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COMMUNITY COLLEGE ATHLETES: TRACKING PROGRESS TO GAUGE SUCCESS

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Abstract

In this working paper, I provide an argument and case for a deeper focus and discussion on community college student athletes. I also offer recommendations to institutions for the types of data that should be collected to gauge student success. A primary aim of these recommendations is to supply a framework for institutions to develop scholar athletes through intentional efforts to ensure that students are on an appropriate path to accomplishing their academic goals. The framework also presents a method for critical evaluation of the effectiveness of an athletic program's contribution to its institution's mission and goals.

Author's notes

I am grateful to the Center of Higher Education at Ohio University (OU) for providing me a platform to discuss a topic that is not only important to students and institutions of higher education, but equally significant to me personally and professionally. I am also thankful to Linda Serra Hagedorn for her comments and feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. The views expressed herein are solely my own.

Introduction

From the time I began my doctoral studies to the present, I have written several manuscripts and given scholarly presentations at regional and national conferences on topics pertaining to community colleges, student athletes, and athletics. In my research and conversations with colleagues and students about my research, I do not mask the fact that I became interested in studying community colleges because I am a product of the community college system. I have experienced firsthand the importance of these institutions within higher education, and I have understood their benefit to students and society as a whole. My personal and professional accomplishments to date can all be traced back to my collegiate experiences and my academic training that began at Wharton County Junior College (WCJC) in Texas more than a decade ago. I am extremely proud to list my associate's degree among the list of degrees and honors I have received over the years.

I am equally pleased to have had an opportunity to represent WCJC and Panola College in Texas as a varsity student athlete during the first two years of my undergraduate studies. My decision to begin my academic studies at a community college was based solely on the opportunity to play baseball at the collegiate level. The time I spent at the community college and my participation in athletics continues to have a profound impact on all aspects of my life. These experiences eventually led me to attend and participate in athletics at a four-year institution. This is my story. My story is not unique. As with hundreds of other students of color and individuals from low-to-middle socioeconomic backgrounds similar to my own, my access to higher education was a product of my athletic abilities and determination to play college sports. However, my story begins to develop some uniqueness when I begin to discuss the impact that athletics had on me academically, personally, and professionally.

Athletics provided me an opportunity to attend college and experience a number of unforgettable moments, but it was my success in academic studies that made a difference later in life. Though focused only on athletics when I began college, I learned during the later years of my studies how to direct my passion for sport toward empowering and motivating me to become a true "scholar-baller" (Harrison & Lampman, 2001). Harrison and Lampman coined the term "scholar-baller" to describe an individual who possesses qualities such as a "willingness to accept the challenge of balancing academics and athletics, the tenacity never to give up when faced with social obstacles, and a commitment to lifelong learning and intellectual development of the mind and body" (pp. 117-118). I did not become enlightened to this new outlook on sports and academics on my own. I had several dedicated mentors, faculty members, and coaches who pushed me academically, as well as invested both time and energy into helping me find ways to excel in the classroom as well as on the field of play.

At the time of this writing, we are in the midst of the worst recession in U.S. history since the Great Depression. I cannot help but wonder if future generations of young men and women will have the same opportunity to participate in athletics and benefit from similar academic guidance and athletic experiences as I had. Moreover, we currently are witnessing substantial cuts in funding for higher education, athletic opportunities and resources to support student athletes. Moltz (2010) suggested that when institutions look to balance funds during times of budget shortfalls, athletic programs may be vulnerable to the chopping block.

It is important to note that cutting athletic teams and programs at the community college level is not a new phenomenon. Since the passage of Title IX legislation in 1972, several institutions have eliminated sport teams and programs to maintain an equitable distribution of athletic opportunities and scholarship aid across genders (Staurowsky, 2009). However, teams and programs today are being eliminated due to wide-ranging budget cuts, which have forced institutions to prioritize programs and services and to propose funding formulas based on these priorities (Moltz, 2010; Murray, 2010). In essence, athletics programs are forced to answer the question: How do athletic programs fit into the mission of our institution and why should they be maintained? While I may be optimistic about the continued presence of athletics at the community college, these budget constraints continue to pressure institutions to eliminate athletic programs and other essential academic and auxiliary programs and services which provide individuals access to higher education and support once they matriculate. In an era of increased political pressures to balance higher education budgets and increased calls for institutional accountability, institutions and athletics programs must find ways to defend athletic expenditures beyond highlighting win-loss records and telling stories of opportunities and access, like the one I shared earlier. One way is to develop a culture which places the collection and analysis of student level data and institutional level data specific to athletics and student athletes as a priority.

