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Faculty Attitudes Toward Athletics at NCAA Division II Institutions

Travis Feezell

Abstract

Faculty members at institutions in three Division II conferences were surveyed regarding their opinions on general issues in intercollegiate athletics. In addition, faculty members at these institutions were asked to express their opinions and understanding as to the role of intercollegiate athletics and the place of faculty governance of athletics at their respective institutions. Analysis revealed that the demographic characteristics of NCAA divisional status, institutional status, gender, and past participation in athletics do influence the attitudes of faculty members and that these attitudes generally differ from faculty colleagues in Divisions I and III. Moreover, analysis noted that Division II faculty members see little faculty engagement with athletics and thus see little faculty governance beyond that of the appointed Faculty Athletics Representative. Finally, Division II faculty members noted a utilitarian function for athletics, often being utilized as a recruitment tool for students or providing activity for some segment of a varied student population.

Keywords: *Faculty, intercollegiate athletics, faculty governance, FAR*

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Introduction

Former Harvard University president Derek Bok (2003) in describing the place and role of faculty on campus said:

Of all the major constituencies in a university, faculty members are in the best position to appreciate academic values and insist on their observance. Since they work on campus, they are better situated than trustees to observe what is going on. They have the most experience with academic programs and how they work. Most of all, they have the greatest stake in preserving proper academic standards and principles, since these values protect the integrity of their work and help perpetuate its quality. (p. 187).

Indeed, faculty members do have central roles in the governance of the university, particularly in two areas. First, faculty plays a role in university-wide governance, often in the form of academic senates or other groups that serve to advise the administration on prominent university issues. Some studies suggest that faculty should and do have influence in the general administrative affairs of institutions, though this may be limited to an advisory capacity heard through a powerful faculty “voice” (Miller et. al, 1996; Daniel, 1992; Hamilton, 2000). Additional studies suggest that this voice is best heard on topics of general university administration when faculty has “better information and better incentives than administrators or trustees” (Brown, 2001, p. 142). Second, and perhaps even more powerful, faculty act within the academic units of the institution (i.e., departments, divisions, schools, colleges) to manage the curricular business of the institution, controlling in some sense the very heart of the academic activity of any college or university. Faculty governance of athletics, however, seems a much more difficult piece to define. James Duderstadt, the former president of the University of Michigan, exclaims:

Faculty members reason further that intercollegiate athletics are presumed to have an educational benefit. Yet, in reality, institutional control does not rest at this level. While many faculty members are concerned about athletics, few have the time to understand the intricacies of contemporary intercollegiate athletics. And rare are those among the faculty who are willing to accept the responsibility and accountability that must accompany the authority for true control. (p. 106).

Faculty members generally have two means of representation in the governance of athletics. First, most institutions have formed a faculty oversight group for athletics, yet the purpose of these groups is inconsistent. Some may set policy, others may be more advisory in nature, while a few may even be quite powerless and are formed as a mollifying action by the president of the institution on behalf of a vo-

cal faculty. Second, the NCAA has mandated that all institutions name a Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) who will be active in institutional athletics affairs. But similar to the oversight group, the FAR's role is ill-defined (Sander, 2010; Wolverton, 2010). Furthermore, there are some who view this position with a suspicious eye. As one critic notes:

The problem is that too many faculty representatives do not see the compromises that overemphasis on athletics programs inevitably causes. Rather, they define their role as being apologists for and promoters of the athletic enterprise. Sadly but understandably, choice tickets, close-in parking, and free flights to away games all contribute toward defining the faculty representative role in ways that are largely in the interests of the athletic department. As a result, the tension between those interests and the institution's educational goals is not addressed . . . It is not unusual to find situations in which the regulator becomes a promoter, if not a captive, of the enterprise he or she regulates. (Atwell, 1991, p. 10)

Research on the intersection of faculty and intercollegiate athletics has been quite limited. Over the last few years, a handful of studies have suggested that faculty attitudes toward athletics are varied and diverse. Though Kuga (1996) noted past participation in athletics as a mediating factor in the development of faculty attitudes, the often conflicting aims of academe and athletics contribute to both the tension and the lack of resolution on issues. Others suggest that intercollegiate athletics is important to the identity of an institution, yet it is unclear whether faculty understands that identity to be positive, conflicting or compatible, particularly because institutions by their very nature must carry multiple and often competing identities (Toma, 1999; Buer, 2009).

