

Faculty Role Models: The Perceived Mentorship of Student-Athletes

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Introduction

Colleges and “universities play an increasingly important role in achieving economic growth and social progress” (Pinheiro et al., 2015, p. 233). The mission of higher education is the dissemination of knowledge through teaching (Cooper, 2011; Pinheiro et al., 2015) and impactful research (Jongbloed et al., 2008; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). However, too often the high emphasis placed on research productivity within the academy takes precedence over undergraduate education (Bland et al., 2006; Fairweather & Rhoads, 1995).

Institutional priorities differ and are often dictated by the individual mission of each institution of higher learning (Fife & Losco, 2004). The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education has seven basic classifications for American colleges and universities: doctoral universities, master’s colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, baccalaureate/associate’s colleges, associate’s colleges, special focused institutions, and tribal colleges (“Carnegie Classification,” n.d.). Further, within the classification of doctoral universities, there are three classifications, including the coveted “R1: Doctoral Universities – Very high research activity” classification, an elite status designated to less than one percent (131 total institutions) of all colleges and universities (“Carnegie Classification,” n.d., para. 4).

Although the first intercollegiate athletic event took place more than 200 years after the founding of Harvard (America’s first institution of higher learning), college sport is uniquely a part of the American educational model (Smith, 1990). Ironically, faculty began to form intercollegiate athletic conferences to assist in unifying rules for athletic play across institutions of higher learning, with faculty establishing the Big 10 as the first athletic conference in 1896 (Smith, 1990). Further, led by New York University’s then president, Henry MacCracken, in 1906, 62 institutions founded the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, which would later become the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; Smith, 1990).

Currently within the NCAA (NCAAA, n.d.; NCAAb, n.d.), there are more than 460,000 student-athletes competing in 24 sports across three divisions (Division I, Division II, Division III) at more than 1,200 member institutions. According to the NCAAc (n.d.), “Division I schools generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships” (para. 1). Although nearly 350 NCAA membership institutions are classified as Division I, there are a group of 65 Division I institutions that are known as the Power Five (NCAAc, n.d.).

Power Five institutions consist of schools that are members of the five most prominent athletic conferences in the country: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Pacific-12 Conference (Pac-12), and the Southeastern Conference (SEC). Not only are Power Five institutions known for being the most elite schools in college sport, but 95% (62 out of 65 institutions) of Power Five intuitions are also classified as R1 institutions.

Faculty members are tasked with carrying out the roles and functions (i.e., teaching, research, service) of colleges and universities (Pinheiro et al., 2015). Further, the complex interrelationship between faculty and student-athletes has been documented for more than 150 years (Smith, 1990). Regarding college student engagement, not only do faculty members influence major choices as well as career aspirations of students, faculty involvement also greatly impacts successful retention and graduation rates (Dunnett et al., 2012; Porter & Umbach, 2006). Although faculty members have the potential to greatly impact students, studies demonstrate that faculty members do not have a favorable view of the student-athlete population (Comeaux, 2010, 2011; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Engstrom et al., 1995; Parsons, 2013; Simons et al., 2007). In fact, some studies have shown faculty tend to view student-athletes as lazy and academically underprepared and often question the motives of student-athletes, feeling that this particular sub-population of students places athletic obligation before academic dedication (Adler & Adler, 1991; Lang et al., 1988; Simons et al., 1999; Stokowski et al., 2016).

The student-athlete population is different from their non-athlete peers in that the athletic obligation(s) placed upon student-athletes consumes a significant amount of time (New, 2015). Further, this particular sub-population of students may be clustered into academic majors that lack rigor to ensure they are meeting eligibility standards (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Paule-Koba, 2019; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010). It should also be noted that student-athletes suffer from higher rates of mental health concerns when compared to their non-athlete peers (Bird et al., 2018; Cox et al., 2017). Moreover, due to the dual roles this population must play (i.e., athlete, student), student-athletes are often isolated and lack social support networks and relationships (Banks & Gibson, 2016; Parsons, 2013).