Importance of Institutional Data

Institutional data are of paramount importance to institutions when decisions must be made regarding the 1) impact of programs and services (e.g., athletics) on specific student outcomes, 2) allocation of human and fiscal resources, and 3) strategic planning for future spending and budgeting (Morest & Jenkins, 2007; Williford, 2009). Accordingly, community colleges have begun to rely more on data to inform new institutional policy and practice, as well as using data to provide a representation of how well institutions are performing with respect to stated mission and goals. This focus on the collection of institutional data has led to global participation of various offices and personnel within data-informed decision-making processes (Romero, Purdy, Rodriquez, & Richards, 2005). The purpose of the widening participation of data collection processes has been done to ensure that adequate quantitative and qualitative data are collected and properly disseminated to administrators, faculty, state and federal agencies, and other constituents concerning institutional spending, enrollment trends, and student involvement and engagement (Morest & Jenkins, 2007; Romero et al., 2005). This evolution of the

collection and use of institutional data can be attributed to a greater focus on institutional accountability as illustrated in such programs as, but not limited to, the National Community College Benchmark Project (NCCBP), Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count—a national initiative largely funded by the Lumina Foundation, and President Obama's American Graduation Initiative (AGI) (2009).

Programs such as NCCBP, Achieving the Dream, and AGI have helped usher in a new era of research that focuses on student success and the use of institutional data to build a culture of evidence to inform decision-making within higher education. More specifically, these programs have placed an emphasis on collecting data on student subgroups that have been historically disadvantaged in their opportunities to access higher education and their ability to succeed once enrolled (Morest & Jenkins, 2007). As institutions further develop data collection systems and processes, it is imperative that they provide a mechanism for gaining a broad understanding of student groups that comprise the student body. Maintaining a broad understanding of an institution's student population is necessary to mitigate the barriers that population sub-groups might encounter as they strive for academic and personal success. This includes a more intentional focus on collecting data on student athletes—one of the most understudied and undervalued sub-population of students on community colleges campuses, as well as on all college and university campuses (Hagedorn & Horton, 2009).

I will focus my discussion on community college student athletes as a population. In addition, I will show the importance of the incorporation of processes to track student athletes' progress to gauge their success. If an institution seeks to maintain athletic programs and have its student athletes excel in its academic programs, it must collect data that will support arguments that athletic programs are essential and complementary to the mission and purpose of that institution.

Purpose and Intent of This Working Paper

Bers (2008) suggested that data from student tracking is necessary to measure institutional or programmatic effectiveness and to identify how effectiveness might be improved. In the same manner, institutional data can be used to track student athletes to measure academic success and the effectiveness of an athletic program to prepare students for global citizenship, as well as convey to stakeholders how athletic programs enhance their institution's ability to accomplish its mission. For instance, tracking students through specific academic benchmarks tells the academic community and student athletes (current and prospective student athletes) that what they do in the classroom is equally important, if not more important, than what they accomplish athletically. In past years, community colleges and higher education researchers have not paid much attention to tracking the academic behaviors of student athletes. Within this paper, I provide recommendations to institutions for the types of data that should be collected to gauge student success. A primary aim of these recommendations is to provide institutions a framework for developing scholar athletes through intentional

efforts to ensure that student athletes are on an appropriate path to accomplish their academic goals. This framework also provides data points institutions should consider when evaluating the effectiveness of athletic programs and the programs' ability to contribute to the mission and goals of their respective institution.

With these goals in mind, I will discuss the studies that have been conducted by institutions and researchers to better understand the individual and institutional impact of athletics. Next, I will suggest additional studies that could be conducted as well as suggest outcomes related to student athletes that institutions might measure. I will then show the perils and benefits associated with collecting data specific to student athletes. Finally, I will provide examples of practical ways in which higher education researchers and centers, such as the Center for Higher Education at Ohio University (OU), can support institutions in expanding current data collection processes to incorporate data points specific to their student athletes and provide guidance with analyzing or interpreting the collected data.

Previous Scholarly Evidence and Findings

Within the higher education literature, few examples are available of how data, which are specific to student athletes, have been used by institutions for the purpose of making evidence-based decisions regarding athletic recruitment, student enrollment, academic performance, effectiveness of support services for student athletes, or continued sponsorship of athletic teams and programs (Hagedorn & Horton, 2009; Lawrence, Mullin, & Horton, 2009). Such examples are important to advance practice and to increase the body of literature on topics pertaining to the experiences of student athletes at the community college level.

