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Assessment of Student-Athlete Involvement in a University Residence Hall

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the involvement of student-athletes in residence hall communities. Survey results were collected from nine floors of a residence hall center at a large public Midwestern research university. Several significant findings are reported which indicate that student-athletes are not as involved in the life of the residence hall community as non-athletes. Implications of the findings suggest that there may be an opportunity for student affairs professionals to involve student-athletes in the residence halls through increased peer educator programming and through a special emphasis on resident-RA relationships on floors with student-athletes.

Introduction

> An institution may not provide an on-campus or off-campus housing benefit for student-athletes that is not available on the same basis to the general student body. (NCAA Proposal No. 30 as quoted by Sperber, 1990, p. 256)

In January 1991, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) passed Proposal No. 30 on Athletics Housing which phased out the "athletic dorm" as of 1996. One rationale for abolishing the athletic residence hall was to provide student-athletes with a more traditional college experience. The student-athlete population had been isolated from mainstream campus life in the past in order to maintain a more controlled environment, which could cater to their unique needs. In doing so, however, they had not been afforded the benefits of interacting with the general residence hall population.

Now, as a result of the NCAA ruling, coaches like Georgia Tech's Bobby Ross, are saying that athletes, by living in the residence halls with non-athletic students, "relate better to the student body...and the students get to know [the athlete] as more than a number" (Wolff, 1991, p.53). However, Engstrom & Sedlacek (1991) suggest that athletes be considered a part of their own culture with problems unique to their situation.

The student-athlete population appears to be, as a whole, a strongly supported group within the college environment. Student-athletes have a predetermined social group, their teammates or other athletes, within the residence hall. Student-athletes spend much of their time attending classes with other student-athletes and participating in athletic-related activities. Such a situation creates college experiences that are unique to student-athletes (Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Holland (1973) suggests that people with like interests and behaviors will tend to gravitate toward one another; and that people will search for an environment which is consistent with their values.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether student-athletes who lived in the residence halls of a large, public, Midwestern research university

were involved in the general residence hall community. This was accomplished by identifying how student-athletes spent their social and study time and examining their level of participation in residence hall programming and activities. It was hypothesized that student-athletes would not show significant levels of involvement with non-athletes in the residence halls, nor with residence hall activities and programs. Additionally, it was hypothesized that non-athletes would identify student-athletes as a population that was not involved in the residence hall community and might exhibit anti-social behaviors such as violating quiet hours or causing vandalism in the residence hall environment.

This paper begins with a review of the literature regarding the benefits of residence halls on the success and development of student-athletes on campus and how that may conflict with Astin's (1984) notion of student involvement. Next, the methods, limitations, results and discussion of the current study are presented. Finally, implications and conclusions are given with regards to student-athlete involvement on campus.

Literature Review

Residence halls have been shown to have a significant impact on the success and development of college students (Astin, 1984; Chickering, 1993; Thompson, Samiratedu, & Rafter, 1993; Williams & Reilley, 1972). Researchers find that on-campus students show higher performance, greater academic progress, and higher retention than their counterparts who live off-campus (Blimling, 1989; Thompson et al., 1993). Astin (1993) concludes that the experience of first year students in the residence halls is the most important factor associated with graduation and retention rates. Chickering notes that residence hall arrangements are important environmental conditions that affect development. He lists close friendships, contact with important reference groups, and general attitudes and values carried by the hall as environmental factors that impact college student development.

Athletic residence halls are reported to have had both negative and positive attributes. Parker & Reese (1991) point out that some individuals believe that it is best to house all student-athletes together in one location. Some of the reasons for this are that the student-athletes know each other, have similar schedules, possess common motivations and understand each other because of similar day-to-day challenges. However, Parker & Reese also indicate that this type of arrangement may not necessarily be the appropriate answer. Such a system may actually restrict rather than widen the opportunities, perspectives, and alternatives for student-athletes (Remer, Tongate, & Watson, 1978 in Parker & Reese). Claims are also made that student-athletes in athletic housing are more isolated and destructive (Sperber, 1990).