Relationships play a crucial role in human development (Holt-Lunstad, 2018; Yang et al., 2016). It is human nature to seek connection as well as group involvement (Holt-Lunstad, 2018; Yang et al., 2016). Johnson, Geory, and Griego (1999) argue that “if we accept that relationships contribute to socialization then we can postulate that structured relationships, such as mentoring, are also a form of socialization” (p. 385). Relationships often lead to and encourage personal growth as well as change (Johnson et al., 1999). According to Johnson et al. (1999), “a more formal term for this outcome or cause and effect relationship is mentoring” (p. 384). Mentoring relationships often exists between two individuals and should be constructive to both parties (Johnson et al., 1999). The mentoring relationship comes in many forms. Such interactions can be impulsive (i.e., spontaneous) in nature or they may be more assigned or formalized (Murray, 1991). Further, “mentoring should be viewed as boundaryless and have the capability to impact all facets of our lives” (Johnson et al., 1999, p. 385). Although it should be recognized that mentorship occurs throughout our social worlds, this paper focuses on mentorship in the educational environment (Johnson et al., 1999).

Considering faculty are crucial to student success (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Bjorklund et al., 2004; Dunnett et al., 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Umbach, 2006) and student-athletes are a special sub-population of college students (Banks & Gibson, 2016; Bird et al., 2018; Cox et al., 2017; New, 2015; Parsons, 2013; Paule-Koba, 2019), this paper serves to fill the gap in the literature regarding faculty members’ mentorship of the student-athlete population. Further, faculty are in prime positions to mentor student-athletes and grow personally by developing relationships

with this particular student group (Stokowski & Ferguson, 2020). Informed by intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), the purpose of this study is to better understand faculty mentorship of student-athletes. Specifically, this study strives to address the following research question, does mentorship of student-athletes differ between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty members?

Review of the Literature

Role of Faculty in Student Success

There is an increasing emphasis on student success at American colleges and universities (Blekic, 2019). Institutions of higher learning are developing programs and courses designed to assist in student development and institutions expect faculty members to assist in meeting the educational and professional needs of students (Blekic, 2019). According to Reason (2009), although student success can be defined by retention and graduation rates, there appears to be no uniform definition of student success. Moreover, factors that measure student success may also include academic success, interaction with faculty and/or peers, satisfaction, and motivation (Reason, 2009).

A multitude of previous studies (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Bjorklund et al., 2004; Dunnett et al., 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Umbach, 2006) demonstrates that faculty interaction with students can significantly contribute to student success. For example, students who experienced active interaction with faculty members (receiving constructive feedback) demonstrated significant improvement in communication and problem-solving skills (Bjorklund et al., 2004). Further, faculty members often assist students with job placement post-graduation (Bjorklund et al., 2004). In addition to the frequency of interaction between faculty and students, the quality of the relationship (both academically and professionally) built from meaningful interactions also contributes to academic success (Anaya & Cole, 2001). Moreover, Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) study showed that the more faculty applied various education practices (providing prompt, respecting student's diverse talents, having high expectations) to students, the further students engaged in their studies and achieved learning outcomes.

Further, faculty motivate students to achieve academically (Roksa & Whitley, 2017; Trolan et al., 2016). The Trolan, et. al. (2016) study investigated various forms of interaction between students and faculty (frequency, quality of interaction, and discussions). The study revealed that when these forms of interaction were dealt separately, all types of interactions showed a significant positive causal relationship with academic motivation. When dealt with altogether, only quality and frequency of interaction showed positive causal relationships with academic motivation (Trolan, et. al., 2016). Moreover, Roksa and Whitley's (2017) study analyzed the moderating effect of motivation from student-faculty interaction. This study found that both White and Black students had high moderating effects of academic motivation which resulted in higher grade point averages when these students interacted with highly student-centered faculty (Roksa & Whitley, 2017).

