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For Their Own Good: A Case Study of the Rules Governing Student Athletes and the Ways In Which They Disadvantage Students of Color

Mary Ann Cummins Prager

California State University, Northridge

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“A story emerges of student-athletes who trust the institutions to assist them in realizing their dreams, only to find that bureaucratic entanglements may impede their progress toward a degree.”

In responding to public cries to reform college athletics, athletic administrators and the National Collegiate Athletic Association have worked diligently to develop rules that will ensure student-athletes do not obtain special privileges based on their status as athletes. Rules have been developed concerning issues such as outside employment, placement in classes, housing arrangements, and financial aid awards. Meant to ensure fairness to non-athletes and to impede access to athletes by boosters and professional sports teams, these rules some times function as barriers to student-athletes. For student-athletes of color from disadvantaged backgrounds, this tends to be even more true. This presentation—using a case study approach—focuses on the rules related to financial aid as a way of highlighting the unforeseen consequences of well intended actions.

Student-athletes of color coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are dependent on a combination of athletic/scholarships and other forms of financial aid to fund their college dreams. In this session, the impact of scholarship limits, policies governing outside employment and academic placement, as well as NCAA policies guiding residential arrangements are examined. A story emerges of student-athletes who trust the institutions to assist them in realizing their dreams only to find that bureaucratic entanglements may impede their progress toward a degree.

What can be done? In focusing on specific regulations that disadvantage those who most need assistance, the presenters will spotlight the bind in which students find themselves. By analyzing the experiences of student-athletes of color, the presenters hope to identify some possibilities for change. Administrators who supervise athletics and directors of intercollegiate athletic programs are the intended audience for this programs.

PRESENTERS

Mary Ann Cummins Prager has been involved with the administration of athletics on the California State University, Northridge campus for the past five years. She currently is responsible for the athletics budget and oversees the program for academic advisement for student-athletes. In 1992, she coordinated the Blue Ribbon Commission on Athletics at Cal State Northridge which recommended that the program become a full participant in Division I athletics and outlined a budget framework for the future. In 1994, she chaired a

committee which investigated allegations of racism in athletics at the campus.

Cummins Prager holds a Bachelor of Arts in history from Seattle University and is completing her dissertation at the University of California at Los Angeles in fulfillment of the requirements for a doctorate in education.

Audrey Moore, currently the Coordinator of Academic Advisement and Students Affairs for student-athletes at California State University, Northridge, is responsible for addressing the academic and personal needs of student-athletes. Moore joined CSU, Northridge in March of 1993 after serving with the University of Nebraska, Lincoln for three years as an academic counselor.

As an athlete, Moore obtained a Bachelor of Arts in physical education from the University of Redlands, a Master of Science in physical education (Sport Management) from CSU, Fullerton, and is planning to pursue her Ph.D. in clinical psychology.