The experience of student-athletes in residence halls can also be viewed negatively in terms of Astin's (1984) theory of involvement. His theory defines student involvement as "...the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, p. 297). Specifically, a

student who is highly involved is one who devotes considerable time studying, spending time on campus, becoming active in student organizations and interacting on a regular basis with faculty members and other students. In simple terms, the more students get involved on campus, the more learning and development they achieve (Astin, 1984).

While involvement is desirable, student-athletes surveyed by Stone & Strange (1989) report less involvement on campus than do non-athletes. Stone & Strange presume this to be the result of the student-athlete's limited time and freedom to explore campus organizations, services, and interactions with faculty. Their research found that "...varsity competition does adversely affect participation in the traditional sources of campus involvement (i.e., clubs and organizations, residence halls, and fraternity/sorority life)" (Stone & Strange, p. 153). Likewise, Lewis (1993) found that student-athletes who have limited contact and low satisfactory interactions with non-athletes are less likely to do well academically. Within the context of Astin's (1984) theory of student involvement, this is problematic.

However, intercollegiate athletic participation can be considered a form of student involvement. Ryan (1989) reports that "...modest, additional benefits are accruing to student participants" (p. 128) who are involved in intercollegiate athletics. Ryan notes that this confirms Astin's notion of student involvement which "attributes beneficial outcomes to high levels of student involvement in various collegiate environments" (Astin, 1984 as cited in Ryan, p. 128).

Residence halls may be the best environments for encouraging involvement among students. They typically have trained live-in professional and paraprofessional resource staff, study lounges, developmental programs, social networks and activities, student organizations, and occasional visits by faculty. Many also have libraries, computer labs, in-room computers, tutoring and advising centers, and other conveniences. Having all of these amenities close at hand paves the way for students to make efficient use of their time, which is, according to Astin (1984), "the most precious institutional resource" (p. 301).

It has been discussed that student-athletes have a much different schedule than non-athletes, which tends to inhibit them from becoming involved with non-athletes. Jordan & Denson (1990) note that student-athletes operate on schedules that have very limited flexibility. Because of this limited flexibility, it is difficult for the student-athlete to find time to interact with non-athletes and attend floor or campus-wide functions. Generally, these student-oriented services occur when student-athletes are in practice or games, and therefore cannot attend. Parham (1993) also mentions that student-athletes simply do not have enough time in the day to fit in all of the activities in which they want to participate. Parham finds that time constraints and the inability to participate in social and leisure activities lead to feelings of estrangement for the student-athlete.

Negative attitudes among the general student population towards student-athletes are an additional obstacle to student-athlete involvement in the residence halls (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). These negative attitudes toward stu-

dent-athletes highlight the need for student-athletes to be involved in the campus community. It is through this involvement, particularly in the residence halls, that non-athletes gain the opportunity to confront and question their stereotypes of student-athletes (Engstrom & Sedlacek).

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were chosen from a single residence hall center at a large public Midwestern research university. Surveys were distributed to 463 students on nine floors of the residence hall and 153 surveys were returned. These nine floors were chosen because of the high percentage of student-athletes in the residence hall, which ranged from 10 to 30% per floor. The participants were 34.6% male and 63.4% female with 2% not responding. In addition, 90.2% of the participants were White, 5.9% Non-White and 3.9% did not respond. Non-White participants include African-American, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Mexican-American, Latino (Hispanic), and others.

Instrumentation

The survey used for gathering the data was drafted specifically for the purposes of this study, although certain items from the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) were used with permission (Pace, 1994). For example, many of the items in sections I and III were borrowed from the CSEQ and modified to fit the present study. In addition, most of the demographic items in section V were taken directly from the CSEQ. The team of investigators drafted the remainder of the instrument.

The survey instrument was pretested to assess its utility in studying student-athlete involvement in the residence hall. Adjustments to the instrument were made based on comments and results from the participants of the pretest. Questions were reworded and the order of sections in the survey was rearranged for better clarity.