A recent study (Lawrence, Hendricks, & Ott, 2007) by researchers at the University of Michigan surveyed roughly 2000 faculty members, many intimately connected to athletics through teaching and governance activities, at 23 Football Bowl Subdivision institutions. This study found that a number of faculty members lack key knowledge about athletics and perceive the academic enterprise of the institution as "disconnected" generally from the athletics department. In this, faculty are generally satisfied with the academic performance of student-athletes compared to those not involved in varsity sport with the notable exception of men's basketball and football. As one might suspect, these revenue sports continue to influence the attitudes of faculty. Moreover, the study found that many faculty members are not happy with faculty governance of athletics but do find some solace in the presidential leadership of athletics.

These same researchers (Lawrence, Hendricks, & Ott, 2009) suggest three areas of focus for faculty, particularly as faculty members engage with the ever burgeoning athletics enterprise. First, faculty should be concerned with *academic*

oversight, the notion that academic endeavors and the creation and transmission of knowledge are the central purpose to an institution. In this, faculty might monitor the academic performance and special admission of student-athletes. Second, faculty should have involvement in the *fiscal oversight* of athletics; while certainly not having a position of authority, faculty does have a voice in the planning and oversight of institutional finances as they relate to athletics. Finally, faculty through appropriate *governance* mechanisms should engage with athletics on the policy level, particularly when athletics activities intrude upon crucial academic operations. Here the researchers note that faculty must have both *desire* and *knowledge* to engage in any meaningful way.

In light of this last recommendation, Feezell (2005) noted significant differences in the attitudes of faculty members at NCAA Division I and NCAA Division III institutions. Division III faculty he observed seem to have much more positive attitudes toward athletics primarily because of some general mode of institutional integration of athletics into the norms of the institution. Here faculty members observe similarities in student-athletes and those who do not participate in varsity sports. Moreover, they observe a faculty oversight and governance of athletics that is generated through such integration; in essence, faculty is involved in and knows of the athletics operation.

Division I faculty members generally present more negative attitudes precisely because of the separation and distance of athletics and academics. Student-athletes, particularly in revenue sports, appear different and the aims of the athletics department seem counter to what faculty hold most dear. They have little precise knowledge of the athletics operation, and when they engage with athletics it is often only through circumscribed structures that have little real effect on change, reform, and integration. Moreover—and this speaks to the issue of desire implicated in Lawrence, Ott, and Hendricks (2009)—faculty at the Division I level have less desire to be involved with athletics; the allegiance of a faculty member, it seems, is often toward the academic discipline rather than the institution. In general, the divisional status of the institution—and one can assume both the financial and operational seriousness of the athletics operation—has a significant influence on the differing attitudes of and engagement with intercollegiate athletics.

This current study builds on the work of this recent research to examine faculty attitudes and faculty engagement with athletics at Division II institutions. While little research exists on faculty and athletics, even less examines Division II faculty members. Division II presents a curious case, particularly when compared to Feezell's previous study. Clearly the most striking characteristic difference of the three NCAA divisions is the offering of athletics scholarship financial aid. While Division I institutions are able to offer significant aid, often in the form of full remission of room, board, books and fee, and while Division III institutions offer no athletics aid whatsoever, Division II schools offer partial athletics scholarships, that is, some small portion of the overall cost of attendance that can be combined

with other merit and need awards. In essence, the notion of an athletic scholarship at Division II is that of “some” as opposed to “all” in Division I and “none” in Division III. Finally, Division II constitutes a rich diversity of schools both private and public and as such presents a variety of institutional aims and agendas. Second-tier state schools, elite private institutions, and enrollment-driven academic enterprises all inhabit Division II and thus prompt a curious but enlightening investigation of its faculty.

