regional/state cities. The students simultaneously experience culture shock, academic stress, and high athletic performance expectations. All of these stressors add up to the seemingly insurmountable task of success in all of these areas. But, with assistance, each of these components can be dealt with separately and broken down using problem-solving skills. This way, the way the whole student-athlete benefits, not just the student or just the athlete.

Through our observations of student-athletes we have noticed failure is cyclic. When athletes start to feel frustrated on the field, a similar attitude is reflected in the classroom and in relationships (i.e., coach/player). Or if they start feeling frustrated in class work they tend to give up on academics and try harder on the field to compensate. Athletics and academics need to work in tandem, not one in exchange for the other.

In this presentation, we would like to discuss and brainstorm possibilities to stop the cycle of failure in the beginning. We have been using and propose enlarging daily academic tracking and athletic counseling that we hope will provide a systematic, holistic, institutional support system.

PRESENTERS

Lisa Hardaway is a graduate of Wayne State College in Wayne, Neb., where she also is the Academic Athletic Program Mentor. She was a Graduate Assistant for Humanities-English Composition/Literature. Her B.S.E. is in English and physical education with a minor in athletic training.

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