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April 1996

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Carey, Sylvia R.; Hutchinson, Gladstone A.; Jaudon, Jon W.; Lenoir, Kenya M.; and Robinson, Jo-Ann, "We Think We've Got It: A Holistic Approach To Retaining Black Male Athletes" (1996). *Different Perspectives on Majority Rules (1996)*. 30.

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We Think We've Got It: A Holistic Approach To Retaining Black Male Athletes

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“...the implementation of an aggressive support program for athletes in general, and for athletes in general, and for black male athletes in particular, is the solution to increased retention and graduation rates.”

African American male athletes who enter four year predominately white Division I institutions have a graduation rate of 33% in baseball, 35% in basketball, 36% in track and field, and 38% in football. (Source: 1994 NCAA Division I Graduation Rates Report). These numbers are startling and can only lead one to ask the questions what can be done and what must be done to increase these percentages. Because of the increased media attention to these low graduation rates, the threat of congressional intervention, and the report by the Knight Foundation, there has been movement toward more institutional accountability and responsibility to student athletes as well as a push for higher academic standards. This means institutions and organizations such as the NCAA should provide outreach and support in a more purposeful and intentional manner to meet the needs of student athletes.

The low graduation rates of black male athletes are a result of many factors. A few lose their eligibility because of injury, some decide to transfer to other institutions for social and cultural reasons, or to pursue a better opportunity to advance in their sport. Others come into the system under-prepared and struggle academically to the point of having to withdraw. The latter category, along with those who feel they have no commitment to the institution other than their sport, eventually fail out, drop out, or withdraw. In all of these examples, somewhere along the line the institution failed in retaining these students. Studies show if comprehensive retention efforts are nonexistent, students will not persist to degree completion.

Noel and Levitz (1987) write that colleges and universities need to be more cognizant of the special populations entering higher education and that there needs to be more effort and institutional commitment towards retaining these and all students. Lapchick (1995) also discussed further implications for the African American male athlete in higher education and provided recommendations for college presidents about how to better

manage these affairs on their campuses.

The research cannot be ignored. To this end, the implementation of an aggressive support program for athletes in general, black male athletes in particular, is the solution to increased retention and graduation rates. This paper will discuss in greater detail the need of a structured program. Additionally, the need to have broad campus representation in any effort will be explored. Participants will be provided with an overview of the necessary components of such a program and mechanisms to measure the success of a program.

PRESENTERS

Sylvia R. Carey is the Assistant Dean of the College at Lafayette College in Easton, P A. She holds a B.A. in liberal arts from the State University of New York in Oneonta and a M.S. in social science with a concentration in counseling from the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Dr. Gladstone A. Hutchinson is an Assistant Professor of economics and business at Lafayette College in Easton, P A. A former athlete and scholar in a Division I program at the undergraduate level, he fully understands the elements necessary to successfully graduate scholar athletes.

Jon Jaudon is in his fifth year as a member of the University of Texas at Austin academic support staff and is an academic counselor for football. He earned his B.S. degree in physical education in 1982 and his M.S. in sports administration in 1985, both in Florida.

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Jo-Ann Robinson is currently a Student Affairs Administrator at the University of Texas at Austin. She coordinates a retention program for minority students and athletes and teaches an educational psychology course. She holds a B.S. in psychology, an elementary education Teachers Certification from the State University of New York at Brockport, and a M.S. in social science with a concentration in counseling from the State University of New York at Binghamton.