In the following section, I provide examples of previous works that have examined issues pertaining to athletics and student athletes at the community college level. Specifically, I will show studies that have examined the characteristics of student athletes, the impact and benefit of athletics on students, the financial impact of athletics, and student participation and performance.

Distinctiveness of Community College Student Athletes

Little beyond gender and racial compositions is known about the characteristics of student athletes at the community college level. The following examples provide ways in which institutions and researchers have sought to gain a better understanding of community college student athletes. The following examples illustrate the need for a deeper awareness of the ways in which student athletes differ, both academically and demographically, from other student athletes and students in the general student population.

Hall (2007) and Brown (2004) asserted that the individual characteristics of a large percentage of student athletes can be characterized as first generation, academically

underprepared, undecided on academic major, learning disabled, and these student athletes are more likely from an under-represented ethnic/racial group. Previous research tells us that student characteristics, such as first generation, academically underprepared, and learning disabled, are likely to reduce the probability of student degree attainment and four-year transfer. Accordingly, Hall (2007) proposed that a "different type of learning environment is needed to promote the success and retention of community college student-athletes" (p. 3). In his 2007 qualitative analysis, Hall explored the impact of a learning community on a student athlete's retention and academic success at a single institution in California. From his institutional case study, Hall concluded that student athletes categorized as "academically at-risk" performed better academically when involved in a learning community organized to connect students with similar academic goals and co-curricular experiences. Hall (2007) suggested that learning communities comprised of students with similar academic and extracurricular activities provide student athletes with peer support and the necessary motivation to succeed in higher education.

In another institutional case study, Richards (1990) provided a descriptive analysis of athletic participation by gender, age, race, and educational aspiration (i.e., degree, fouryear transfer). In Richards's (1990) report of Modesto Junior College (MDJ), a single campus community college in California, he found that a majority of student athletes during the 1988-1989 academic year were white (23% were students of color), 84% were the traditional age, and 96% had obtained a high school diploma prior to their initial enrollment. In comparison, 86% of students in the general student population had obtained a high school diploma prior to their initial enrollment. Furthermore, student athletes in the sample utilized by Richards (1990) maintained an overall mean 2.10 GPA (physical education courses not included), and 46% of the student-athletes indicated transfer to a four-year institution as their intended goal. In addition to the studies previously discussed, Lewis and Marcopulos (1989) conducted a five-year longitudinal study of athletic participation at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, California, during the 1983-1984 and 1987-1988 academic years. From their (1989) analysis, Lewis and Marcopulos concluded that black students represented between 12% and 17% of the total student athlete population, but represented only 5% to 7% of general student population. Their report further showed that 25% of athletes enrolled in 1983 completed an associate's degree and maintained a GPA between 2.08 and 2.21 during the five-year period of the study.

The higher education literature also provides examples of studies that have utilized descriptive statistics to examine the enrollment patterns of student athletes and the type of grades earned by athletes in various types of courses (i.e., remediation, college level courses). For example, Hobneck, Mudge, and Turchi (2003), in their single institutional study, concluded that student athletes were not prepared to handle the academic or athletic requirements that were necessary to be successful in their freshmen year in college. Hobneck and colleagues (2003) arrived at this troubling conclusion based on their analysis of transcript data for student athletes attending the single institution studied.

The authors found that 14% of credit hours attempted by all athletes resulted in a grade of "F" (failure) or "W" (withdraw), and 17% of the total credit hours attempted were in developmental or remediation courses. In sum, the authors concluded that the combination of inflexibility in daily athletic schedules and the lack of academic preparedness decreased students' year-to-year retention rates, as well as the probability of maintaining minimum academic eligibility requirements necessary to continue athletic participation their sophomore year.

Academic Behaviors, Performance, and Outcomes

Despite the maturation of research on community college student outcomes and enrollment behaviors, few studies have examined the academic behaviors of student athletes and the effect of individual and institutional factors on their academic success. One of the most comprehensive studies completed to date on the enrollment behaviors of student athletes was completed by Horton in 2009. In this 2009 study, Horton examined the academic behaviors of student athletes in the state of Florida using data from the Florida Department of Education Data Warehouse. Horton (2009) found that student athletes of color and female student athletes earned more credit hours each semester and earned higher GPAs than non-athlete students with similar background characteristics. When examining differences within student athletes, Horton found that white student athletes performed better than students of color, and white female student athletes outperformed both female students of color and their male counterparts, regardless of race. Horton also found that student athletes from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds earned fewer credit hours per semester and had slightly lower GPAs than students from high SES backgrounds.