Methods

This current study aims to answer two specific questions. First, what are the attitudes of faculty members at Division II institutions surrounding general issues in intercollegiate athletics such as student-athlete eligibility, the treatment of women’s athletics programs, the time demands placed on student-athletes, and the academic performance of student-athletes in comparison to those not participating in varsity sports? Second, what are the attitudes of Division II faculty members in regards to faculty governance and the place and status of intercollegiate athletics at their respective institutions?

Faculty members at institutions in three Division II athletics conferences (Conference Carolinas, Peach Belt, South Atlantic) in the South were surveyed using a 40-question survey instrument first developed by Armenta (1986) and utilized by Norman (1995); the instrument employs a Likert system which asks respondents to note their level of agreement—*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *undecided*, *agree*, *strongly agree*—with a statement regarding intercollegiate athletics (i.e., In general, athletes should meet the same admissions standards as the general student body). Further modification (Feezell, 2005) added two open-ended qualitative questions addressing the issues of faculty governance and place/status of intercollegiate athletics. In addition, nine demographic questions such as age, gender, tenure status, academic discipline and academic rank were included on this most recent survey instrument.

Faculty athletics representatives at the institutions in the three athletics conferences were asked to distribute the survey to faculty colleagues at their institutions utilizing the most widely preferred electronic method of distribution that would reach all faculty; most institutions have a distribution email listing whereby information is directed to the specific group of faculty on campus, thus anonymity of respondents and institutions was ensured. Only full-time faculty with the rank of instructor/lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor were asked to complete the survey. The rationale for such limitation is that this grouping would have the most familiarity and interaction with student-athletes and intercollegiate athletics in general. Of the respondents to the survey, only one was provided from an institution in the South Atlantic Conference; thus, the ratio of respondents was roughly 60:40 in favor of the Peach Belt Conference in comparison to Conference Carolinas. (See Table 1 for demographic information).

Table 1
Demographic Information of Respondents

Percentage of Respondents	
Age (n=191)	
35 or under	16.2%
36-45	26.2%
46-55	23.0%
56-65	29.3%
66 or over	5.2%
Gender (n=193)	
Male	47.2%
Female	52.8%
Academic Rank (n=190)	
Instructor/Lecturer	21.6%
Assistant Professor	28.9%
Associate Professor	32.1%
Professor	17.4%
Tenure Status (n=191)	
Tenured	37.2%
Not Tenured	62.8%
Years at Current Institution (n=193)	
1-5	49.2%
6-10	20.7%
11-15	11.4%
16 or more	18.7%
Highest Level of Athletics Participation (n=194)	
None	31.4%
Junior High School	6.7%
High School	41.8%
College	19.1%
Professional	1.0%
Sports Fan? (n=192)	
Yes	65.6%
No	34.4%
Academic Discipline (n=192)	
Natural Sciences	14.1%
Social Sciences	21.4%
Humanities	28.6%
Professional	24.5%
Other	11.5%

Results from the study were analyzed using measures of central tendency in addition to an analysis of variance to measure significance, particularly on variables others than divisional status. Significance levels were set at the $<.05$ level. In this, responses to the Likert-system questions were assigned a numerical value (*strongly disagree*=1; *disagree*=2; *neutral*=3; *agree*=4; *strongly agree*=5) and thus yielded a significant pool of quantitative data which could be analyzed through a variety of demographic characteristics including divisional status, academic rank, and the like. Separately, the two open-ended qualitative questions were analyzed using coding and emergent information techniques. In this, responses were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral and analyzed for specific trends or consistencies regarding content. A fourth category of identification (“split”) was added upon further analysis as some comments on the role and status of athletics seemed to indicate a bifurcated response, that is, a response which indicated some combination of positive, negative, and neutral opinions.

