



# “Student” Athletes: Creating Authentic Interest in Academics Amongst Student Athletes

Mark Asper  
University of Oregon



## The Introduction

The stereo-type of the student athlete is one of an individual that is primarily interested in the second half of their name sake and counts on their athletic talent to excuse them from academic expectations. Like many stereo-types the truth behind the phenomena of the academically disinterested student athlete has much more sociological and psychological than initially meets the eye.

One of the most famous student athletes was a wrestler whose feats in the Pale gained him the nick name Plato for his large plate like forehead that he would gouge into his opponents. He knew that in order to enlighten the young Greek men he needed to go where they were which way the gymnasium. The place that Plato taught was the Akademia, those that attended were the akademics and so began the connection of athletes and the academy.

The organization that my plan is for has the responsibility of mapping the academic pathways of student athletes at the Division 1 level. The most challenging part of their mapped plans is the completion of those plans by the student athletes. My Improvement Plan targets the problem that is created when the athletes become disinterested in their academic plans due to a disconnect between what the organization does for them and what they want for themselves.

## The Theory

The ideology of authentic experience that will be used of this plan is primarily rooted in the sociology of culture. The two main theories that are behind this plan come from Anne Swidler from the University of California Berkley and Richard Peterson from Vanderbilt.

Swidler developed the theory that describes culture as the use of what is publicly available, in symbolic form, through which people experience and express meaning. Culture consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies as well as informal practices such as language, gossip, stories, rituals of daily life and social processes of shared modes of behavior and outlook in a community. She also places high levels of priority on social values which she describes as the links people make between culture and action.

Swidler is most known for her comparison of an individuals collective culture and values to a tool kit that they use to:

1. Solve problems
2. Create strategies of action
3. Establish significance

- (Swidler 1986)

Peterson's work primarily discusses the various venues through which something can be considered to be authentic.

Authenticity is socially constructed which means that membership to a group is not an inherent right there must be a claim to that group which validation will determine authentic membership or not.

The greatest void in the creation of authenticity is between the “expert” and the “user” or the producer and the consumer.

## The Theory Continued...

There are many times when an object, idea, or individual is considered authentic by one and not the other causing a change in definition by one or the other and in rare cases both.

The “work” of authentication happens in six primary ways:

1. Ethic/Cultural Identity-ascribed group membership rather than earned
2. Elasticity of Group Boundaries- stretching the limits of a groups boundaries for inclusion
3. Status Identity-membership due to influence or lack or corruption
4. Experience-membership based on an experience or submersion in the culture
5. Technology Mediated- heavy use of technology as foundation of claim
6. Expert- examples of past precedence determine what future membership should look like.

- (Peterson 2005)

## The Plan

The plan is to create authentic interest in academics by means of one of the various authentic “works” mentioned by Peterson based on a critical assessment of the student athletes “tool box”.

-Base on Swidler's theory when a person does not have the right tools to solve a problem or create a plan of action to respond to it they go into what is commonly known as “culture shock”. In the case of some student athletes they have not been adequately prepared for the course load or the content of their college level course schedules which leads to an abandonment of the expectations and a digression to the familiar strategies of action.

-In high school many of the athletes were able to be successful because of the prestige that they received due to their athletic ability or they were excused for their learning disabilities for the same reasons.

**In addition to helping students with class scheduling and degree choices, advisors encourage and mentor student-athletes throughout their college experience. It is SSA's philosophy to foster an honest and open learning environment in which students learn to become more self-reliant.**

**Services for Student Athletes ensures that students who are currently or have been affiliated with University's Athletics, regardless of athletic eligibility, are provided every opportunity to accomplish academic goals and earn a degree**

(Taken from the organizations official web site)

## The Need for Improvement

-The NCAA requires that student athletes are enrolled as a full time student ( twelve credits) every term and that they pass at least half (six) of those credits in order to be eligible to participate in athletic related activities for the University sponsored team. Related activities include but are not limited to lifting weights, practices, competitions, meetings, and recreational activities.

-Before each term the Services for Student Athletes team creates course schedules that will best complete their organizational goal (See above) .

-Services for Student Athletes (SSA) also create tutoring schedules and provide learning specialists to help student s be most successful at the classes that are offered to them. SSA has a monitoring program that makes sure the student athletes are going to class and that they are going to their appointments and that the work carried out in those appointments is on task.

-All Student Athletes are placed in one of three classifications or tiers of learning assistance needed. Which are based on the student's accumulative GPA .

The Tier Classifications for Student Athletes

- (1) A student with a 3.0 GPA and above can sign up for tutoring or learning specialist help as needed.
- (2) A student with a 2.5-2.99 GPA has four hours of structured study hall, which means tutors are assigned for them, and they can sign up for tutoring or learning specialist help as needed.
- (3) A student with a GPA below 2.5 has eight hours of structured study hall, which means tutors are assigned for them as well as a learning specialist.

Despite all of the structured study and assistance rendered by SSA there are still student athletes that do not maintain the needed level of credits passed each term to participate with their team in athletic related activities. When this happens the team that the student participates with becomes weaker and has to look for replacement players until the student is academically eligible again , if ever.

## More of the Plan...

### Creation of Authenticity

To create strategies of action that are consistent with that of a authentic student first SSA will have to establish the ethos, norms or boundaries of the group “Student Athlete”. The boundaries of the group should include the NCAA standards as a base line and be inclusive enough to include all students that are currently on tier 1 and 2 but should be enticing enough to draw members of tier 3 into the group.

The boundaries of the group should include a level of autonomy that is unique to students that do not have SSA to assist them in their college planning like the skills to look up, plan and register for their own classes. The boundaries should also include skills and actions like going to class and tutoring appointments, passing all classes registered for, and earning a degree before their final season of eligibility.

The autonomy to choose classes should promote authentic desire to be a student and help remove any resistance that exists in the tool box that causes strategies of action that cause behaviors that will lead to failure.

Expert creation will be effective if the precedence and definition of authenticity comes from the group rather than those that over see the group. Like music fandom plays such a large role in determining what is and what is not real country music. If a culture that places importance on academics can be created by the athletes themselves those responsible for turning them into students will have an easier time. Like Plato in the times of the Greeks was able to draw the athletes to his learning by first going to their gymnasiums a culture of authentic interest in academics can be created amongst the athletes.

- Establish group boundaries
- Create tools that support group boundaries
- Help athletes use those tools for positive action strategies
- Authentic interest develops amongst athletes
- Leads to more interest individual learning career
- Student Athletes become co-planners and allies in the future recruitment of new student athlete into the group through work in authenticity

## References

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