Beyond Tutoring: a Proposal to Integrate Athletics and Academics

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Sacramento City College (SCC) has an outstanding athletic program, but many of its athletes have serious academic problems. This proposal recognizes the academic problems experienced by large numbers of college athletes and proposes a plan for integrating athletics and academics in ways that do not currently exist. It addresses the Basic Agenda Priority of Student Access and Success and offers a specific design for a comprehensive support services package to strengthen instructional services. This will promote excellence in the classroom while challenging students to increase their performance to the best of their ability. By doing so, it will meet a systemwide need felt by every college with an athletic program. The development of the project will be recorded in detail and carefully evaluated for purposes of replication. SCC is committed to graduating athletes who can become as successful academically as they are athletically, and believes it can develop a program that will work equally well in other colleges.
This is a program development proposal that addresses the “special learning needs of educationally disadvantaged students” to achieve the Basic Agenda Priority of Student Access and Success. SCC currently has 264 identified athletes, 1/3 of whom are women, and about 42% of whom are members of under-represented racial or ethnic groups. Many have academic problems in at least one class, and some have problems in all their classes. Although precise statistics are not available, coaches estimate that approximately 70% each semester fail at least one class, and 20% become academically ineligible to play the next semester. The college’s overriding goal is to use the opportunity to play on a college team as an incentive to encourage athletes to take advantage of support services that will be designed to meet their specific needs. Although this will only affect 264 students per year at SCC, the effect will be multiplied many times over if the project is replicated at other colleges.
Because the problem is poor academic performance on the part of some athletes, it is a systemwide problem that the college proposes to help solve by creating a model that can be adopted by other colleges. In addition to problems in the classroom, many athletes at SCC have poor study skills and limited interest in academics. The Board of Trustees has instituted strict requirements, including regular monitoring of coursework, that has resulted in increased effort, but it has not solved the problem of poor study skills. This project will address that through a carefully coordinated program of support services tied together by a core of student tutors whose primary role will be to promote hard work and academic quality into the normative structure. Athletes have to be highly disciplined to achieve in their sports and their normative structure, the rules that bind them together as a group, is different from that of most other students. They share a sense of camaraderie just knowing that they have the perseverance and will power to work far beyond the physical tolerance of the majority of the population. There is every reason to believe an equally strong commitment to academic excellence can become a part of that normative structure.

This Solution was chosen over alternative solutions because it recognizes that the way people define situations determines how they respond to them. If athletic programs demand the same degree of commitment to academic excellence that they do to athletic excellence, athletes will have no choice but to conform to those demands. Simply offering academic support services is inadequate for this population as evidenced by the fact that too many athletes have failed to take advantage of them when they have been offered. The college has to create an environment in which academic success is as highly prized as athletic success. This project has the potential to do that.
This project will directly serve the 264 athletes per year who play on the Sacramento City College teams and need academic assistance. Indirectly, it will serve their friends, relatives, and everyone else they influence. People notice success, and they often respond by imitating what they have observed. In that way, all success replicates itself in populations that evaluative researchers can never identify.

The short-term impact on these athletes will be two-fold: 1) their academic performance will improve, and 2) their self-definition will change. Many of the college’s athletes view themselves as talented only in sports, and a surprising number assume they can financially support themselves as athletes. Since only one-half of one percent of all college athletes go on to a career in professional sports, the college feels an obligation to prepare its athletes for a more realistic future. If they can learn to think of themselves as people who can succeed outside the domain of sports, they will be more likely to put effort into mastering the skills they will need in the future.

The long-term impact is that the college’s athletes will learn the skills they need and be in a position to successfully adapt to whatever the future brings. Most athletes leave school in excellent physical condition, and those who are equally in shape academically can create a lifestyle they can enjoy for decades. In addition, they will leave behind a higher standard for the athletes who follow them, and that standard will quickly become institutionalized within SCC’s academic programs.
• Seventy-five percent of the athletes will have improved their GPA over that of the previous semester by at least .5 grade point. This will be evaluated at the completion of each semester.

