**Improve the Student Athlete Experience: A Proposal to Better Support the Freshman Population**

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**Introduction**

Services for Student Athletes (SSA) ensures that students who are currently or have been affiliated with University of Oregon Athletics, regardless of athletic eligibility, are provided every opportunity to accomplish academic goals and earn a degree. The NCAA mandates academic services as well as rules and policies to ensure the academic commitment of student athletes and to increase the likelihood that they will earn degrees. SSA runs more of a conservative academic support program, which required all student athletes with a GPA under 3.0 and all newcomer student athletes to have mandatory tutoring and study hours. The under skilled or under motivated student athletes are also required to meet with learning specialists to build their learning skills as well as organizational management. The academic advisors also hold weekly meetings with the student athletes they are responsible for to check-in on how their classes are going. This is a high stakes job because you are dealing with a student athlete’s eligibility to compete in their sport, as well as the hope to graduate.

**Ways of Improving Freshman Support**

- **Added Advisor Position:**
  - Adding an extra academic advisor to the Services for Student Athletes staff would allow more support to be given to the freshman student athlete population. This would allow for a staff member to focus primarily on issues that arise in a student athlete freshman year. This advisor would be able to counsel and mentor these student athletes, and help bridge the gap between high school and college. They would be in charge of over seeing all freshman athletes, through supporting them both academically and socially.

**Pressures of Being a Student Athlete**

Being a collegiate athlete is not an easy task. Having to deal with the pressures of both competing at a high level athletically as well as doing well enough academically to stay eligible (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). An average day of a student athlete involves: practice, lifting, film, treatment, class, tutors, homework, and maybe a little socializing. Besides the basic stress of school student athletes are also dealing with things like playing time, injury, nutrition, skill building, and getting along with their coaches and teammates. Student athletes are always trying to find balance in their life, as illustrated in the triangle below.

**High School to College Transition**

More students are enrolling in college than ever before, but graduation rates are not increasing with the enrollment demand. One of the main reasons why more students are not graduating at a higher rate is because of their lack of preparedness for college. This has become a major concern for the federal government, which has led to a shift in educational policy towards college and career readiness. One problem that needs to be addressed is that “many first-year students find that their college courses are fundamentally different from their high school courses” (Corley, Aspengren, Stout, & Veach, 2006). College freshmen are expected to know how to conduct research, analyze and interpret results, as well as build a supported argument. These are skills that are not ways taught at the high school level at either the rigor or depth that is required in college (Corley, 2007).

College is already a huge transition for a high school student athlete. Freshmen are away from their parents and are learning the ins and outs of adulthood. For many this is the first time in their life where they are responsible for making their own decisions on when to go to sleep, what the eat, when to do homework, and how to do laundry. A college freshman has enough to worry about and adjust too even if they are prepared academically for college. Adding on the stress of being underprepared for college in a student athlete freshman year, could be almost unbearable. It is not an easy task to figure out how to improve these skills and know where to go for help, when you are new at having to take care of your own business. This is one of the main reasons why so many freshman struggles to stay afloat and continue on to graduation when they are underprepared to begin with.

**Weighing an Added Advisor Position**

- **Advantage:**
  1. Increased supervision and support for freshman both academically and socially.
  2. Eliminates the possibility of someone falling through the cracks.
  3. Allows someone to be more specialized on the needs of the freshman population.
  4. Allows the other academic advisors to focus on a smaller case load.
  5. Could be talked about when recruiting student athletes.
  6. They could help with the freshman student athletes success class, and basic life skills.
  7. They would help this population feel like someone was looking out for them.

- **Disadvantages:**
  1. Student athletes will then have to change advisors their sophomore year, after already building a relationship with their freshman advisor.
  2. There could be up to 80 freshman student athletes a year, which is a lot for one person.
  3. The advisor may just feel like a babysitter at times.
  4. This could put a lot of stress on one person to act as a academic advisor as well as a life coach.
  5. The fiscal implications of adding another staff member.

**Contact Information and Acknowledgements**

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**Outcome Predictions**

- **Adding a freshman academic advisor:** Freshman will be assessed for their social and academic needs quicker.
- **Leading to proactive individual academic plans and interventions for specific freshman:** This will allow freshman to be better protected and supported in their new environment.
- **Creating a better freshman student athlete experience:** This will lead to freshman feeling more confident and secure.

**References**

- Conley, D. T. (January 01, 2007). The Prepared Graduate - The Challenge of College Readiness - The author describes how high schools can prepare students to meet the academic demands of college. Educational Leadership - Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.e.a, 64, 7, 23.