Section I of the survey assesses the students' frequency of interactions within the residence hall community. Section II examines the amount of time the student spends engaged in various activities on the floor. Section III of the survey inquires about the participants' perceptions of the involvement of their floor community, and their sense of belonging within that community. Section IV includes eight items designed to reveal the types of students with whom the participants are interacting. Finally, section V reports demographic information.

Analysis

Data from the survey were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, and were computed with the assistance of SPSS 7.5. Sections I, II and III of the survey are numeric data. For these items means and standard deviations were calculated, and significance was determined using t-test analyses. Variables in sections IV and V are categorical and were therefore analyzed using the Chi-square test.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that need to be mentioned. First, although the residence hall was selected because of the high number of athletes living there, there was a low response rate by athletes. In addition, the selection of residence hall floors with higher proportions of varsity athletes living on them may have skewed the results. This is because these athletes had greater opportunities to interact only with other athletes. Unfortunately, this study is not able to draw out those comparisons.

Second, there was an over-sampling of females in the non-athlete group and an over-sampling of males in the athlete group. This may have had an impact on the results reported by those groups. That is, it is possible that they represent attitudes of gender-bias more so than athletic group-bias.

Third, there was no differentiation made between fall and spring athletic participation. Since the survey was conducted in the late fall, it is likely that athletes who participate in the spring would have responded differently had the survey been conducted in the spring.

Finally, the survey instrument used in this study asked for information regarding peer group interaction in section IV. These items allowed for multiple responses, which are potentially ambiguous. For example, if a non-athlete rooms with an athlete, it is hoped that the non-athlete roommate would check *both* of the corresponding boxes in section IV which would indicate one for varsity athletes and one for roommate. Other items in this section can be similarly criticized.

Results

Table 1 shows the sample means and standard deviations of numerical variables from sections I, II, and III of the survey, sorted by athletic status. Almost entirely, student-athletes responses are lower than non-athletes, with six of the items showing significant mean differences. In section I, student-athletes (M=3.48) report a significantly lower frequency than do non-athletes (M=4.03) on the scale which gauges "hanging out with other students late at night", $t(142) = -2.183$, $p<.05$. Student-athletes (M=1.44) are also less likely than non-athletes (M=1.96) to attend planned programs in the residence hall, $t(141) = -3.589$, $p<.01$.

The open-ended responses on section II yields results which show athletes (M=.011) report significantly fewer hours than non-athletes (M=.085) working per weekday, $t(137) = -2.809$, $p<.01$. This result should, however, be considered with caution since there is a NCAA rule that prohibits full-scholarship student-athletes from working in paying jobs during the academic year. Since there is no indication of how many student-athlete participants are receiving a full-scholarship, this finding may not show a significant difference in student-athletes versus non-athletes' working behavior.

Consistently lower mean ratings are observed by student-athletes on the first three items of section III, designed to measure the students perceptions of their acceptance and involvement in their own floor communities. Specifically, student-athletes know fewer floormates by name, $t(142) = -5.118$, $p<.001$, and

like fewer of them as well, $t(141) = -3.142$, $p<.005$. Student-athletes also believe that fewer of their floormates know their names, $t(141) = -2.138$, $p<.05$.

Numbers and frequencies on the categorical variables in section IV of the survey are reported in Table 2. Chi-square analyses find the first five items to have significant differences. Of these, the first four items show a larger proportion of athletes preferring to eat (46.2%), spend time together informally (42.3%), go out to social events (46.2%), and study with athletes. Interestingly, the fifth item "of whom do you ask assistance" shows a break in this trend. On this item the largest portion of student-athletes (51.9%) seeks the assistance of non-athletes.

Discussion

The six items with significant mean differences in Table 1 show some interesting trends. These items indicate that student-athletes do not seem to be spending much time engaged with their floormates. These findings support the earlier research of Jordan & Denson (1990), Stone & Strange (1989), and Parham (1993) which indicate that student-athletes have a schedule with limited flexibility that makes it difficult for them to find time to interact with non-athletes and attend floor or campus wide functions.