• Seventy-five percent of the athletes will demonstrate an improved attitude toward academics by working hard to learn the material. This will be measured by the criterion stated above and will be evaluated at the time listed.

• Sixty percent of the athletes will participate in study tables at least two hours per week more than the required three hours per week. This will be evaluated on a weekly basis.

• Seventy percent of the athletes will identify a career goal and enroll in classes that will enable them to pursue that goal. This will be evaluated at the end of the registration period each semester.

• Study tables will be offered three hours a night four nights a week. This will be evaluated on a weekly basis.

One workshop will be offered during each study table at the beginning of each semester. This will be evaluated at the end of the first two weeks of the semester.

The existing Health Education 25 class will be redesigned to elaborate on the study skills and success strategies taught in the workshops and reinforced by the Project Coordinator, coaches and tutors.

At the conclusion of the project, a final report will be written and disseminated and the results of the project will be reported at conferences and in professional journals.
The following activities will take place in order to meet the project objectives:

Hire the Project Coordinator (P.C.) by August 1, 1994. The Project Coordinator will be an experienced counselor who has taught the College Success class and who will have the expertise to teach students the academic skills taught in that class as well as provide academic advising. He or she will train tutors and the P.E. coaches. He or she will also conduct workshops and work individually with student athletes.

Hire tutors/peer advisors by August 1, 1994. Whenever possible, tutors will be student athletes who have a successful academic history. That group will be augmented by students in a college program known as A.S.P.I.R.E. (Academic Search Project for the Innovative Recruitment of Educators). Those are carefully selected students who are being mentored to become community college instructors. If additional tutors are needed, they will be selected on the basis of maturity as well as mastery of the subject matter. It is essential that the tutoring atmosphere be one that promotes the serious pursuit of knowledge.

In addition to providing academic services, tutors will function as peer advisors, a role that will enable them to help student athletes learn strategies for succeeding in their classes. There will be opportunities for informal discussions about the experience of being a student and how they can successfully integrate that role with others. A campus study of re-entry students in 1988 revealed a number of specific strategies for success that can be easily taught to student athletes. Simple techniques like maximizing study time by quizzing one another while driving to school, and enrolling in classes with a friend for group study purposes can make a quantifiable difference in how students perform as well as in their ability to enjoy the learning process as they integrate it into their lives.

Whenever several students are studying the same material, the one who has the best understanding of it will be encouraged to work as a tutor with the others. The tutor will benefit by teaching others what he or she is learning, and the other students will gain by working with someone who is motivated to know the material. They are also more likely to respond to another athlete who has shared many of their experiences.
The Project Coordinator will meet with P.E. coaches by August 15, 1994 to plan the details of the project. All P.E. coaches will participate in the project, and at least two will be present at each study table to help establish an understanding that academics are an integral part of the athletic program. They will help students study as well as drive those home who do not have transportation.

Train the P.E. coaches and tutors/peer advisors by September 1, 1994.

Coaches and tutors will be taught the study skills taught in College Success classes along with the strategies for success discovered in the 1988 study of re-entry students. They will be trained by the Project Coordinator who will be present at all study tables to provide further training as needed.

Establish required athletic study tables by September 8, 1994. Student athletes will be required to participate in study tables for four hours a week as a condition of playing on the team. This will be a meaningful activity in which they will work in groups with a tutor whenever possible so that they can: learn group study skills. The Project Coordinator and P.E. coaches will supervise and participate when appropriate. Prior to registration, students will be encouraged to enroll in classes with other athletes so that they can study together during study table as well as other times. Facilities will be made available so that students studying in groups will not disturb those who are working alone. There will be one coach and as many tutors as are needed in each room. Study tables will be held four nights a week so the athletes will be able to work it into their schedules.

Study tables have a reputation of being required activities that are not taken very seriously. Many athletes consider them a waste of time, and they do little or no work during those hours. A major intent of this project is to change that perception. By carefully structuring and supervising study tables and by involving other athletes as tutors, study tables can offer an opportunity for student athletes to learn how to become successful students.

