

SUPPORTING THE STUDENT-ATHLETE.....OR THE ATHLETE-STUDENT? PART I

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A Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) is faced with numerous situations involving faculty, administration, and the athletic department that can affect the status and well-being of student athletes. He is convinced that what his institution, Seaside State University, is experiencing could be applicable to intercollegiate athletic programs nationwide and have far-reaching effects on the future of student athletes.

INTRODUCTION

As with many professors, Bob Belafonte pursued additional interests at his institution besides those related to his area of academic expertise. Although his Ph.D. was in Marketing with an emphasis in international business, as a former collegiate athlete Bob was concerned about the welfare and progress of student athletes. He often talked with student athletes who were enrolled in his classes and sought to help them when they struggled. This interest in the welfare of student athletes served as a special passion for Bob that augmented his passion for teaching and helping college students. When the position of Faculty Athletic Representative became vacant at SSU, Bob submitted his application and was thrilled when he was chosen for the job. Little did he know of the extent of the problems he would learn and the challenges he would face.

THE FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE

In 1973 NCAA reorganized collegiate sports into three membership divisions (I, II, & III). The responsibilities of FARs are considerably different within and between these division classifications due to not only the scope and importance of their athletic programs, but also because of differing structures of institutional control that each follow.

The importance and involvement of the faculty athletic representative (FAR) are described in Articles 4, 5, & 6 of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Constitution. Specifically, Article 6.1.4 requires that each member institution appoint a faculty athletic representative who is “a member of the institution’s faculty or an administrator who holds faculty rank and shall not hold an administrative or coaching position in the athletic department.” Furthermore, the

FAR is one of five individuals at the member institution who are allowed to make contact with the NCAA concerning normal interactions between the NCAA and the member institution. The other four recognized individuals are the institution's chief executive officer, director of athletics, senior woman administrator, and the compliance coordinator.

The ideal roles and responsibilities of the Division II FAR are grouped into the three areas of 1) student athlete well-being, 2) academic integrity, and 3) institutional control. However, the specific duties of the FAR at each member institution can differ considerably as they are determined by the institution's administration.

THE INSTITUTION

Seaside State University (SSU) is a Division II member institution under the NCAA system. Academically it is a highly accredited comprehensive regional university offering over 50 undergraduate degrees and 38 graduate degrees, from its eight colleges and schools. Approximately 10,000 undergraduate students and 2,000 graduate students from every state in the nation and over 50 foreign countries are enrolled at SSU. Its beautiful sprawling grounds are divided into two campuses. South Campus, the larger one, includes university administrative buildings, the library, the student union, student residence halls, and most of the university's colleges. North Campus, over a mile away from the South Campus, includes the Health Sciences and Business Administration (HSBA) building, which houses the College of Nursing & Health Sciences and the College of Business Administration.

Administratively, SSU encouraged its students' academic progress and allowed its faculty a lot of academic freedom. Its policies included allowing instructors to determine whether a student's absence qualified as an "excused absence" and making a student subject to a failing grade if they were absent more than 20% of the class meetings without their absences being accepted as "excused". Since there are typically 30 class meetings in a semester, the maximum number of absences a student may have without failing a course is 6. In addition to a very open-minded Provost (Vice President of Academic Affairs), it also had an active Faculty Senate, of which Bob was a former member for 4 years.

Athletically, SSU is known as the "Surfers" and has 360 student athletes from across the nation and 15 foreign countries. It competes in seven intercollegiate sports for men and seven for women. SSU has a strong athletic program and has won 10 national championships in 12 appearances among six sports. It has a strong athletic reputation and a large local fan base among SSU and the local community.

INSTRUCTOR INSOUCIANCE

One day Bob was contacted by a SSU basketball player who explained that he was having trouble with a marketing class taught on North Campus by Prof. Yunkov on Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00-1:15pm. The student athlete (SA) explained that he was doing satisfactory work in the class, but Prof. Yunkov had a class policy that assigned students “a half absence” every time they were late to class. It so happened that the SA had a class on South Campus 11:00-11:50am on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Since the two campuses were more than a mile apart, the SA had only 10 minutes to get to Prof. Yunkov’s class. The situation was complicated by the facts that the SA did not have a car and the shuttle service between the two campuses was notoriously unreliable, often taking more than 20 minutes to get to North Campus. The SA was arriving a couple minutes late to every class and accumulating 1 absence every week. Needless to say, the SA was worried about failing the class and thereby endangering his athletic eligibility.

After speaking with SSU’s Athletic Director, Curt Collins, to share what he had learned from the SA, Bob approached his colleague, Prof. Yunkov, to see if a compromise could be found. Prof. Yunkov stated “I refuse to give SAs special treatment and I’m not going to change my policy. This is a required course in the student’s major and it’s important. If anything the student should leave his class on South Campus early to make it to mine on time!”

Making no progress with Prof. Yunkov, Bob approached the Head of the Marketing Department, Dr. Simon Coosey, the next day in hopes that Dr. Coosey would encourage Prof. Yunkov to change his “half absence” policy. However, Dr. Coosey claimed that Yunkov’s policy was a matter of academic freedom and that he would not interfere with it in any way. Dr. Coosey then exclaimed, “Earlier I received a call from the Athletic Director (AD) who asked if anything could be done to help the SA’s situation. I told him I wouldn’t and that I am tired of SAs expecting special treatment!” Dr. Coosey ended the conversation by saying with a smirk on his face “...and you can tell Collins to not contact me again because he is coming VERY close to violating NCAA policy by asking me to intervene!”

Feeling as if he was caught in a run-down between 3rd base and home, Bob decided to return to his office, listen to some classical music, and develop another approach.

PROFESSOR POLICIES

While checking his email, Bob noticed an email from SSU’s Senior Woman Administrator, Judy Gaskins. Apparently, a women’s basketball player, Delilah Strauss, had missed an American Government exam due to the team’s travel schedule and was not being given an opportunity to make-up the exam. Knowing that all students often do not provide the whole story of a situation, Ms. Gaskins

asked Bob if he would contact the American Government Professor, Dr. Thomas Hall, to learn all the facts of the situation.

Bob called Dr. Hall and explained his responsibilities as SSU's FAR and asked if Dr. Hall could shed light on the situation. Bob learned that Dr. Hall was very supportive of SA's and was actually a former SA when he was an undergraduate student. "Bob, I give any SA in my class the same opportunities that I would give any student. My exam policy is clearly explained in my syllabus. It states that all students are allowed to drop their lowest exam score out of 5 exams. Plus, my missed exam policy explains that if a student knows they will be missing an exam for any reason, they need to contact me beforehand with an acceptable excuse so that we can reschedule the exam. If they do not re-schedule an exam, then they are allowed to use the missed exam as the one they drop." Bob also learned from Dr. Hall that other professors followed a policy of adding the weight of any missed exam to the weight of the comprehensive final in their classes.

Knowing that the majority of students do not bother to closely read syllabi, Bob thanked Dr. Hall for his time and returned to his office.....realizing that something just did not seem right about this situation. There had to be a better way.

Bob wondered if all his experience in international business and his years of teaching prepared him for such problems. He knew that his cultural sensitivity and his passion for his students could be the key in finding solutions that would be beneficial to everyone.

However, with multiple people involved in each scenario, how could Bob get them to understand the other side of the situation? How could mutually beneficial changes be made?