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CULTIVATING CHAMPIONS: EXPLORING LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMING AND ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT IN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

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Video Presentation

This study addresses leadership programming and athlete development initiatives within intercollegiate athletics by gathering data from athletic department employees. These employees filled a variety of roles from athletic directors and coaches to athletic training staff. Gathering data from a variety of staff within athletic departments (senior staff vs. other athletic department staff) allowed us to identify any disconnects in athletic department programming perceptions. Findings of the study indicate athletic department staff perceptions of programming appear to be relatively consistent, except across a few items.

Student-Athlete Statement

While there is merit in the findings of this research study, it was initially designed to determine differences in the perceptions of athletic department staff and current student-athletes existed. Despite the research teams best efforts, we were unable to secure participation with ACC athletic departments to get student-athletes to participate, leaving a gap in the findings to understand potential disconnects between the athletic department perceptions and student-athlete perceptions. Importantly, we reached out to athletics department staff from every ACC institution and only received a reply from one institution. However, this institution declined to share our survey with their student-athletes. To provide strong, implementable suggestions, having future ACC support to access this population is necessary and mutually beneficial to athletic departments.

Program Offerings

An initial question explored programming present within athletic departments available to student-athletes. Findings of interest include less than half of the institutions providing transition programming for their athletes. Additionally, responses indicated very small numbers of institutions requiring student-athletes to engage with graduate school counseling (2.5%) and structured networking opportunities (13%). These are areas that could be targeted to improve with transition training. Further, 60.5% of institutions indicated social media/branding education training. With the development of NIL, athletic departments should look to increase offerings around social media use and effective branding skills to help athletes wishing to engage in NIL opportunities and minimize potential negative outcomes of social media use.

Finally, programming opportunities such as the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) must be offered within athletic departments, and therefore it is likely this is under-reported in this study indicating a lack of understanding from athletic department staff regarding the programming offered. Athletic department staff, such as coaches, student-athlete development and academics, and athletic trainers have high touch-points with student-athletes and should be aware and educated on the programming opportunities available.

Differences across Division

   In addition to collecting data from Division I institutions, we also collected data from a small number of Division II and Division III institutions. Division I athletic departments were most likely to offer programming across all options except sexual violence prevention, drug/alcohol education, and offering senior day (Table 2). Division I athletic departments were much more likely to provide access to transition programming than other divisions; however, only represented 51.3% of division I institutions indicating a significant gap for this programming. Responses indicated 85% of Division I athletic departments offered SAAC and 57.5% offered leadership academy with almost 80% providing leadership workshops.

Leadership Development Programming Perceptions

   Leadership development programming perceptions were measured over eight items, scored on a five-point Likert-scale (Table 3). Overall perceptions of this programming were positive, however, "*The mandatory programming offered by my athletic department develops better leaders"* scored 3.56/5, indicating many individuals feel indifferent toward this statement. Similarly, "*The mandatory programming offered by my athletic department develops better people"* scored 3.69/5, again suggesting that many individuals feel that this programming is not influential in athlete development.

Differences between senior staff and others

   Differences between scores from senior staff and the other athletic department staff were then analyzed (Table 4). Scores were relatively consistent across the two groups; however, senior staff (*M*=4.35) outscored other athletic department staff (*M*=4.19) by 0.16 on the item, "*I feel that my athletic department invests in student-athlete development."* However, a mean score of 4.19 is still very supportive of the programming. Senior staff (*M*=4.08) also outscored other athletic department staff (*M*=3.95) considerably by 0.13 on the statement, "*Leadership development opportunities are available and accessible to all student-athletes."* Senior staff should engage in conversation with other staff to better identify why their scores differ significantly on this item, and more importantly, why other athletic department staff report so lowly on this item. Further, future research ***needs*** to engage with student-athletes to determine their perceptions on this item.

