Mentoring of Intercollegiate Student-Athletes and Leader Development

Maiya Anderson, The Ohio State University
Packianathan Chelladurai (Advisor), The Ohio State University

The objectives of this study are to answer the following research questions: Who do intercollegiate student-athletes identify as their mentor(s)? How frequently do they interact with their mentor(s)? And in what ways does mentoring influence their leader development? This study applies the traditional mentoring models of Kram (1980) and Weaver & Chelladurai (1999) which focus on career development to the broader application of the leader development of college student-athletes. One of the primary goals of higher education including the athletic programs therein is to develop the leadership capacity of students (Astin & Astin, 2000). Mentoring is one tool for developing leadership that can also have positive impacts in other areas such as athlete retention and satisfaction (Marshall & Sharp, 2010; Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999).

Mentoring has long been proposed as a means of facilitating leader and life skills development. In his review of the leadership development literature Day (2001) identified mentoring as an especially effective component of leadership development. According to McCauley et al. (1998) mentoring is an important strategy for enhancing the leadership development process. Mentoring has also been shown to have positive impacts on leadership outcomes of college students (Jajabi et al., 2008; Komives et al., 2005). Jajabi et al. (2008) found that students who were mentored scored significantly higher in leadership efficacy than students who were never mentored. Peer mentoring was the most prevalent form of mentoring with 71.6% of students reporting being mentored by other students followed by faculty (69.6%) and student affairs professionals (53.4%). Further women were found more likely to participate in mentoring than men. Even though mentoring exists in practice, there are few studies exploring the mentoring relationships of college athletes (Bloom et al., 1998; Carter & Hart, 2010; Harrison et al., 2006; Perna et al., 1996). It is hypothesized that mentoring relationships will help facilitate the leader development of college student-athletes.

This study plans to use a quantitative ex-post facto non-experimental correlational design utilizing secondary data from the 2009 Multi-Intuitional Study of Leadership (MSL). The original data set utilized either random or census samples of undergraduate students on the campuses that agreed to participate. Collected in the spring of 2009, the MSL used a cross sectional design that also included several self-reported pre-college variables. For this study a subset of the data set that includes senior intercollegiate student-athletes from 102 campuses across the United States will be utilized.

Data will be evaluated using statistical techniques (cross-tabs, frequencies, differences in means, correlation, hierarchical multiple regression, linear regression, and ANOVA) to determine the associations between participation in and frequency of mentoring, and self reported leadership efficacy and the values of socially responsible leadership (collaboration, commitment, consciousness of self, etc.; HERI, 1996). Moderating factors such as participation in leadership training and having held a leadership position during and/or before college will also be evaluated with respect to leadership outcomes. Other factors such as precollege involvement, gender, ethnicity, GPA, parent’s income and level education will serve as control variables.

Understanding existing mentoring relationships of student-athletes will help us capitalize and expand on these potentially valuable relationships. One area of particular interest that may provide further opportunities for athlete leadership and improved team cohesion is the use of peer mentoring on athletic teams, where upper classman serve as mentors to first year athletes. Both the mentor and protégé have the potential to benefit from the relationship in terms of facilitating leader growth and development. Mentoring may emerge as a valuable tool for the growth and development of intercollegiate student-athletes and therefore deserves further attention. This study will provide valuable information that can be immediately applied in athletic departments and teams. It can also serve as a catalyst for further research in this area.