Knapp and Raney (1988) provided a historical context to view the academic behaviors of student athletes, as well as illustrate the possibilities for future research. Their study compared student athletes' academic performance at the community college level to their performance at the University of Nevada --Las Vegas (UNLV). They also compared a group of UNLV students with student athletes who had no prior community college experience. The authors found that physical education departments were the leading source of credits earned for all groups of students in their sample. Grades earned in physical education courses were also found to be, on average, higher than grades earned in other non-physical education credit courses. Though data for Horton's (2009) and Knapp and Raney's (1988) studies were collected from various sources (i.e., state data system, the community college, and four-year institution), these studies can be replicated using only data available at the student-level.

For example, data can be collected to track student performance based on demographic characteristics, athletic participation status, and course enrollment patterns and trends. Although I will later discuss why these data points are important aspects to track, for now, I suggest that tracking enrollment behaviors is important because student athletes have been known to enroll in non-rigorous, non-transferable courses to ensure they will

earn the grades necessary to maintain their athletic eligibility (many times encouraged to do so by coaches and advisors). Tracking the types of courses in which students enroll will help curb, if not eliminate, these practices. Tracking course enrollment will also ensure that students have the necessary perquisites to transfer to four-year institutions or the credits hours needed to leave their institution with a certificate or degree in hand once they have exhausted their athletic eligibility.

In another study, Palomar College (2002) in California tracked the persistence and academic performance of student athlete cohorts from the 1988-1989 and 2001-2002 academic years, and compared their performance to a sample of first-time, full-time (FTFT) enrolled students in the general student population during the same time period. Compared to the general student population, student athletes earned proportionally more associate's degrees, had higher five-year retention rates, and completed their studies in less time than students in the general population. This 2002 study found that 21% of student athlete cohorts in the fall 2000 received an associate's degree by their fifth semester, compared to approximately 4% of students in the comparison group. Kanter and Lewis (1991) and Carr, Kangas, and Anderson (1992) conducted multi-institutional studies on the academic experiences of student athletes. Specifically, Kanter and Lewis examined differences in educational goal achievement (measured in college GPA) between student athletes and non-athlete students using student transcript data. Kanter and Lewis found that female athletes earned higher GPAs and completed more credit hours than men, and that all athletes completed more credit hours, earned slightly lower GPAs, and completed fewer transfer units per year compared to the general student population. Their study also found that male athletes of color earned higher GPAs than male non-athlete students of color in the general student population.

In Carr and colleague's (1992) study, the researchers examined the influence of athletic participation and specialized student support programs for black male students through four semesters at two California community colleges. From this multi-institutional study, they found that 100% of black males participating on the basketball team persisted through four semesters, and 67% of all black male athletic participants completed four semesters, compared to only 33% of black male students in the general student population. Carr and colleagues (1992) suggested that the proliferation of student social and academic integration, which was manifested through sport participation and the encouragement and mentorship provided by athletic coaches and other institutional members, contributed to the differences found in retention rates between black male non-athlete students and student-athletes. From their analysis, Carr and colleagues (1992) suggested the development of student support programs for black male and female non-athlete students as a way to replicate rates of retention and graduation rates as those found within the sample of student athletes.

Benefits of Athletic Programs to Student and Athletes Institutions

Many consider athletics to be insignificant to the mission and purpose of the community college. However, the scant research on this topic suggests that athletic programs have many associated benefits. Castañeda (2004) and Castañeda, Katsinas, and Hardy (2006) posited that institutions benefit from the presence of an athletic program through increased enrollment of full-time students—both student athletes and non-athlete students alike. As per the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) eligibility standards, a student must be enrolled full-time at the community college to receive financial aid that is athletically related and to participate in intercollegiate athletics. As a result, athletic programs can bring more full-time enrolled students to an educational institution. Castañeda (2004) and Castañeda et al. (2006) further argued that athletic programs and increased institutional enrollment of full-time students benefit institutions through increased revenues to the college through state FTE-based funding formulas. In addition, researchers have suggested that athletic programs have a significant impact on the increased enrollment of non-athlete students.

