Title IX Misperceptions: Division III

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When Title IX was passed in 1972, it was widely assumed that the legislation would eventually lead to an equitable level of treatment of, and opportunity for, girls and women in athletic departments. However, according to the Sharp Center’s 2012 research report, the reality is that 40 years after the adoption of the legislation, gender equity in interscholastic sport has not been achieved; opportunities for boys increased at a greater percentage than opportunities for girls (Sabo & Veliz, 2012). Parente’s (2008) study about perceptions of Title IX compliance among college athletes indicated that female athletes reported that men were treated better than women in terms of access to facilities, facility scheduling, team publicity and new equipment.

While there are several factors that could be contributing to this lack of equity, one could argue that a lack of understanding of Title IX by sport administrators and then a subsequent lack of education for their athletic departments is a leading cause. Sanger and Mathes (1997) studied perceptions of Title IX compliance by faculty athletics representatives and women’s basketball coaches in Division III. The results of this study indicated the athletic directors and FARs had different perceptions of Title IX compliance than coaches, and further that women were significantly under-represented in athletic administrative positions and over represented as women’s basketball coaches. Jacob and Mathes (1996) determined that female athletes were not “extremely knowledgeable” (p. 38) about Title IX, and further that variables that influenced knowledge included having a woman coach.

More recent studies of what Staurowsky and Weight (2011, 2013) referred to as Title IX literacy among NCAA head coaches and athletics administrators revealed large gaps in knowledge 40 years after the passage of the legislation. Among NCAA coaches who were surveyed (n=1128), over half were not able to respond correctly to basic questions regarding Title IX. Only 16.6% of coaches and 25.5% of athletics administrators reported receiving formal education about Title IX as part of their training (Staurowsky & Weight, 2013; Weight & Staurowsky, in press). Staurowsky and Weight (2011, 2013) concluded that the entire mechanism that was expected to be in place to support Title IX education among constituent groups (students, teachers and coaches, school officials and athletic directors, and parents) has never been activated with the end result being vast gaps in Title IX knowledge throughout the citizenry.

The perception of students, coaches, and athletic directors about Title IX informs us about the present. As prior studies indicate that there is a disconnect between what the athletic director perceives as reality and what others see as the reality about Title IX compliance, it seems then that one area that deserves study is the knowledge of Title IX by future high school and collegiate athletic administrators. To that end, Riemer and Zonder (2013) asked two groups of participants, sport management majors (undergraduate and graduate students) and college athletes at a Division I mid-major institution, to answer questions about their perceptions of Title IX. In general, results for graduate students indicated that the majority of respondents had some idea about Title IX in terms of gender equity but were not aware of what the law actually covered. In contrast, 48% of undergraduate students had no idea what Title IX was and only 6% understood the law. In terms of college athletes, 55% did not know what Title IX was, 38% did not understand the law, and less than 1% had a “basic understanding” of the law (Riemer & Zonder, 2013).

The purpose of this study is to apply the questionnaire from the previous Riemer and Zonder (2013) study to college athletes at the Division III level in order to determine their perceptions of Title IX and then further to determine if there are differences in perceptions between Division I and Division III. College athletes from two Division III schools were solicited in September of 2013 to answer the questionnaire on-line via Survey Monkey. Data collection has already begun for Division III student athletes, and preliminary results indicate that of the 186 participants, 42 (22.5%) could not or did not answer the question of “What is Title IX?” Further, of those who did, 28 answered with some variation of “I don’t know” – 38% in total. And, of the 186 participants, 21% have majors that may lead to a future career in sport, including exercise science and health. Complete results will be available at the time of the conference.
conference, as data collection ends on November 1, 2013. The presentation will include those results as well as a discussion regarding implications for the future.