   A large difference in scores (.28) was identified on the item "*Athletic departments have student-athletes in mind when creating their programming"*, with senior staff reporting a score of *M*=4.31 and other athletic department staff reporting *M*=4.03. However, both responses are relatively supportive of the statement, indicating that most athletic department staff agree with the statement. Finally, a difference of .12 was identified on the item, "*I feel that my athletic department provides student-athletes with effective programming."* Senior staff reported *M*=3.94, while other athletic department staff indicated *M*=3.82. Future research should seek to understand why athletic department staff lack confidence in the effectiveness of this programming, and what student-athlete perceptions are.

Perceptions of Access to Programming

Finally, the study explored perceptions of access to programming (Table 5). Respondents were somewhat positive in their perceptions of access to programming. For example, the item, "*I feel that the policies in place create a fair and equitable guide for leadership position selection*" scored $M=3.71$. This section of questions also explored time commitments for both student-athletes and staff in terms of programming. The item, "*I feel that my athletic department requires too much of the student-athletes, in terms of programming quantity*" scored $M=2.36$, indicating participants somewhat disagree with the statement. Additionally, participants also somewhat disagreed with the time requirement for staff ($M= 2.59$).

Differences between senior staff and others

Senior staff ($M=3.59$) underscored other athletic department staff ($M=3.78$) on the item, "*My athletic department has policies in place to select student-athlete leadership positions*", indicating that senior staff do not necessarily know or support the current selection policies in place for opportunities. Findings indicate senior staff are very much in support of the amount of money they are investing in student-athlete development, scoring $M= 1.90$, while other athletic department staff scored $M= 2.14$. Regarding athletic department time commitments of student-athletes, senior staff scored much less ($M= 2.15$) than the other staff perceptions ($M=2.40$). However, both groups feel that the athletic department programming does not require too much of student-athletes time. Similarly, senior staff also underscored ($M=2.38$) other staff perceptions ($M=2.68$) when responding to the statement, "*I feel that my athletic department requires too much of the staff, in terms of programming quantity.*" However, both groups disagree with this statement, indicating support for the current amount of programming present within athletic departments.

Summary

Athletic departments appear to have a strong number of program offerings for student-athletes to take advantage of. However, it could be in the interests of athletic departments to shift some of the programming from offered to mandatory, given recent research findings (such as transition programming). Athletic department staff appear to support the current programming and indicate that athletic departments are both appropriately funding these resources and requiring adequate time commitments from both staff and student-athletes for these activities. This study importantly examines whether athletic department staff feel similarly across positions on the programming provided within their athletic department. For the most part, it appears senior staff and other athletic department staff have similar perceptions of the programming. However, there were some items where perceptions from senior staff and other athletic department staff differed noticeably, indicating a disconnect between those in the athletic department. Identifying differences across these two groups is just one level of analysis. Specifically, these findings indicate a need to examine student-athlete perceptions, as it is possible that the disconnect will continue to that population. If found, athletic departments will be able to make the necessary changes to ensure the population of student-athletes feel that their athletic department caters to their needs.

ACC Grant Tables

Table 1

Total Program Offerings

Programming	Offered	Mandatory
Student-Athlete Advisory Committee	445 (84.1%)	95 (18%)
Leadership Academy	290 (54.8%)	23 (4.3%)
Leadership workshops	401 (75.8%)	30 (5.7%)
Nutrition workshops	396 (74.9%)	55 (10.4%)
Guest speakers	443 (83.7%)	103 (19.5%)
Exit Interviews	318 (60.1%)	206 (38.9%)
Graduate School Counseling	337 (63.7%)	13 (2.5%)
Structured Networking Opportunities	383 (72.4%)	69 (13%)
Finance Workshops	346 (65.4%)	81 (15.3%)
Career Development Workshops	413 (78.1%)	80 (15.1%)
Senior Day	309 (58.4%)	132 (25%)
Transition Programming	253 (47.8%)	38 (7.2%)
Effective Communication	274 (51.8%)	26 (4.9%)
Media Training/Public Speaking	289 (54.6%)	65 (12.3%)
Social media/Branding Education	320 (60.5%)	79 (14.9%)
Emotional Intelligence Training	223 (42.2%)	34 (6.4%)
Sexual Violence Prevention	265 (50.1%)	367 (69.4%)
Drug/Alcohol Education	272 (51.4%)	291 (55.0%)
No Programming	11 (2.1%)	4 (0.8%)