Finally, both the qualitative and quantitative responses were compared with Feezell’s earlier study (2005) which maintains that institutional divisional status in the NCAA has a significant effect on the attitudes of faculty members. Thus, a comparison of the data across divisional status, particular survey data taken from the same instrument—though admittedly a limitation given that the data springs from collection at two different times through two different methods—seems appropriate and relevant. In this the current analysis reveals that Division II faculty members have distinct attitudes regarding athletics apart from their Division I and Division III colleagues. More specifically, Division II faculty members note a significant lack of faculty involvement in and governance of athletics though there is some sentiment to suggest that this state of affairs is not necessarily negative. Moreover, faculty at Division II institutions seem to indicate a “use” for athletics by the institution, a use that appears to be more intentional and more directed than at Division I and III schools. (See Table 2 for specific points of analysis discussed further in the following section.)

Results and Discussion

Divisional Status—NCAA Division I, II, and III

As mentioned previously, the demographic characteristic of institutional divisional status did rise to a level of significance in Feezell’s previous study; thus, whether the school was at the Division I, II, or III level did have some impact on differences in attitudes of faculty members. When asked about the graduation rate of student-athletes generally being lower than that of other students on campus, Division I faculty trended toward agreement while Division II and Division III faculty trended toward disagreement. Similarly, Division II and III faculty trended toward the same disagreement level when asked about the grade point averages of student-athletes in comparison to other students; again, Division I faculty when asked this same question trended toward agreement. It seems Division I faculty

Table 2*Significance Levels and Mean Scores of Selected Questions*

Divisional Status	Division I	Division II			Division III	
The graduation rate for athletes at this institution is lower than that of the general student body	3.54	2.54			2.06	
The grade point average of athletes at this institution is lower than that of the general student body	3.45	2.57			2.54	
The faculty, in general, resents athletics at this institution	2.62	2.37			2.35	
In general, athletes should meet the same admissions requirements as the general student body	4.13	4.43			4.44	
A majority of athletes at this institution are here to participate in athletics, not to pursue a degree program	2.98	2.60			1.85	
Private vs. Public Institution	Significance Level	Private			Public	
A majority of athletes at this institution are here to participate in athletics, not to pursue a degree program	.000	2.95			2.26	
Too much emphasis is place on the athletics program at this institution by college/university administration	.000	2.57			2.02	
Gender	Significance Level	Male			Female	
The women's athletics program at this institution receives equal treatment by the university administration	.000	3.79			3.29	
Tenure Status	Significance Level	Tenured			Not Tenured	
The grade point average of athletes at this institution is lower than that of the general student body	.002	2.32			2.75	
Athletes at this institution often remain eligible through unethical means	.023	1.92			2.23	
Participation Level	Sig_Level	None	JHS	HS	College	Professional
Athletes at this institution often remain eligible through unethical means	.042	2.16	2.75	2.08	1.87	2.00
In general, unrealistic time demands are placed on athletes by coaches	.053	3.31	3.42	3.20	2.83	2.00

see great difference in the academic performance of student-athletes when compared to other students while faculty members in other divisions observe this less so.

Division II faculty, however, found some similarity with both Division I and Division III faculty when asked about faculty resentment of athletics. Interestingly, faculty members at all divisions trend toward disagreement with this statement. It may be noted that this may be an issue of self-selection and respondent affinity with athletics. Those with the greatest resentment of athletics might be inclined not to respond at all to any questionnaire related to varsity sports. Moreover, faculty at all divisions noted a strong agreement that student-athletes *should* meet—not necessarily that they *do* meet—the same admissions requirements as other students. One might argue here that all faculty are calling for academic primacy in admissions as opposed to other special talents or privileges that might admit a student to the institution. This similarity of faculty attitudes is particularly striking when compared to another survey statement that seeks faculty attitudes on whether student-athletes are at the institution primarily to pursue an athletic experience as opposed to seeking an academic degree. Here, there is some level of neutrality from Division I faculty while Division II faculty trend toward disagreement with the statement and Division III faculty exhibit even stronger disagreement. These attitudes may again speak to the general notion of difference between student-athletes and other students.

