

Enhancing Campus Conductivity

Resources for Faculty Athletics Representatives to Engage in Conversations about Intercollegiate Athletics

Executive Summary

While efforts to communicate the value of intercollegiate athletics have improved the perceptions of college sports within certain external publics, a recent study indicates work still needs to be done closer to home – with campus faculty and staff.

The NCAA in 2016 surveyed a range of stakeholders and constituents about whether they thought college sports provides opportunities for student-athletes, prioritizes student-athlete well-being, is committed to academics, and is committed to fairness. In all cases, the lowest ratings for these questions were from faculty and staff. In parsing out the data further, it was obvious that faculty had the least positive perception about the value of college sports. While ratings were generally higher for Division II faculty and staff, respondents still thought that college sports, as an entity, is mainly motivated by making money.

Accordingly, participants at the 2017 Division II FAR Advanced Institute developed a resource to help FARs talk with their campus colleagues to explain how intercollegiate athletics benefits both the student-athlete participants and the institutions themselves.

The resource focuses on “enhancing conductivity on campus” – initiating effective dialog with campus constituents about the value of college sports in the educational experience. The document, composed by FARs with contributions from members of the Division II Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, identifies the following four areas in which FARs can help move the needle locally on the perceptions of intercollegiate athletics:

Section 1: FAR Relationships with Faculty

Among the FAR’s responsibilities is to communicate the benefits of athletics to the faculty:

- How athletics aligns with the institution’s educational mission
- How athletics participation benefits student-athletes (teamwork, self-discipline, builds life skills, collaboration with colleagues from different backgrounds, etc.)
- How student-athletes increase the overall profile of the student body (academic success, diversity, regional/national exposure for the institution, etc.)

Key takeaway: Regardless of the category, be it academic achievement, community engagement, campus leadership, university ambassadorship – however you rank your student body, student-athletes will almost certainly populate the top tier. Faculty who interact with student-athletes know this firsthand and should advocate that fact to colleagues and other campus constituents who may doubt athletics’ positive influence on the university as a whole.

Section 2: Communicating the Role of the FAR with University Administration

The FAR plays a key role in ensuring the academic integrity of the intercollegiate athletics program at every Division II college or university, facilitating institutional control of intercollegiate athletics and enhancing the student-athlete experience. As neither a member of the athletics department nor the institution's administration, the FAR holds a unique position as an independent voice in the management and oversight of college athletics.

Key Takeaway: FARs should advocate for student-athletes to the following:

- President/Chancellor
- Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer
- Vice President of Student Affairs/Dean of Students
- Enrollment Management
- Communications/Public Relations
- Social Equity/Title IX/ Diversity

Section 3: Engaging with the Athletics Department

The effective functioning of the FAR depends on having positive working relationships with various constituencies across campus. The relationship between the FAR and the athletics department is especially crucial.

Key Takeaway: FARs should connect regularly with:

- Director of Athletics
- Senior Woman Administrator
- Coaches
- Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)
- Director of Compliance
- Sports Information Director
- Athletic Training Staff

Section 4: The FAR and Student-Athletes

Student-athletes play an integral role on today's college and university campuses. They contribute to a vibrant campus life and in some cases are the lens through which many view the university. Yet it's crucial that guidance and direction be provided to student-athletes. FARs can help ensure and advocate for student-athlete well-being, academic integrity and fairness within the athletics department.

Key Takeaway: To engage and develop trust with student-athletes:

- Become more involved with SAAC, which provides an opportunity to meet student leaders in each sport.

- Attend athletics competitions, including occasional travel with teams.
- Take advantage of technology to engage with student-athletes.
- Accompany student-athletes during community engagement activities.
- Set aside and publicize office hours for student-athletes.
- Post a video explaining the role of the FAR and how student-athletes can get in touch.
- Visit practice sessions or meet with teams.
- Congratulate student-athletes on their various accomplishments.