

DEVELOPING A GAMEPLAN: LIBRARIES AND CAMPUS ATHLETIC DEPARTMENTS

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*"It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."
Coach John Wooden*

Athletics at colleges and universities of all sizes have long been a major enterprise in the United States. Successful sports programs increase school spirit and support among students, staff, alumni, and the local population, and can bring national attention and major financial benefits to their institutions. But most student-athletes do not turn professional. After completing a student-athlete career, they must rely on their academic successes to achieve the livelihood of their dreams. Many institutions are increasing their investment in their student-athletes to ensure that these young people, who give so much to their schools, truly reap the benefits of their academic degrees and are equipped to meet all the challenges of life upon graduation. College and university libraries across the country are reaching out to athletic departments and offering their expertise to meet the special needs of student-athletes. This paper looks at library outreach programs to athletic departments at Willamette University, Arizona State, and UCLA, three universities of different sizes and characteristics, and how each one works to instill Information Literacy among their student athlete population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1983 the National Collegiate Athletic Association

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(NCAA) took firm action to reform and improve the academic eligibility standards of collegiate athletes, stirring much debate and controversy. Reformers and educators argued that student-athletes were seen more as revenue-generating cogs in a corporate environment than young individuals with their own unique needs, and that universities had a moral obligation and responsibility to provide academic support programs to meet these unique needs (Jesudason, 1989). Academic libraries around the country recognized their own obligation to reach out and work with athletic departments, and the professional literature presents several examples of these efforts. Depending on the circumstances of the particular institution and library, outreach may focus on "at risk" student-athletes, student-athletes in general, or specifically target freshmen student-athletes for whom adapting to all aspects of college life is a new challenge.

Melba Jesudason (1989) reviews how the library at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, developed their bibliographic instruction program for student-athletes who were struggling to maintain the minimum grade-point average for competition eligibility. She emphasizes the special needs of these students, especially their pedagogical challenges and time limitations and outlines the actions incorporated into their program. In a later article she discusses the addition of e-mail reference service to the outreach program (Jesudason, 2000).

CHAMPS, (Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success) is an NCAA program for the instruction of a variety of life skills to college athletes. Some institutions, such as Valdosta State University, reach their student-athletes by incorporating library instruction into this program (Puffer-Rothenberg & Thomas, 1999). Washington State University built their own life-skills program based on CHAMPS, into which they have also integrated information literacy instruction (O'English & McCord, 2006). Both of these are examples of how libraries are reaching out to all their student-athletes in a systematic manner.

Freshman athletes at the University of Central Florida and the University of Iowa are targeted for information literacy instruction sessions in order to ease their transition to campus life and emphasize the importance of taking their studies seriously (Ruscella, 1993; Forsy et al., 2000). This is done through mandatory orientation programs for which they receive university credit, and supplementary workshops held regularly throughout the year.

WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY

Information literacy programs for student athletes are offered at a number of NCAA Division I schools, but how well do similar programs scale to a NCAA Division III school? In the summer of 2005, the Willamette University (WU) library contacted the head coach of the football team to discuss the possibility of piloting a newly-developed information literacy program for freshman players. The players were already coming into the library in the evenings for study tables, and this looked like an opportunity to meet with a section of students who did not get to participate in the library's Opening Days sessions. With dedicated staff and support from administration at WU, the library has been able to successfully develop a program called "GamePlan."

In the GamePlan program, each fall semester is treated as an information challenge/game and is broken up into seven weekly sessions, 15-20 minutes each. Each week has one learning objective, tied to a skill that can be directly incorporated into the students' current course work. Students earn points each week by completing the hands-on portion of the evening sessions. There is also a snack/surprise at each challenge which the players really appreciate, and which helps build a relationship with the athletes.

The first session of the program introduces the athletes to the library. This is the same tour and introduction that all students receive, but we also make sure they are aware of their campus network space, and that they know how to organize and save their files. We also assist them in configuring their laptops for mounting their home drive and using the campus printing system.

The next three weeks focus on finding materials in the library catalogs, finding journal articles, and finding information in the library's online reference tools. The structure of each session is based on the "IDEA" method of coaching. Sessions begin with the introduction (I) of the topic, demonstration (D) of the task, an explanation (E) of the reason behind why tasks are done a certain way and then we attend (A) to the athletes as they attempt the tasks. All athletes are taking a freshman colloquium course, so we have them find materials on their various topics. Often they will use the materials we find in our sessions for their class assignments.

