"They Made Me Do It": An Exploration of Student-Athlete Volunteer Motivations and Satisfaction

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Developing socially responsible and civically engaged citizens has been a priority of higher education in the United States since its conception (Labaree, 1997). As an extension of higher education, athletic participation has been tasked with the same objective (Brown, Hoye, & Nicholson, 2014; Harvey, Levesque, & Donnelley, 2007). One way to develop socially responsible and civically engaged citizens is through volunteering (i.e., community service) (Gallant, Smale, & Arai, 2010; Payne, 2000). While the NCAA does not mandate student-athlete community service participation, almost all university athletic departments require service participation for their athletes (Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2012). In addition, an increasing number of athletic departments are including community service and engagement in their mission statements (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011). With the growing amount of attention placed on community service, it is becoming increasingly important to understand student-athletes’ volunteer experiences in order to help administrators better coordinate impactful volunteer opportunities for their student-athletes.

While some studies have addressed the outcomes of community service for student-athletes (Fuller et al., 2015; Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2012; McHugo, 2005), there is a sufficient gap in the literature in regard to why student-athletes participate in community service and whether they are satisfied with the volunteer opportunities that their athletic department provides. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore student-athletes’ motivations for volunteering, and their satisfaction with their volunteer experience, as well as to determine what effect, if any, athletic department-mandated community service has on student-athletes’ motivation and satisfaction. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are student-athletes’ motives for volunteering?
2. Is there a difference in student-athletes’ satisfaction with their volunteer experience based on their motivation and type of volunteering?
3. Is there a difference in motivation between student-athletes who volunteer on their own and student-athletes who volunteer only through their athletic department?
4. Is there a difference in satisfaction between student-athletes who volunteer on their own and student-athletes who volunteer only through their athletic department?

Theoretical Framework

The current study applies functionalist theory to motivation. Functionalist theory holds that people can and do perform the same actions in the service of different psychological functions (Clary et al., 1998). Furthermore, the same attitudes can serve different functions for different people, and an attempt to change attitudes would only be successful if the functions served by those attitudes are addressed (Katz, 1960; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Within the context of this study, student-athletes are motivated to volunteer for a number of different reasons, and in order to influence student-athletes’ attitude toward volunteering, athletic administrators have to address these motivations. The current study used the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), developed by Clary and colleagues (1998), to measure student-athlete volunteer motivations. The authors suggest that there are six functions served by volunteering – Values, Understanding (i.e., the chance to exercise knowledge, skills, and abilities), Social, Career, Protective (i.e., the chance to reduce guilt over being more fortunate than others), and Enhancement (i.e., personal development). The VFI also measures volunteer satisfaction on the basis that volunteers’ needs were being met based on their motivation.

Method and Data Analysis
Utilizing a convenience sample, student-athletes from three universities have been chosen to take part in this study. Athletic department administrators from these universities will send out a link to a survey via email to all student-athletes by mid-November 2015. Participation will be on a voluntary basis. The student-athletes that choose to participate will be asked to complete the survey, which asks questions related to their motivations/reasons for volunteering, their satisfaction with their previous volunteer experiences, the type of service they engage in (social service, teaching or coaching, work for a cause, and functionary work), and whether or not they engage in community service on their own time. Descriptive statistics will be used to analyze research question one and analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used to analyze research questions two through four.

Results and Implications

At the time of submission, data collection is in progress, and will be completed by January 2016. The presentation will include the finalized analysis. In addition, theoretical implications will be discussed in regard to the study’s contribution to the motivation literature. Because the VFI has been used in a limited capacity with regard to application in a sport context, this study will provide insight into its applicability and future directions related to sport. Furthermore, practical implications will be discussed. It is expected that the results of this study will provide insight into what motivates student-athletes to participate in community service and their level of satisfaction with their volunteer experiences. In addition, this study will help administrators determine if the mandated component of athletic department community service has an effect on student-athlete motivation and satisfaction. Better understanding student-athletes’ volunteer experiences will help administrators determine how they should coordinate community service activities for their student-athletes, and whether athletic department administrators are currently providing volunteer opportunities that maximize student-athlete satisfaction. Finally, the results of this study will guide future research into athlete motivations with regard to volunteerism.

References


