

Report to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee

Faculty Athletics Representative, Aki Hirota, Mar 27, 2008

The Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) is a member of the faculty or an administrator who is designated by the chief executive officer to represent the institution and its faculty in the institution's relationships with the NCAA and its conference. The FAR plays a strategic role in three major institutional responsibilities required by NCAA: *academic integrity*, *institutional control* and *well being of student-athletes*. The FAR reports annually to the Faculty Senate in order to maintain critical communications links among athletics, the faculty, the institution, the Big West Conference, and the NCAA.

1. Academic integrity

(A) NCAA academic requirements

The NCAA tracks Academic Progress Rates and Graduation Success Rates, which show the institution's success in retaining and graduating student-athletes. The NCAA academic eligibility requirements include that student-athletes be enrolled in at least 12 units and complete 6 units each semester, complete 24 units per year, and meet minimum GPA requirements. The student-athletes must also meet the Progress toward Degree Requirements, which require completion of 40% of the units toward degree before the third year, 60% before the fourth year, and 80% before the fifth year.

(B) Academic Support Plans

In response to the NCAA's emphasis on academic success of student-athletes, the institution and the Athletics Department make every effort to enable student-athletes to achieve academic success. The FARs of the Big West Conference institutions as well as FARs nationwide share policies and practices among themselves to learn from each other.

Based on the recommendations of the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Athletics of March 2006 and the Athletics Department's Academic Improvement Plan of September 2006, Academic Services for Student-Athletes, under the supervision of the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Studies, is responsible for services to support success rates of student-athletes. The new position of Student-Athlete Academic Specialist was created in Fall 2007. The responsibilities of the position include supervision of tutors and mentors.

(C) Academic excellence

CSUN student-athletes graduate at a slightly higher rate than the general student body. About 12% of some 350 student-athletes make the Varsity N Honor Roll, the requirement for which is GPA above 3.2. One example of a successful student-athlete is Jessica Beach, recipient of the 2007 Wolfson Scholar award, CSUN's highest honor for a graduating senior. A hammer and discus thrower, Jessica graduated with a 4.0 GPA and is now a biology graduate student at CSUN. She gave a speech at the First Annual Freshman Convocation in Fall 2007, advising freshmen on how to succeed in college through organization and time-management skills.

(D) Missed Class Policy

One of the issues affecting student-athletes' academic success is missing classes for university-sanctioned athletic activities. The CSUN missed-class policy, which was adopted by the Faculty Senate and is listed in the University Catalogue, reads in part:

When representing the University in official curriculum-related, university-approved activities requires a student to miss classes, faculty are expected to provide, within reason, opportunity to make up any work or exams that are missed. . . . The process for making up missed class work is the prerogative of the instructor and shall be communicated to the affected students during the first week of classes or as soon as the need for accommodation becomes known.

At the beginning of each semester, the Athletics Department prepares letters that include game schedules. Student-athletes submit these letters to their instructors. It would be a great help if faculty members would clearly indicate what their missed-class policies and make-up opportunities are so that student-athletes can understand at the beginning of the semester what the possibilities are for successfully completing courses. Even if a student learns that the instructor's policy will make successful completion of a course impossible, however, finding another class to enroll in may also be impossible.

I would appreciate it if faculty colleagues could understand the limits on a student-athlete's time and accommodate a student's participation in athletics, just as you would a student participating in Model United Nations, musical events, and other course- and program-required field trips.

2. Institutional control & compliance

It is important that the institution has established policies and procedures for following the NCAA regulations and, in case of any violations, for investigating and self-reporting. Before the beginning of fall and spring semesters, the Academic Advisors, Coaches, Financial Aid staff, Director of Compliance, Associate Director of Athletics, and Faculty Athletics Representative examine the eligibility of all student-athletes. These university officials continue throughout the year to monitor eligibility to practice and/or compete, practice hours, game schedules, and team rosters. In its compliance efforts, the Athletics Department is supported and advised by the Athletics Academic Advisors, the Compliance Review Committee, the Drug Testing Committee, the Intercollegiate Athletics Advisory Council, and the Athletics Appeals Committee.

The Athletics Department and the FAR regularly communicate to student-athletes, coaches and staff concerning the NCAA regulations, including amateurism and the drug and sports wagering prohibitions. The coaches must pass the NCAA certifying exam annually. Any violation discovered has been reported immediately by the Athletics Department to the Conference or the NCAA, and self-imposed penalties have been approved by them.

The NCAA is currently conducting a nation-wide survey on sports wagering to better formulate effective strategies for education and intervention. The NCAA has selected two or three teams from each institution to be surveyed by the FAR.

The Big West's Compliance Review Report on CSUN, submitted in September, 2007, was very positive. The forms and procedures that CSUN uses were repeatedly held up as a model during the Big West Compliance Committee Meeting in October. Another institution identified

as having good practices to emulate was UC Davis, which is supported by a large cadre of compliance officers and advisors, including technical support.

3. Well being of student-athletes

The Athletics Department has been diligent and proactive in looking after the welfare of student-athletes, and offers seminars on various issues, such as life skills, drug abuse, and career planning. With the encouragement of the Athletics Department, student-athletes make an effort to be an integral part of the University and the Community by getting involved in community service opportunities such as “Ending Violence Against Women.” The Student-Athletes Advisory Council (SAAC) plans and leads campus and community events and activities. In December of each year the SAAC raises funds to help a family through the Meet Every Need with Dignity (M.E.N.D.) “Adopt a Family” program. During the academic year, student-athletes have visited a local elementary school to engage students in the Dr. Seuss Day reading program, as well as participated as judges in their annual Halloween Costume contest.

The Athletics Department and the coaches refer student-athletes to the FAR for assistance in communicating their needs to faculty members, since they (the Athletics Department and the coaches) are not allowed to contact faculty members. I try to determine if the faculty members have made their policies clear and treated the student-athletes as fairly as any other students. Most faculty members have been very helpful in clarifying their policies and/or accommodating the needs of student-athletes, whenever that was warranted and possible.

Student-athletes are also encouraged to consult with the FAR with personal problems or issues that they might have with athletic administration and coaches.