In general, the median responses of Division II faculty fall in the middle when compared to Division I and Division III faculty from Fezell's previous study. This should not be surprising given the polarizing nature of institutional division choice and emphasis on athletics. Division I institutions invest great financial sums in intercollegiate athletics and generally operate outside the institutional norms and processes. Division III institutions invest substantially less and seem to integrate athletics into the overarching fabric of the institution. Faculty members in each division seem to recognize this polarization and exhibit this in their attitudes toward athletics. Thus, Division II faculty attitudes might rightly fall in the middle of these two extremes whereby Division II institutions invest less than Division I but often put more financial clout behind athletics than in Division III. Moreover, Division II picks up some elements of the seriousness of athletics as observed at Division I, yet faculty seem to see some of the limitations of a smaller athletics enterprise and may view this with an attitude more akin to Division III colleagues. This similarity of Division II and Division III faculty—both with strong differences to Division I—seems to occur most often around statements and issues of student-athlete and student body comparison and the relative place of athletics on campus. Division II and III faculty seem to recognize athletics as a student-driven activity, one with strong similarities to other student activities on campus, as opposed to being primarily a financial endeavor at the Division I level.

Institutional Status—Private and Public

In the analysis of Division II responses only, the demographic of institutional status—whether the institution was private or public—did rise to the level of significance. Private institutional faculty members often presented more negative attitudes toward athletics than their public school colleagues. For instance, when asked to comment on the statement regarding student-athletes at the institution primarily pursuing an athletic experience, public school faculty tended toward a much stronger disagreement than private school faculty who expressed a marked neutrality on the topic. Additionally, public school faculty exhibited a stronger disagreement than their private school colleagues when asked whether athletics received too much emphasis and attention from college administrators.

Perhaps the explanation for such difference in public and private institutional faculty attitudes lies in institutional enrollment patterns. To this end, private schools generally have smaller overall enrollments but carry a much greater percentage of student-athletes as a portion of overall enrollments; in many cases this can fall between the 30-50% range of overall enrollment. And with such a large percentage of the student body—and in some instances where private institutions are utilizing athletics as a primary enrollment strategy—the student-athlete population is markedly different from other students. Student-athletes in fact may not be as integrated at private institutions; they are recruited for athletics talents and may be seen as “separate” from the very outset of that recruitment. Thus, faculty at private schools may see student-athletes in quite a different light than public school colleagues. Quite simply, the lens on student-athletes and the drive of administrators to attract this population is dramatically stronger at private schools than it is at public institutions.

Gender, Tenure Status, and Level of Athletics Participation

For Division II faculty members, the demographic characteristic of gender rose to the level of significance on a number of questions, yet the difference in mean scores was often negligible. On only one question was the difference in attitudes quite substantial. As one might suspect, when asked to provide an opinion on the statement as to whether women’s athletics programs received similar attention to their male program counterparts, female faculty members trended toward a much stronger disagreement.

As to tenure status, this demographic characteristic only rose to the level of significance on two particular statements. In both of these cases—both statements about athlete academic performance—tenured faculty tended toward more negative attitudes than their non-tenured colleagues. This may be a product of tenured professors having more experience and more interactions with student-athletes to reflect on their responses; however, one must note that that the demographic questions only asked about tenure status as opposed to number of years at the institution. It would be quite reasonable to expect there to be tenured professors at some institutions who had not spent many years at that specific institution or per-

haps had experience at other institutions outside of Division II. Conversely, it may be the case that there are non-tenured faculty who have spent a strong number of years at the institution. Perhaps what is most telling about tenure status is that it does NOT rise to the level of significance on the other 38 questions; perhaps it is the case that tenure status has little to do with faculty attitudes.