On the other hand, the majority of the items in Table 1 show no significant differences between athletes and non-athletes in involvement behaviors. Therefore, one may interpret these data to mean that student-athletes are having similar involvements in the residence hall. The question is, with whom are these individuals involving themselves?

As stated previously, section IV (Table 2) reveals the types of students with whom the participants are interacting. The largest proportion of student-athletes report choosing to eat meals, spend time together informally late at night, and attend social events with other student-athletes. The reasons for this low level of involvement with non-athletes are not clear from these data. However, one must consider that the average number of residents per floor was 51, and the average number of student-athletes within that floor population was nine. Therefore, one would expect student-athletes to have fewer opportunities for involvement with other athletes, and more opportunities for involvement with non-athletes. This low level of involvement with non-athletes also supports the research that shows a lack of flexibility in student-athletes' schedules which make it difficult for them to fit in more than their required activities (Jordan & Denson, 1990; Parham, 1993).

On those same three items the number of student-athletes that choose to be involved with non-athletes only ranges from 15% to 27%. In addition, the number of student-athletes that choose to be involved with both student-athletes and non-athletes ranges from 27% to 38%. Combined, these numbers indicate that about 50% of student-athletes are actually involved with non-athletes, despite the unique demands on their time. These findings support the NCAA's rationale for eliminating athletic residence halls, which was to increase the involvement of student-athletes with non-athletes.

On the fourth significant item, while 37% of the student-athletes responded that they usually study with only other student-athletes, it must be noted that varsity athletes at this institution are required to attend academic study tables which are run by the athletic academic advising staff.

Contrary to the first four items, the fifth item of significance shows that a majority of student-athletes ask only non-athletes for assistance. Perhaps student-athletes prefer to ask non-athletes for assistance in an effort to avoid appearing vulnerable to other athletes. Perhaps it is because they are including other individuals in the non-athletes category, such as resident assistants, academic tutors, trainers, coaches, and faculty.

Implications

The implications of this investigation are interesting for student affairs professionals. The results indicate that mixing student-athletes with non-athletes in the residence halls does not necessarily result in significant interaction between the two groups. While student-athletes indicate involvement in activities and the campus community, this involvement does not seem to include many non-athletes. Possible questions to pursue in future research are: What are the student-athletes' and non-athletes' perceptions of this situation? Do they mind? Are they aware of the situation? Are the members of each group still learning and developing despite the lack of involvement with each other?

The results of this study also indicate an opportunity for student affairs professionals to increase the involvement of student-athletes in the residence halls by capitalizing on their tendency to ask non-athletes for assistance. This could be done through increased peer educator programming and through a special emphasis on resident-resident advisor (RA) relationships on floors with student-athletes. It would be useful for further research to investigate exactly whom student-athletes are asking for assistance. This information would provide a clearer indication of whether student affairs professionals can tap into the tendency of student-athletes to ask non-athletes for assistance.

Conclusion

The purpose of the NCAA decision to phase out athlete-only residence halls by 1996 was to provide student-athletes with a more traditional college experience. It was hoped that student-athletes would benefit more from their involvement in mainstream residence halls, than in privileged, separated environments with other student-athletes, coaches, and trainers. This study was designed, therefore, to explore the types and levels of involvement of student-athletes in one particular residence hall community. By use of a survey instrument, the investigators compared student-athletes and non-athletes in terms of their involvement activities within the residence hall, how they spend their time, and how well they are fitting in to their floor communities. The study also asked with whom the respondents were generally interacting — student-athletes or non-athletes.