Develop workshops that will take the place of the study table at the beginning of each semester by September 8, 1994. At the beginning of each semester, the Project Coordinator will use study table time to present workshops that will summarize
the principles taught in College Success classes and teach the strategies learned in the 1988 re-entry study. These workshops will also familiarize students with the assessment tools available to those who do not have a specific career goal to guide them in selecting classes, and the Project Coordinator will lay the groundwork for helping students select one. All student athletes, tutors and coaches involved in the project will attend.

Coordinate with the Career Center and the Counseling Center for testing and advising sessions by September 15, 1994. All student athletes who do not have a specific career goal will be tested and advised in order to identify one, and will meet with a college counselor to develop an academic plan that they can follow to achieve their career goal.

Coordinate with the Health Education 25 instructor to incorporate the study skills and success strategies taught in the workshops. The Health Education 25 class (Contemporary Problems of Student Athletes) will be redesigned to incorporate the techniques of academic success. That coursework will be followed up at study tables by the Project Coordinator, the coaches, and the tutors/peer advisors. The course will be continually refined until it best meets the needs of SCCs student athletes.

Prepare and disseminate a final report. At the conclusion of the project, all data will be analyzed, and a final report will be written and disseminated. Project information will be presented through conference presentations and articles -in professional journals.

Details regarding project objectives, dates of scheduled activities, budget amounts to be spent on each objective, personnel, equipment, materials, and the evaluation process are listed on the attached Application Annual Workplan form.
Project Objectives

As a result of this project, student athletes will study harder and more effectively, and their grades will improve measurably. A secondary effect will be the likelihood that they will redefine themselves as people who can succeed academically as well as athletically, and they will identify career goals and pursue them.

Impact of the Project

Student athletes have their own community on campus. It is a community of people committed to working hard who respect others who do the same. However, the hard work is primarily physical, and the part that is not relates only to the intellectual activity required to play team sports, such as learning plays. By expanding the normative structure to include a commitment to excellence in academics, student athletes will feel obliged to apply their will power and intellectual potential to schoolwork just as they apply it to sports. This will result in fewer athletes having to sit out games which will improve the college’s chances of winning games, but of infinitely greater importance is the fact that it will result in athletes who have a future outside of sports. Since the college’s primary purpose is to educate, the success of this project will definitely benefit the college. It will also benefit other colleges because this is a replicable project, and the college will make its staff available to help other colleges institute it on their campuses. If enough colleges adopt it, California community college sports programs will become associated with academic commitment, just as are those at the University of California campuses. Athletic programs are an important part of most colleges, and this project promises to enhance them by integrating academics in ways that do not currently exist.

Potential for Continued Support

If this project is as successful as everyone believes it will be, it will definitely be institutionalized. It is strongly supported by the coaches, the rest of the faculty, and the administration, and all are prepared to use a combination of institutional resources and their own time to continue it beyond the expiration of the grant. There are also community organizations that have been strongly supportive of the college’s athletic programs that could be
approached for funding after the project demonstrates it can be effective.

Potential for Adaptation to Other Institutions

This project could be easily replicated at other colleges, and SCC win make its staff available to help other colleges implement it. Most colleges experience problems with the academic performance of some of its athletes, and the majority are seeking answers to these problems. Because this project strives to change the way student athletes think about their academic responsibilities, it increases the chances of students benefitting from the support services that are provided. This is an essential component that is needed at all colleges but exists in very few.
The project will be evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively on a formative and summative basis. The Project Coordinator will analyze each objective and activity listed in the work statement to determine the extent to which it was completed and to identify any problems that arose. Effective methods will be identified along with successes so that both processes and outcomes will be evaluated. The evaluation will conclude with a list of recommendations for those interested in replicating it.

Specifically, the Project Coordinator will maintain descriptive statistics on all project activities (number of study tables, number of workshops, number of hours per week each athlete attends study table, etc.), and the P.C. and coaches will maintain journals to record anecdotal evidence and observations that will be used to improve the program and formulate recommendations for replication.
Sacramento
Dissemination

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