The benefits of sponsored athletics programs at the community college level are extended to the general student population through opportunities to participate on athletic teams as non-scholarship participants, as well as enhance their overall collegiate experience of the traditional age of students at the community college level (Berson, 1996; Castañeda, 2004; Castañeda et al., 2006; Rishe, 2003). Furthermore, Rybak (1994) and McCullough (2000) found that athletic programs at the community college have a substantial economic impact on the local economy. In their respective studies, Rybak (1994) and McCollough (2000) suggested that athletic programs at rural institutions accounted for 15% to 30 % of the total institution's economic impact on the city or town in which it was located.

The previous literature on athletics and student athletes at the community college, as previously discussed, provides several models for institutions that are interested in improving their processes for collecting institutional data to track student athletes' academic performance and progress. In addition to the examples that have been provided, endless possibilities for data points occur that can be easily incorporated into current data collection processes. In the following section, I will provide recommendations for expanding current data collection processes to include a more focused approach to collecting data on student athletes to gauge the success of student athletes and athletic programs.

Recommendations and Considerations for Future Practice

Continual opportunities exist for the types of data specific to student athletes that can be collected by community colleges, as well as ways in which these data can be used to gauge and enhance success for both students and institutions. In this section, I will provide recommendations for collecting such data. Specifically, I will focus my

discussion on collecting institutional data on individual student characteristics, developmental education, enrollment trends and academic progress, and academic outcomes for student athletes.

Relationship of Student Characteristics to Outcomes

Data collection processes at the community college should focus attention on better understanding the relationship between individual student characteristics and course completion, GPA, degree completion, and four-year transfer to gauge student success. For instance, institutions can track and compare the performance of athletes to the performance of non-athletes to see if athletes are in anyway disadvantaged. In doing so, institutions must remember to be sensitive to low overall course completion rates for all students. If both athletes and non-athletes are completing only 35% of the courses they enroll, it is not advisable or appropriate to suggest low completion rates for athletes is acceptable. Rather, institutions should evaluate how to best improve rates for both populations. In addition, data collected pertaining to course completion should include course completion ratios (courses attempted versus courses completed); specific courses athletes enroll each academic quarter/semester, particularly courses enrolled during the academic term in which they participates in athletics; and the percentage of courses which follow a program of study leading to a degree or that transfer to a four-year institution. If these data are collected, institutions and athletic programs will be in a position to better identify individuals who continually struggle with completing courses in which they enroll. If trends do arise, institutions can further investigate particular courses that students struggle with. If in-season and out-of-season training and game schedules pose a problem for student attendance and completion of particular courses or course schedule times, institutions can adjust extracurricular schedules accordingly.

Developmental education. A considerable number of students who enter the community college each year require some form of remediation prior to enrolling in college level courses for credit. The large numbers of unprepared students who require remediation in math, reading, and writing at the community college place a substantial strain on already scarce institutional resources, as well as place a financial burden on students. Accordingly, gaining a greater understanding of how college readiness impacts student athletes' is essential to the academic success of athletes. Specific data should be collected on the number of new student athletes who require remediation and the number of content areas in which remediation is needed. Once enrolled, institutions should track their performance (i.e., grades earned) and their advancement from developmental courses to college level credit courses. Institutional data are helpful in understanding which developmental course or courses, if any, are creating barriers for students. In turn, these data can put institutions in a position to focus on academic support. If students are found to complete development course requirements without difficulty, this information can also be helpful to institutions and athletic programs.

Student performance. Student performance data are best collected using grade point averages earned during a given semester or academic year and through progress to degree. These data can be used to compare the academic performance of student athletes and non-athlete students, as well as subcategories of students within these populations. Only then can institutions have a mechanism for understanding the impact of athletics on their campus and to gauge student success. For example, institutions can pursue and answer these two questions: 1) Do students of color—who participate in athletics—perform at levels consistent with non-athlete students from similar backgrounds? and 2) Are student athletes who participate in baseball performing at levels similar to those who participate in basketball or rodeo?

Enrollment trends and academic progress. Longitudinal data on grade point averages earned and the types of courses students enroll can be used to evaluate the courses in which students perform well and those in which they perform poorly. For instance, are students struggling to complete core course requirements, such Financial Accounting, but earning exceptional grades in elective courses, such as Introduction to Sport and Exercise Studies or Beginning Yoga?