Importance of Mentorship/Mentoring

The lack of a clear consensual definition of mentoring has been presented as a significant issue in previous studies (Gershenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Nora & Crisp, 2007). Jacobi (1991) noted a lack in consensual agreement on defining what mentoring is by providing 15 different definitions of mentoring used in education, psychology, and management fields. In an effort to conceptualize mentoring, instead of creating one consensual definition, Nora and Crisp (2007) identified four major functions of mentoring as, "1) psychological and emotional support, 2) support for setting goals and choosing a career path, 3) academic subject knowledge support aimed at advancing a student's knowledge relevant to their chosen field, and 4) specification of a role model" (p. 538). Gershenfeld's (2014) review of undergraduate mentoring programs (UMPs) literature based on both Jacobi's (1991) and Nora and Crisp's (2007) work supported these conceptualizations by indicating

that while academic, psychosocial support, and role modeling were frequently utilized in UMPs studies, the use of goal setting in career paths function was limited.

While various reasons exist for institutions of higher learning to develop UMPs, most of the UMPs foster student engagement and help to build relationships which will ultimately contribute to academic success and professional development (Nora & Crisp, 2007). McKinsey (2016) suggested that there are three stage types in mentoring: mentoring in, mentoring through, and mentoring onward. *Mentoring in* assists new students in adjusting to their surroundings (e.g., orientation). *Mentoring through* deals with aiding students to gain and adopt advanced skills, feel confident, and start conducting independent work. Finally, *mentoring onward* assists students with career maturity and adapting to transition post-graduation (McKinsey, 2016). Previous studies also mentioned the benefits of mentorship to students (Campbell et al., 2012; Ray & Kafka, 2014). The Campbell et. al. (2012) study showed students who had mentorship during their college years demonstrated higher leadership capacity through psychosocial and leadership skill building process occurring in mentoring relationships. Ray and Kafka's (2014) study used the Gallup-Purdue Index report that utilized 30,000 college graduates to show the long-term benefits of mentoring. Students who had a faculty mentor during their college years showed more engagement in their work and an increased sense of general well-being than those who did not.

Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes

Student-athletes have been stigmatized in college settings as both unintelligent and academically unmotivated (Comeaux, 2011; Engstrom et al., 1995; Riciputi & Erdal, 2017; Sailes, 1993). Historically, faculty were banning sports on college campuses prior to the first intercollegiate athletic competition in 1852 (Smith, 1990). In the mid-to-late 19th century, student-lead initiatives for the development of sport activities were prevalent on college campuses and faculty struggled with the infiltration of athletics on college campuses (Smith, 1990). Furthermore, they attempted to remove the student-athletes who attended college exhibiting solely athletic motives (Smith, 1990). Prior research has indicated that some faculty members still have increased prejudicial and stereotypical feelings towards student-athletes in comparison to their non-athlete peers (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995). Specifically, some faculty have indicated unfavorable perceptions of Black student-athletes' accomplishments (Comeaux, 2010), expressed discontentment with universities providing full athletic scholarships (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995), and conveyed the concern that student-athlete tutoring services, undermined the academic integrity of their entire university (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). This raises the following question: With such overwhelmingly negative perceptions, do faculty take the time to mentor student-athletes?

As suggested by Pettigrew and Troop (2008), intergroup contact may allow individuals from different groups, such as faculty and student-athletes, to feel comfortable interacting with one another. Intergroup contact may be facilitated through mentorship. As such, faculty mentoring student-athletes might have the ability to reduce some of the stigma faculty associate with student-athletes. Furthermore, faculty who have frequent and quality interaction with students often have the ability to help students facilitate positive resolutions with struggles commonly faced by students, such as identity association, relationship management, and development (Astin, 1993).

