Measuring Organizational Effectiveness within University Student-Athlete Programming

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Method - Quantitative (College Sport) Saturday, June 1, 2019
Poster 9:20 AM
Abstract 2019-325 Room: Napoleon AB corridor

Across collegiate athletics, an increased emphasis has been placed on the student-athlete experience. Student-athletes are valuable members of their university communities, yet, many examinations provide evidence that student-athletes have unique experiences when compared to their peers (Gayles, 2009). Many critics of the NCAA have argued that the financial implications of high level collegiate athletics, and overall financial value of the product have led the NCAA to divert from its purposes and “core values” (Cooper & Weight, 2011). At the heart of the NCAA’s self-proclaimed “core values” is the belief in student-athletes succeeding on and off the field (NCAA, 2017). To many, this belief leads to an increased emphasis on graduation requirements: institutions must graduate a certain percentage of their student athletes in order to be compliant with NCAA mandates and regulations (NCAA, 2014). The NCAA regularly reports student-athlete graduation rates above 80% (Eckard, 2010; NCAA, 2017), and uses these statistics to demonstrate to their public audience that they are fulfilling their responsibility to educate and provide academic opportunities for their athletics participants. Unfortunately, graduation is only the beginning for nearly all student-athletes. Nearly every single student-athlete will be finding a career outside of being the professional athlete which many aspired to be from the time they were young.

In order to counteract the challenges with assisting student-athletes post-athletics retirement, institutions have established programming designed to better prepare student-athletes for these opportunities. These career development programs, though noble in thought, have yet to be statistically measured or examined to thoroughly understand their impact and influence on the student-athletes they serve. Through this study, scholars and practitioners will have a better understanding of the ways in which student-athletes perceive their experiences as programming participants.

Drawing upon the theories of organizational effectiveness, the researcher has designed a model of analysis that determines the organizational effectiveness of student-athlete career development programming utilizing the perspective of the primary stake-holders. Several hundred current student-athletes, second through fifth year participants, from three homogeneous NCAA Division I Power Five represent the purposive sample used. Data collected was analyzed using hierarchical regression techniques and represents new opportunities for programmatic evaluation.

The implications of this study are significant within the dynamic nature of collegiate athletics. As more institutions incorporate programming into their student-athletes’ curriculum, there becomes an increased need to measure the effectiveness of programming. The researcher feels that this model is unique in its ability to measure overall effectiveness instead of limiting itself to specific variable outputs. As benchmarking practices continue to spread throughout the collegiate athletics landscape, more institutions will have access to an effective measurement of their career development programming’s influence on the lives of their student-athletes. Additionally, researchers will have the opportunity to adapt the measurement tool to other facets of student-athlete development programming, providing a variety of new populations and programs to analyze and assess in order to provide a more efficient and effective developmental process for university student-athletes.