During the fifth week, students are introduced to Google and the power of "Horizontal Searching", which is basically citation-building with Google. This is not something they are going to use immediately, but it can save them an incredible

amount of time in the future. With every session, we stress that they are not expected to remember everything that we do, but now they know where to come and get help.

Athletes are divided into teams of two or three during week six, and participate in the "Plagiarism Challenge". Students are presented with five different scenarios; their goal is to decide if there is proper citation or if plagiarism has taken place. After the correct answer for each scenario is revealed, the reason as to why it is or is not plagiarism is discussed.

Up until this final week, all athletes have had the chance to earn the same amount of points. We finish up with a 10-point quiz which touches on the main topics of the first six weeks. The top scoring athletes over the entire seven weeks are identified and their coaches often provide them with some type of reward, thus developing a sense of competition in the program.

With a program that has only been around two years, it is hard to gauge success. However, comments from students and coaches are incredibly positive, and athletes now come into the library knowing where to get help. After a successful start in 2005 the library contacted the Athletic Director about expanding the program to other sports. Now in its third year, the GamePlan program works with six different men's and women's sports providing freshman athletes the skills to meet the challenges of a college environment and life beyond school. Although a library the size of WU does not have designated outreach librarians, dedicated staff working with the Athletic Department are making the library a key resource for student athletes.

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

At Arizona State University, the teaching of information literacy skills to freshmen has become a high priority for the Libraries. These efforts have primarily been actualized through the university's Writing Programs, which oversee composition classes like English 101 and 102. However, with their busy travel schedules and intense training programs, student-athletes are subject to missing entire class periods, which can place them at a disadvantage compared to their classmates.

Instruction Librarians met with the Director of Student-Athlete Development to discuss and develop an approach for introducing a library component specifically into the freshman athletes' curriculum. Together we created three goals. First, every freshman athlete at ASU must take a class called "Student-Athlete Success" which focuses on developing life skills; a related library assignment would be included in that course's curriculum. Second, we would teach the teachers; information literacy training would be offered to the Student-Athlete Success instructors (called "academic coaches"), as well as the tutors and mentors who would be routinely working with individual athletes. Third, we would expose students to the physical library and its infrastructure.

We began by creating a list of the life skills students would be focusing on in the course, and then designed an assignment connecting each life skill with a research objective.

Student-athletes would be taught to use the Library's online resources to find a magazine or journal article related to a designated life skill. Then, the writing portion of the assignment would involve a one-page essay, both summarizing the article's content and reflecting on the students' research process.

Before the students came into the library for their class, we met with the academic coaches in order to familiarize them with the new assignment and its anticipated learning objectives. We also provided a demonstration of how the presentation to the student-athletes would be handled. We then provided multiple instructional sessions for the athletes' tutors and mentors, designed to broadly familiarize them with library resources and services. The tutors and mentors are responsible for assisting the student-athletes with their entire course load, but were heretofore unfamiliar with the value this library knowledge could be in fulfilling their duties to their charges.

The Office of Student-Athlete Development offered nine sections of the Student-Athlete Success class, and we scheduled the sessions within a three-day period. These sessions provided the students' first exposure to the libraries, particularly to an assignment that required the use of a library resource. One easily measured result from the library session was that every student left class with an article related to their life skill; another was the positive feedback we received from a post-class survey indicating students found the session informative and useful. The true measure of success, though, would be in the students' semester-end feedback which rated the course in general along with all of the assignments given; they rated the library assignment as one of the semester's best. Feedback from the academic coaches noted the library instruction component as an important addition to the course's curriculum. Consequently, the decision was made to incorporate the library as a permanent part of the Student-Athlete Success course.

That isn't to say that there aren't improvements to be made. While the searching exercise itself was considered worthwhile by all, the reflective essay designed to articulate the students' searching experience did not produce the thoughtful results we had hoped. We surmised the assignment was too much to expect from students with only a few weeks of college experience, and many were likely unfamiliar with the process of writing a descriptive composition of this nature. They were also not properly prepared and lacked the context to understand the need for, and value of, this type of reflection. It was also apparent that not soliciting input from the academic coaches in the creation of the library piece hampered their commitment to the assignment as we envisioned it.