Methods

Participants

Utilizing purposeful sampling, participants were recruited through social media, specifically Twitter. One member of the research team utilized Twitter to ask faculty at NCAA membership institutions to participate in the questionnaire, with a link to the questionnaire included in the tweet. The use of Twitter as part of research design has grown significantly in recent years (Zimmer & Proferes, 2014) and provides researchers with "a viable and flexible means of engaging in the research process"

(Stewart, 2017, p. 251). Given the nature of the research design and the timing of data collection during the spring semester (affected by the global pandemic), Twitter became the most practical method of recruiting participants for the study. While 141 individuals initially opened the questionnaire, two individuals disagreed to consent, and nine respondents indicated they were not faculty. As such, they were immediately removed from the study. Furthermore, faculty who started, but did not finish the questionnaire were also removed from the study. This resulted in a total of 93 faculty participants.

Instrument

The questionnaire began with informed consent and one screening question, which were the only two forced response questions in the questionnaire. If participants agreed to the informed consent, they were asked if they were a faculty member at a university. If a participant disagreed to the informed consent or indicated they were not a faculty member, the questionnaire ended at that time. After the screening questions, the questionnaire requested demographic information such as age, gender, race, marital status, athletic division, and athletic conference. Specifically, to differentiate between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty, participants were asked if their “athletic department compete[s] in a Power Five conference (i.e. ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, SEC)?” The questionnaire also included items inquiring about the number of student-athletes participants teach in a typical semester and the average number of athletic events they attend in a year.

The questionnaire continued with the Mentor Role Instrument (MRI) to measure mentor functions (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). The original scale was developed utilizing confirmatory factor analysis. The scale contained 33 items and was measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The MRI measures Kram’s (1985) nine mentor roles: sponsor, coach, protect, challenge, exposure, friendship, role model, counseling, and acceptance, and two additional psychosocial-related roles: social interactions and parent. Each of the 11 mentor roles includes three items on the questionnaire. The internal consistency coefficient, Cronbach’s alpha, for the subscales in the original study ranged between $\alpha = 0.77$ to 0.93 (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). Similar to the Kram (1985), the current study removed the social interactions and parent subscales to avoid the potential response bias that may result from sexual issues in cross-gender relationships. As such, nine subscales and 27 total questions remained. The current study slightly modified the wording in MRI to provide clarity for participants. For example, one of the original items for the sponsor subscale was, “my mentor helps me attain desirable positions.” The same item in the current study states, “As a mentor, I help my student-athlete attain desirable positions.”

Data Analysis

SPSS was used to conduct data analysis. First, descriptive statistics and tests for hypotheses were performed. Internal consistency reliability ratings for the nine subscales were calculated using Cronbach’s (1951) alpha. To address the research question, a one-way MANOVA was conducted to evaluate the mentorship of student-athletes between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty members. The independent variable, faculty classification, was a categorical grouping variable with two levels: Power Five faculty member and non-Power Five faculty member. The dependent variables were the level to which faculty mentored student-athletes in each of the nine mentor role subscales.

Results

This study consisted of 93 faculty members (see Table 1) who completed the questionnaire. Sample descriptive statistics showed heavily White (86.0%), married or with domestic partnership (77.4%), and untenured (assistant professors 46.2%) faculty. The majority of participants (73.1%) were from universities with athletic departments participating outside of the Power Five conferences. Participants ranged between 25 and 76 years of age with a slight male majority (58.1%). Ninety participants (96.8%) reported having at least one student-athlete enrolled in their class(es) each

semester. Additionally, 94.6% of the participants reported attending collegiate athletic events at their home institution.

The internal consistency reliability ratings were analyzed for the nine subscales after the data were cleaned and requirement checks were determined tenable. Cronbach's alpha was utilized to examine the internal consistency reliability, and scores ranged between $\alpha = .72$ and $.92$. As such, each subscale was determined to have adequate item interrelatedness (see Table 2).