Table 2

Program Offerings by Division

Division	Division I (n=468)		Division II (n=34)		Division III (n=27)	
Programming	Offered	Mandatory	Offered	Mandatory	Offered	Mandatory
SAAC	85%	17.1%	76.5%	29.4%	77.8%	18.5%
Leadership Academy	57.5%	4.5%	26.5%	2.9%	44.4%	3.7%
Leadership Workshops	79.5%	5.8%	41.2%	5.9%	55.6%	3.7%
Nutrition Workshops	77.6%	11.5%	58.8%	2.8%	48.1%	-
Guest Speakers	85.5%	20.9%	76.5%	8.8%	63.0%	7.4%
Exit Interviews	60.5%	41.9%	58.8%	17.6%	55.6%	14.8%
Graduate School Counseling	67.5%	2.8%	35.3%	-	33.3%	-
Structured Networking	76.7%	14.7%	41.2%	-	37.0%	-
Finance Workshops	70.7%	16.9%	26.5%	-	22.2%	7.4%
Career Development	80.3%	16.9%	64.7%	2.9%	55.6%	-
Senior Day	58.5%	25%	55.9%	20.6%	59.3%	29.6%
Transition Programming	51.3%	7.9%	14.7%	-	29.6%	3.7%
Effective Comm.	53.6%	4.7%	32.4%	5.9%	44.4%	7.4%
Media Training	58.5%	13.2%	20.6%	5.9%	29.6%	3.7%
Social media/ Branding	65.6%	15.2%	20.6%	14.7%	22.2%	11.1%
Emotional Intelligence	44.2%	6.4%	26.5%	8.8%	25.9%	3.7%
Sexual Violence Pre.	49.8%	70.1%	50.0%	67.6%	55.6%	59.3%
Drug/Alcohol Education	51.5%	55.8%	50.0%	47.1%	51.9%	51.9%
No Training	1.9%	.4%	5.9%	5.9%	-	-

Table 3

Total Leadership Development Programming Perceptions

Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Mean
I feel that my athletic department invests in student-athlete development	2.2%	6.6%	4.4%	38.4%	47.7%	4.22
I feel that my athlete department invests in leadership development	3.8%	12.6%	14.1%	39.8%	29.7%	3.79
The mandatory programming offered by my athletic department develops better people	4.2%	8.9%	26.3%	34.7%	25.9%	3.69
The mandatory programming offered by my athletic department develops better leaders	5.1%	10.6%	28.0%	35.4%	20.8%	3.56
The mandatory programing offered by my athletic department develops better student-athletes	2.3%	7.8%	23.2%	39.0%	27.8%	3.82
Leadership development opportunities are available and accessible to all student-athletes	3.8%	10.0%	13.8%	29.7%	42.6%	3.97
Athletic departments have the student-athletes in mind when creating their programming	2.7%	6.6%	11.4%	39.1%	40.2%	4.08
I feel that my athletic department provides student-athletes with effective programming	4.4%	9.9%	14.4%	40.4%	30.9%	3.84

Table 4

Leadership Development Programming Perceptions, Senior Staff vs. Others

Item		Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agee (5)	Mean
I feel that my athletic department invests in student-athlete development	**Senior Staff (n=88)**	**-**	**10.2**	**2.3**	**29.5**	**58.0**	**4.35**
	Others (n=440)	**3.4**	**5.9**	**4.8**	**40.2**	**45.7**	**4.19**
I feel that my athlete department invests in leadership development	Senior Staff (n=88)	4.7	15.1	12.8	37.2	30.2	3.73
	Others (n=439)	3.6	12.1	14.4	40.3	29.6	3.80
The mandatory programming offered by my athletic department develops better people	Senior Staff (n=88)	3.4	6.8	30.7	33.0	26.1	3.72
	Others (n=440)	4.3	9.3	25.5	35.0	25.9	3.69
The mandatory programming offered by my athletic department develops better leaders	Senior Staff (n=88)	4.5	12.5	27.3	33.0	22.7	3.57
	Others (n=440)	5.2	10.2	28.2	35.9	20.5	3.56
The mandatory programing offered by my athletic	Senior Staff (n=88)	2.3	8.1	26.7	30.2	32.6	3.83