Again working with the Director of Student-Athlete Development, we have redesigned the assignment for the fall 2007 semester. Instead of requiring the students to compose an essay they will write short answers to a series of contextualized questions reflecting on their search experience. We will also make further adjustments by involving the academic coaches in the planning and development of the library assignment.

UCLA

UCLA's College Library recently expanded its collaboration with the athletic department to use a combination of programs for targeted teams, ongoing outreach services, and collaboration on specific projects in order to integrate library knowledge and information literacy more completely into the student-athletes' academic support system. The ultimate goal in the near future is to ensure that all student-athletes receive some form of information literacy instruction during their undergraduate careers.

For several years, College Library and the football team's academic coordinator have provided a two hour library session to all incoming football players. In 2003, an academic coordinator was hired for the men's and women's basketball teams, and soon after, introductory library sessions were launched for them too. Before classes begin in September, the freshmen team members meet at the library for an extensive tour and explanation of library facilities. They then assemble in the computer classroom for hands-on instruction and exercises in search strategies and the library catalog. Getting them to apply what they've learned through the use of library games, such as Bibliography Bingo and the Catalog Race, appeals to their competitive nature. Most enjoy the chocolates they win, although some prefer the carrot stick prizes! The most important outcomes from these sessions are that the student-athletes have a positive library experience, and they become aware of the how the library's services can help them in their academic careers. UCLA has not yet implemented a mandatory Information Literacy requirement for all incoming students, and many feel this gap in their knowledge later in their studies. But the athletic department has successfully implemented a mandatory library session for all incoming student-athletes on the basketball and football teams, ensuring that they will begin their academic careers on the right foot.

However, in order to satisfy increasing academic standards and demands, the academic staff, in collaboration with the football coaches, developed a Community of Learners (COL) academic support program that meets weekly with all scholarship freshmen throughout their first year. The athlete-outreach librarian participates in this program by meeting with the COL group for supplementary and special subject sessions, and by serving as a faculty mentor. Through these multiple interactions players develop a familiar relationship with the librarian, and they are more comfortable coming to the library whenever they need assistance. In winter quarter of this year, twenty-six current members of the UCLA football team earned GPAs of 3.0 or more in at least twelve units, thus qualifying for the Director's Honor Roll. Fifteen of these Honor Roll students were freshmen in the COL group, a clear indication of COL's hard work and success.

Other regular services provided through library-athletic department outreach include library workshops for undergraduate athlete tutors, a steady supply of library instructional handouts to the student-athlete academic center, and a regular library contact person for the mentors, tutors, and student-athletes. Like a librarian-liaison to an academic department, the athlete-outreach

librarian is often contacted for consultation on specific library questions and for research appointments.

This academic year, student-athletes have also participated in four new library instruction videos. LITE Bites (Library Instruction To Everyone, bite-sized), a project involving the UCLA Library and Office of Residential Life, are a series of short, student produced infomercials that are broadcast on the campus housing cable television station. The athletic department supported the idea enthusiastically as a way to involve student-athletes in a fun, educational activity, and help them learn more about the library and its system. Athletes featured in these four videos are from the track, swim and dive, and basketball teams. Please see <http://www2.library.ucla.edu/5833.cfm> for more information about LITE Bites.

Building a close working relationship with key people involved in student-athlete academic support has been invaluable to the successful library outreach at UCLA. These people include the Learning Specialist, the Academic Coordinators for football and basketball, and the Director for Student-Athlete Counseling. Academic support has been cited by new athlete recruits as a major influence in their decision to commit to UCLA; College Library is proud to be a contributor to this success.

CONCLUSION

Every institution of higher education and every academic library have their own unique characteristics, culture and challenges. All of them however, share the obligation of assisting their students achieve full academic potential. Student-athletes shoulder the twin pressures of excelling in both the classroom and on the playing field, and librarians must be ready

to reach out to them with an understanding of their special needs. There are as many ways to do that as there are institutions, and each must find the formula that best fits their educational goals. This paper has presented ideas from library outreach efforts at Willamette University, Arizona State, and UCLA with the hope of stimulating further discussion among academic librarians in order to better serve all our student-athletes.

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