Table 1. *Participant Demographic Information*

	Power Five <i>n</i> = 25	Non-Power Five <i>n</i> = 68	Total <i>n</i> = 93
White	88.0%	85.3%	86.0%
Black	4.0%	5.9%	5.4%
Other	4.0%	8.8%	7.5%
Male	52.0%	60.3%	58.1%
Female	44.0%	39.7%	40.9%
Single, Never Married	8.0%	13.2%	11.8%
Married or Domestic Partnership	68.0%	80.9%	77.4%
Divorced	16.0%	4.4%	7.5%
Separated	8.0%	1.5%	3.2%
Instructor/Lecturer	16.0%	8.8%	10.8%
Assistant Professor	24.0%	54.4%	46.2%
Associate Professor	20.0%	22.1%	21.5%
Full Professor	40.0%	14.7%	21.5%

Table 2. *Mentorship Subscales Internal Consistency Reliability Ratings and the Means and Standard Deviations between Power Five and Non-Power Five Faculty Participants*

	Power Five (<i>n</i> = 25)	Non-Power Five (<i>n</i> = 68)	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Cronbach's α
	Mean (SD)				
Sponsor	5.09 (1.35)	5.50 (1.22)	1.96	0.17	0.86
Coach	5.01 (1.37)	5.59 (0.89)	5.71	0.02	0.72
Protect	3.23 (1.63)	4.02 (1.33)	5.75	0.02	0.80
Challenge	5.68 (1.39)	6.01 (0.95)	1.73	0.19	0.93
Exposure	4.23 (1.51)	5.05 (1.41)	6.02	0.02	0.85
Friendship	6.27 (0.72)	6.44 (0.86)	0.81	0.37	0.92
Role Model	5.04 (0.95)	5.79 (1.03)	10.06	0.002*	0.83
Counseling	5.34 (1.05)	5.95 (0.98)	8.86	0.01	0.85
Acceptance	6.12 (0.76)	6.32 (0.81)	1.11	0.30	0.88

Note. * indicates means differ significantly at $p < .0056$.

A one-way MANOVA was employed to answer the research question – whether mentorship of student-athletes differs between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty members. Results of the omnibus test revealed a significant difference in mentorship subscale scores between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty (Wilks' $\Lambda = .80$, $F(9, 83) = 2.33$, $p = .02$). The large multivariate effect size ($\eta^2 = .20$) indicates that 20% of the total variability in the mentorship subscales can be explained by the variability between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty.

To determine how the mentorship subscales differ for Power Five faculty and non-Power Five faculty, tests of between-subjects' effects were analyzed. Faculty type, Power Five or non-Power Five, has a statistically significant effect on the role model subscale ($F(1, 91) = 10.19, p = .002, \eta^2 = .10$). While the following coach ($F(1, 91) = 5.71, p = .02$), protect ($F(1, 91) = 5.75, p = .02$), exposure ($F(1, 91) = 6.02, p = .02$), and counseling ($F(1, 91) = 6.86, p = .01$) may appear statistically significant, statistical significance was accepted at .0056 using the Bonferroni correction ($.05 / 9 = .0056$) to account for the running of multiple ANOVAs. Furthermore, sponsor ($F(1, 91) = 1.96, p = .17$), challenge ($F(1, 91) = 1.73, p = .19$), friendship ($F(1, 91) = .56, p = .81$), and acceptance ($F(1, 91) = 1.11, p = .30$) also did not show a significant statistical difference between faculty type.

Discussion

This study is the first to examine faculty members' mentorship of student-athletes. As such, there are few previous studies that are even comparable to the current investigation. Due to the bias and isolation student-athletes often endure, this population is neglected in regard to receiving effective mentorship by faculty (Banks & Gibson, 2016; Comeaux, 2010, 2011; Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Engstrom et al., 1995; Parsons, 2013; Simons et al., 2007; Stokowski & Ferguson, 2020). However, UMPs have been shown to nurture student engagement and provide social support through relationships which collectively contribute to academic success (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Overall, the high mean scores represented in Table 2 demonstrate that faculty members perceive that they are effective mentors to student-athletes. This is positive in that faculty members are vital to overall student success (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Bjorklund et al., 2004; Dunnett et al., 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Porter & Umbach, 2006). Further, although previous studies have found that faculty are biased against the student-athlete population (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995), perhaps such stigmas are changing.