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department develops better student-athletes	Others (n=440)	2.3	7.7	22.5	40.7	26.8	3.82
Leadership development opportunities are available and accessible to all student-athletes	**Senior Staff (n=88)**	**2.3**	**8.0**	**14.8**	**29.5**	**45.5**	**4.08**
	Others (n=440)	**4.1**	**10.5**	**13.6**	**29.8**	**42.0**	**3.95**
Athletic departments have the student-athletes in mind when creating their programming	**Senior Staff (n=87)**	**-**	**6.9**	**6.9**	**34.5**	**51.7**	**4.31**
	Others (n=440)	**3.2**	**6.6**	**12.3**	**40.0**	**38.0**	**4.03**
I feel that my athletic department provides student-athletes with effective programming	**Senior Staff (n=88)**	**2.3**	**12.5**	**11.4**	**36.4**	**37.5**	**3.94**
	Others (n=439)	**4.8**	**9.3**	**15.0**	**41.2**	**29.6**	**3.82**

Table 5

Total Perceptions of Program Access

Item	Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agee (5)	Mean
My athletic department focuses on ensuring every individual has access to student-athlete development programming	2.5%	9.6%	13.4%	36.9%	37.6%	3.98
My athletic department has policies in place to select student-athlete leadership positions	4.0%	7.6%	24.1%	38.1%	26.2%	3.75
I feel that the policies in place create a fair and equitable guide for leadership position selection	3.0%	9.9%	27.2%	32.5%	27.4%	3.71
I feel that my athletic department invests too much money in student-athlete development	36.2%	32.6%	19.2%	8.5%	3.4%	2.10
I feel that my athletic department requires too much of the student-athletes, in terms of programming quantity	24.1%	39.0%	18.2%	14.6%	4.2%	2.36
I feel that my athletic department requires too much of the staff, in terms of programming quantity	20.5%	29.2%	27.5%	16.3%	6.6%	2.59

Table 6

Perceptions of Program Access, Senior Staff vs. Others

Item		Strongly Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Strongly Agee (5)	Mean
My athletic department focuses on ensuring every individual has access to student-athlete development programming	Senior Staff (n=88)	-	12.5	11.4	34.1	42.0	4.06
	Others (n=441)	2.9	9.1	13.8	37.4	36.7	3.96
My athletic department has policies in place to select student-athlete leadership positions	**Senior Staff (n=88)**	**6.8**	**8.0**	**28.4**	**33.0**	**23.9**	**3.59**
	Others (n=439)	**3.4**	**7.5**	**23.2**	**39.2**	**26.7**	**3.78**
I feel that the policies in place create a fair and equitable guide for leadership position selection	Senior Staff (n=88)	3.4	8.0	28.4	33.0	27.3	3.73
	Others (n=438)	3.0	10.3	26.9	32.4	27.4	3.71
I feel that my athletic department invests too much money in student-athlete development	**Senior Staff (n=88)**	**42.0**	**36.4**	**12.5**	**8.0**	**1.1**	**1.90**
	Others (n=439)	**35.1**	**31.9**	**20.5**	**8.7**	**3.9**	**2.14**
I feel that my athletic department requires too much of the student-athletes, in terms of programming quantity	**Senior Staff (n=88)**	**29.5**	**39.8**	**19.3**	**9.1**	**2.3**	**2.15**
	Others (n=440)	**23.0**	**38.9**	**18.0**	**15.7**	**4.5**	**2.40**

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I feel that my athletic department requires too much of the staff, in terms of programming quantity	Senior Staff (n=88)	28.4	29.5	22.7	14.8	4.5	2.38
	Others (n=440)	18.9	29.1	28.4	16.6	7.0	2.64