Results indicate that student-athletes have lower levels of involvement in the residence hall community and less frequent interactions with non-athletes. This suggests that the decision to house athletes in the mainstream residence halls may not have the full effect intended by the NCAA ruling. More deliberate interventions on the part of student affairs professionals and athletic program staff may be necessary to foster the types and levels of involvement hoped for in the integrated living environments. It is recommended that future studies focus more on specifics of the student-athletes' experience and developmental outcomes based on the quality of their living arrangements.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviation, and Mean Difference of Numeric Variables by Athletic Status

Variable	Athletes N=27 Mean	SD	Non-Athletes N=115 Mean	SD	Mean Difference
Section I					
Have lively conversations with people	3.19	1.49	3.35	1.40	
Hang out with others late at night	3.48	1.19	4.03	1.16	*
Offer to help others with errands	3.07	1.44	3.50	1.27	
Ask others for assistance	2.93	1.27	3.08	1.24	
Borrow things from others	2.63	1.24	2.77	1.32	
Attend social events outside the residence hall	2.78	1.34	2.93	1.33	
Study with others	2.19	1.36	2.42	1.40	
Attend programs with others	1.44	.58	1.96	.95	**
Sum of Means of Section I	2.71	.91	3.00	.92	
Section II					
Hours spent per day sleeping	7.42	2.06	7.35	2.05	
Hours spent per day studying	2.65	2.62	2.85	2.03	
Hours spent per day socializing	3.68	4.43	5.00	3.42	
Hours spent per day working	.11	.58	.85	2.52	**
Section III					
No. of people who you know by first name	2.26	.81	3.17	.89	****
No. of people on the floor you like	2.22	1.05	2.91	.92	***
No. of people who know your name	2.67	.83	3.05	.89	*
How often your door is open	2.74	.90	2.91	.85	
How well people get along on your floor	3.11	.51	3.21	.60	
How well you fit in	3.04	.76	3.05	.76	
How often you go away on weekends	2.85	.99	2.96	.92	

*p≤.05; **p≤.01; ***p≤.005; ****p≤.001 for *t*-test analyses

Table 2: Numbers and Frequencies of Categorical Variables by Athletic Status

Variables	Athletes N	Percent	Non-Athletes N	Percent	Mean Difference
Section IV					
With whom do you usually eat meals?					*
Athletes only	12	46.2	0	0	
Non-athletes only	6	23.1	101	87.8	
Both athletes and non-athletes	7	26.9	9	7.8	
Alone/none	1	3.8	5	4.3	
With whom do you usually hang out late at night?					*
Athletes only	11	42.3	0	0	
Non-athletes only	7	26.9	99	86.8	
Both athletes and non-athletes	8	30.8	12	10.5	
Alone/none	0	0	3	2.6	
With whom do you usually go out to social events?					*
Athletes only	12	46.2	0	0	
Non-athletes only	4	15.4	96	87.3	
Both athletes and non-athletes	10	38.5	13	11.8	
Alone/none	0	0	1	.9	
With whom do you usually study?					*
Athletes only	10	37.0	0	0	
Non-athletes only	6	22.2	53	47.3	
Both athletes and non-athletes	3	11.1	2	1.8	
Alone	8	29.6	56	50.0	
None	0	0	1	.9	
Of whom do you usually ask for assistance?					*
Athletes only	4	14.8	1	.9	
Non-athletes only	14	51.9	98	86.7	
Both athletes and non-athletes	7	25.9	8	7.1	
Alone/none	2	7.4	6	5.3	
Who commits the most vandalism on the floor?					
Athletes only	2	7.7	9	9.1	
Non-athletes only	11	42.3	39	39.4	
Both athletes and non-athletes	0	0	5	5.1	
Alone/none	13	50	46	46.5	
Who violates quiet hours most often on the floor?					
Athletes only	3	11.1	12	11.3	
Non-athletes only	16	59.3	74	69.8	
Both athletes and non-athletes	0	0	8	7.5	
Alone/none	8	29.6	12	11.3	
What group does not participate in social activities ?					
Athletes only	6	25.0	22	21.6	
Non-athletes only	5	20.8	35	35.3	
Both athletes and non-athletes	2	8.3	14	13.7	
Alone/none	11	45.8	31	30.4	

*Asymp. Sig. ≤ .001 for chi-square analyses

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