The present study found that Power Five and non-Power Five faculty significantly differed in regard to the role model subscale. Non-Power Five faculty felt that they "served as a role model" for student-athletes, exemplified themselves in a manner in which student-athletes should follow, and could "identify" with student-athletes (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990, p. 329). Role modeling is one of the main functions of mentoring (Nora & Crip, 2007). Previous work (Gerchenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Nora & Crip, 2007) has demonstrated that role modeling is commonly used and has been proven to be impactful in UMPs. Given the importance placed on role modeling, it is concerning that faculty at Power Five institutions scored significantly lower in this subscale. The majority of Power Five schools are classified as R1 institutions ("Carnegie Classification," n.d.), and perhaps the pressure that these faculty members are under to produce research, and in essence prioritize research over teaching, leaves little time for this population to be student-centered (Bland et al., 2006; Fairweather & Rhoads, 1995). Still, despite institutional classification, faculty have an obligation to aid in student success (Blekic, 2019) and UMPs have been shown to increase student success (Gerchenfeld, 2014; Jacobi, 1991; Nora & Crip, 2007). By faculty investing in student-athletes, perhaps issues that are often viewed as specific to the student-athlete population (major clustering, mental health, stigma) can be decreased.

Major clustering is common among the student-athlete population (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Paule-Koba, 2019; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010); however, students who work with student-centered faculty have been shown to earn higher grades (Roksa & Whitley, 2017). Additionally, student-athletes are at-risk for mental health disorders (Bird et al., 2018; Cox et al., 2017) and students that have faculty mentorship have a higher sense of overall well-being (Ray & Kafka, 2014). As such, UMPs regarding student-athletes warrant further exploration due to the potential benefits to this population.

Conclusion

Limitations and Future Research

The researchers recognize that limitations exist in the present study. Due to the method of data collection, a response rate could not be determined. Further, the method of data collection is limited in that only faculty members who saw the tweet had the chance to respond. It should also be noted that a larger sample size was desired. Because the survey was distributed during the COVID-19 Pandemic, it is very possible that the sample size was limited due to the pivot in modality of instruction that many faculty members faced during that time. Although this study strived to determine faculty members' mentorship of student-athletes, it is possible that faculty who have not had (or did not know they had) student-athletes in their courses failed to complete this survey due to the lack of understanding surrounding the importance of UMPs. This study also only looked at power-five and non-Power Five faculty. Future work should see if other demographic factors impact mentorship relationships with student-athletes. There is also a possibility that faculty members were unaware the athletic conference membership affiliation of their respective institution. This study also failed to look at faculty bias of student-athletes. Based on previous work, faculty bias towards this population could very much impact the results of this study. Future lines of inquiry should also be qualitative in nature to truly humanize the process of faculty relationships with student-athletes.

The data revealed that faculty members perceived themselves to be effective mentors. However, just because faculty felt like they were effective mentors does not mean this population is actually serving the student-athlete population in this important role. Future work is needed regarding faculty member's ability (or inability) to mentor student-athletes and develop UMPs. Research is needed to understand institutional training faculty receive regarding UMPs, as well as best practices for mentoring student-athletes specifically. Scholars may also consider investigating the different roles faculty play in experiences of student-athletes, specifically in regard to the differences between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty. The student-athlete perspective regarding faculty mentoring is also needed. Studies should strive to determine the student success outcomes (e.g., grades, graduation, retention) that results from faculty/student-athlete UMPs. Future work should include a better understanding of what student-athletes expect from faculty members and what student-athletes would like to see from faculty members regarding UMPs.

