

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

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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 great deal 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.

COACHING CONFLICTS

While grading papers in his office, Bob was paid a visit by one of his colleagues, Dr. Reggie Williams, a Finance professor and faculty advisor for the SSU College of Business Investment Club. Reggie told Bob that Mercedes Herrera, SSU's #1 women's golfer from Spain and 4.0 GPA Finance major, had been awarded a free trip to the NY Stock Exchange with the Investment Club for her academic performance and her contribution to the Investment Club. Having had Mercedes as a student in one of his classes, Bob blurted "That's fantastic!! Mercedes was one of my best students! If anyone deserves such an award it is her! I'm excited for her!" Reggie cut short Bob's excitement by stating, "Right, but her team has a tournament the same weekend and her coach will not release her to go on the trip! As the FAR, can you please talk to the Athletic Director and her coach and explain what an opportunity this is for her, especially since she does not plan to be a professional golfer as a career and she has a bright future in finance?!" Bob understood completely, but told Reggie that Mercedes signed an agreement with the SSU Athletic Department to play golf in exchange for financial assistance to earn her degree. Reggie countered "But this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for her! Besides, she said the tournament means nothing to the team's standing and that other golfers can easily take her place!" Bob then promised his colleague that he would talk to the AD, Curt Collins, and her coach, Rudy Talbot, and see what could be worked out.

Although very sympathetic, Curt Collins stated that he might be able to pressure Coach Talbot to release Mercedes from playing in the tournament, but such an action would be counter-productive to the overall health of SSU's successful athletic program. Understandably, Collins declined to take action and left the decision up to Mercedes' coach.

Coach Talbot confirmed to Bob that the tournament had little effect on SSU's season record and standing, but that it was a matter of Surfer Pride and emphasized that Mercedes is obligated to compete because of the financial aid she had received. Coach Talbot was adamant that Mercedes compete with the team and stated, "Heck, she can go to NYC anytime!" Bob thanked the coach for his time and left to break the bad news to Mercedes.

Mercedes was not surprised when Bob informed her of Coach Talbot's decision. "That is what I expected," she sadly said. "Besides, it is typical of Coach's style and treatment of student athletes ...especially international student athletes." Based on Mercedes' comment and his special concern for international student athletes (ISA), Bob questioned Mercedes further and learned of some interesting situations that ISAs face.

CULTURAL CONFLICTS

Based on his conversation with Mercedes, Bob spoke with some other ISAs that were in his classes and contacted others on various SSU athletic teams. Bob learned that although SSU had over 200 foreign students from 20 foreign countries, SSU's 18 ISAs came from only 13 of those countries. This indicated that there was not a lot of common nationalities among Surfer ISAs.

Bob learned that although most of the ISAs had travelled to other countries before coming to the United States, receiving a scholarship to play their sport at an American university was the first time many of them had ever visited the United States. This put SSU's ISAs in the same situation as many of SSU's regular international students...having to earn a college education in a strange country with different socio-cultural norms far from their usual support system of family, friends, and familiarity.

A tennis player confided to Bob that she was regularly expected to play with a nagging injury. This was contrary to the treatment she received in her home country where her coach would make her rest and recover before another competition. She stated that the approach to coaching at SSU was very different than what she was accustomed to back home. Her coach in her home country was more encouraging and sympathetic and someone she felt very comfortable around. However, at SSU it was more adversarial with a lot of yelling and reprimands. This was not only distressing to her competitively, but also caused a great deal of distraction in her studies.

A soccer player indicated that although there were students from his home country at SSU, he spent the vast majority of his extra time with his teammates and other SSU ISAs. He explained that due to his team practice and training schedule, he had very little time to socialize with anyone outside of the Athletic Department. In addition, the soccer player explained that he felt he had more in common with other ISAs from different countries than he did with students from his home country.

Multiple ISAs indicated that, due to their athletic obligations, they did not have the time to join other campus organizations or activities that were not organized by the SSU Athletic Department to serve as community service obligations. Some even expressed frustration at not even knowing that certain events and organizations existed which would allow them to acculturate more into American and local culture.

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?