Academic outcomes and benchmarks. Measuring outcomes, such as degree obtainment and four-year transfer, can be taxing for institutions—if not impossible—to accurately measure. First, students may not maintain enrollment at that same community college until they have reached a measurable outcome. Second, institutional data are not currently matched with state level data systems to track students between community colleges in the same system or to a four-year institution (to be discussed further in the "Perils and Benefits of Data Collection" section). Though measuring transfer is not often an option, institutions can collect data to measure a student's progress toward a degree if he had stayed enrolled at that institution or if he was "transfer ready" when he left. Hagedorn and Lester (2006) defined "transfer readiness" as the "progress of a community college student on the path to transfer while still enrolled in the community college" (p. 835). Transfer readiness is within the purview of the community college, it can be easily measured, and it does not rely on time and place. Tracking progress and transfer readiness are other ways to measure success and to highlight the performance of student athletes to the institutional community.

Benefits and Perils

The importance of tracking student athletes' academic performance and progress should not be underestimated or undervalued. Collecting institutional data on student athletes affords institutions with invaluable data to guide decisions regarding athletics and student athletes, as well as providing a framework to ensure these decisions are consistent with the goals and mission of the institution. Furthermore, collecting longitudinal data on student athletes' experiences, academic performance, and enrollment behaviors underscores an institution's commitment to both academics and athletics. More than 70% of students who begin their academic studies at the community college level do so with

the intention of transferring to a four-year institution (Boswell, 2004; Laanan, 1996). Likewise, most students who participate in athletics also aspire to eventually transfer to a four-year institution. In addition to earning a bachelor's degree, many student athletes (not all, of course) hope to participate in athletics at the four-year level. Tracking student athletes' progress helps to ensure that those who are interested in earning a certificate, degree, or transferring to a four-year institution are on the right path to meet their academic and athletic goals. Furthermore, maintaining longitudinal data on student athletes permits institutions to conduct retrospective studies comparing those athletes who were successful to those who were not doing well. These data are helpful in informing practice and, most importantly, institutional policy.

However, notable barriers must be discussed that may inhibit institutions from carrying out all of these presented recommendations. First, one of the most valuable ways to gauge success for student athletes is to compare their performance on selected benchmarks to student athletes at peer institutions within the same athletic conference or state. This comparison requires institutions to have access to state databases or to build data-sharing relationships with peer institutions. To date, few states maintain a data warehouse to allow such comparisons to be made across institutions or within a given state. Six states (Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Ohio, and Tennessee) currently have a system that allows for student-level data collection and student tracking across secondary and post-secondary institutions (Hansen, 2006). A more likely and accessible option is for institutions to collaborate with peer institutions to share data on mutual benchmarks. This practice also presents areas of concern. For this to work properly, participating institutions must work collectively to create identical criteria to collect data to ensure comparisons are as accurate as possible.

Second, a number of my recommendations require the expertise of various offices and personnel staff, including the registrar's office, athletics department, student services, and the institutional research office, to collect and analyze institutional data. The necessity of community partnerships creates some barriers because many offices at the community college level are already understaffed and overburdened. Additional requests are not likely to be easily integrated into current priorities. Though listed here as a peril, this community partnership barrier presents several opportunities, including a chance to collectively re-examine priorities for collecting data and to consider extending institutional priorities to include data collection for student athletes. Another opportunity comes in the form of building working relationships with education centers, such as the Center for Higher Education at Ohio University, which is a research and policy analysis center that focuses its attention on regional and state issues concerning higher education. Accordingly, the center provides access to knowledgeable graduate students, practitioners, and faculty who are available to perform independent research projects and provide consultation and technical assistance to institutions that need assistance collecting or analyzing data. Collaborating with the Center for Higher Education to

analyze data collected by institutions can decrease the personnel needed to carry out my recommendations.

Conclusions

In this paper, I discussed the importance of collecting data for tracking student athletes at the community college level. I stated that institutional data can provide a wealth of knowledge so that institutions can advance awareness 1) of the impact of student participation in athletics and 2) of the influence of individual and institutional characteristics on the academic success of student athletes. Athletic programs have the capacity to make an impact on both institutions and student athletes. This paper presented the benefits of institutional data in the hope that institutions will use such data to optimize the positive impact of sports, to benefit both the success of institutions and student athletes. Greater attention to research in this area will increase our knowledge and understanding of this student athlete population and their academic needs. James Axtell (1991) wrote, "Unlike student-athletes, who seem to sprout annually and effortlessly from the scholastic soil, scholar-athletes are a somewhat rarer hybrid. They are relatively scarce because the resources needed to succeed in one endeavor are demanded by the other as well" (n.p.). By addressing these issues, our knowledge of and the volume of data available on community college student athletes will be significantly increased. In turn, institutions will have empirical evidence to better understand and support the academic needs of their student athletes and scholar athletes.

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