Practical Implications

This study serves as a foundation for faculty members who mentor student-athletes. The present study demonstrated the perceived differences between Power Five and non-Power Five faculty regarding their mentorship of student-athletes. Student-athletes that compete at institutions outside of the Power Five most likely have a very different experience when compared to student-athletes that compete at Power Five institutions. Due to the discrepancy in resources between Power Five and non-Power Five institutions, it is very likely that institutions outside of the Power Five utilize on-campus resources (faculty) to assist in student-athlete success. Although Power Five faculty may have increased research obligations when compared to their non-Power Five peers, student success should always be the priority at institutions of higher learning. Thus, Power Five faculty with research obligations may consider getting student-athletes involved in high impact practices, specifically where research is concerned. Allowing student-athletes to be involved in research could be mutually beneficial to both parties and further the mentoring relationship of student-athletes and faculty members.

Although student-athletes make up a small sub-population of students it is likely that at some point, every faculty member will have a student-athlete in their class. The Stokowski et al. (2016) study demonstrated that frequent positive interactions between campus personnel and the student-athlete population led to a more favorable view of not only student-athletes but of the athletic department as a whole. Further, Stokowski et al. (2016) found a correlation between college personnel's

understanding of NCAA legislation and perceptions of student-athletes. The student-athlete population is unique, and it is important to educate faculty members about the student-athlete experience. This is a great opportunity for faculty support centers on college campuses to work with their respective athletic department to put together supplemental resources to inform and educate faculty about the unique characteristics of the student-athlete populations, as well as, provide faculty with strategies regarding meeting the needs of the student-athlete population.

Practically, there are strategies that can potentially improve the relationships between faculty and student-athletes. To begin with, student-athletes and faculty members should have a more formalized mentoring relationship. Athletic teams may consider appointing faculty mentors that can assist student-athletes in acclimating to campus and faculty members can also serve as a great resource for student-athletes. Faculty members can provide student-athletes with much needed social support, reducing the isolation that student-athletes so often experience. Additionally, faculty members should also be encouraged to attend the sporting events of the student-athletes in their classes. Perhaps athletic departments could recognize faculty members at athletic events. Coaches should consider inviting faculty members to practice and team dinners. Such actions will further the relationships between faculty and student-athletes, assisting these two groups in establishing a relationship and develop mutual respect for one another. According to intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1945; Pettigrew & Troop, 2008), the more faculty members are exposed to student-athletes (and student-athletes are exposed to faculty members) the more understanding these individuals will have for one another. Ultimately, faculty members can assist student-athletes in navigating higher education.

Aside from a formalized mentoring relationship, faculty should consider a pedagogical shift to a more student-centered approach for all students. Unlike traditional teaching strategies (e.g., lecture) where information is transmitted from faculty to pupil (Huba & Freed, 2000), Student-centered learning (SCL) allows the student to guide their own learning by affecting the content and pace of the material (Collins & O'Brien, 2003; Froyd & Simpson, 2010). This approach affords students a transformational learning environment and opportunities for reflection (McCombs & Whistler, 1997; Nicole & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Further, SCL allows students to build upon previous knowledge and further relate to the course content through personal application (Collins & O'Brien, 2003; Froyd & Simpson, 2008; Handelsman et al., 2004; McCombs & Whistler, 1997; Nicole & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Faculty that practiced SCL reported that the experience was enjoyable and found students demonstrated increased academic success as well as a fondness for learning (Handelsman et al., 2004; McCombs & Whistler, 1997; Nicole & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Some SCL strategies faculty can utilize in the classroom are case studies, minute papers, small-group learning, student presentations, and think-pair-share (Allen & Tanner, 2005; Angelo & Cross, 1993; Froyd & Simpson, 2010; Stead, 2005). By taking on more of a student-centered approach in the classroom, faculty are more likely to develop rapport with their students and increase instances of out-of-class interactions.

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