As to the demographic characteristic of level of participation, those faculty members who had participated in athletics previously at the college level had markedly different attitudes from those who had only participated at the junior high/middle school level or had not participated at all. In general, there was a pattern of gradated responses based on the level of participation of the faculty member on questions when the variable rose to the level of significance. For instance, when asked about student-athletes being subjected to unrealistic time demands by coaches, those faculty members with college athletics experience trended toward neutrality while those with junior high experience trended toward agreement. When asked about athletes at the institution remaining eligible through unethical means, those with college athletics participation trended toward strong disagreement versus those with junior high participation (who expressed mild neutrality on the question. In sum, it seems that those faculty members with college athletics playing experience may want to dismiss any negative statement or myth about intercollegiate athletics; perhaps they are pulling on their own experience as a former student-athlete and that this has helped shape a more positive impression of athletics.

Faculty Governance

The open-ended question on faculty governance asked faculty to comment on the role of faculty governance of athletics at the institution. Those Division II faculty members with positive comments noted a visibility in faculty governance of athletics and an effective institutional communication strategy, that is, that faculty were “in the know” because issues of athletics were regularly shared with faculty. More specifically, these faculty noted a strong faculty athletics representative on campus, an active faculty advisory group, and a faculty associate coach program whereby specific faculty were linked to specific teams and often visited practices, met with students, or travelled to away competitions. Here it should be noted that Feezell’s previous study that Division I faculty with positive attitudes commented most often on the quality of “structure” in faculty governance while those faculty in Division III commented on the “integration” of faculty into the oversight of athletics.

Division II faculty members with negative opinions toward faculty governance noted a lack of power of the existing governance components. In essence, Division II faculty here saw faculty governance as a sham; faculty members in their minds are disempowered from having any real say in athletics oversight. While there may be an FAR, that FAR does little beyond communicating what has already been done as opposed to legitimately seeking faculty input on issues. Divi-

sion I faculty have similar attitudes while Division III faculty show disfavor only around very specific issues (e.g., athletics scheduling).

What is most shocking about the Division II responses (n=115) is that the majority, almost 69%, are coded as either negative or neutral. In this, faculty members are falling into one of three categories. On the one hand, they are looking for faculty governance and either finding it lacking or not finding it at all. On the other hand, faculty members are not even looking for any kind of interaction with athletics. There is no interest; athletics is a separate world apart from the academic life. It is this last category of the malaise of many faculty that may have the most implication for future progress of faculty governance in Division II.

The Role and Function of Intercollegiate Athletics

While Division I faculty members previously commented on the positive role of athletics as a community building agent, particularly for institutional identity and alumni connection, Division II faculty with positive feelings toward athletics note a more banal utilitarian function. In this they note that athletics is positive in that it assists in institutional enrollment and “keeping the doors open” in some drastic cases. Moreover, athletics provides some level of diversity through international students on teams as well as attracting more males to campus. While there is some notion of athletics as a student development to—similar to previous responses from Division III faculty—the theme of utilitarianism is quite strong and quite separate from the attitudes of others.

Those in Division II with negative responses toward the role and function of athletics focus comments on the cost-value tension that is apparent on campus. In this comments from faculty note a significant devotion of resources toward athletics with little return on that investment; in essence, they see little value institutionally or developmentally from such a large investment. Perhaps this is the reverse and negative feeling of the utilitarian theme. More interestingly, Division II faculty are quite different from their Division I and III colleagues who express negative feelings toward athletics around the academic-athletic tension, that is, that athletics seems to distract and remain disconnected from the primary academic enterprise.

Moreover, some Division II faculty members seem split in their opinions over the value of athletics on campus. They do recognize athletics as a recruitment tool for the institution—and that this is positive—but even then recognize that athletics often produces inferior students, fails to unify the student body, and prompts coaches to be much more concerned with winning rather than student development. And while they note that athletics can be “fun” and an “outlet” for student-athletes, there is little else to demarcate it from other “fun” activities on campus and that students not participating in athletics generally “don’t care” about intercollegiate sports.

Overall, Division II faculty members seem to focus on institutional benefits as a product of the role and function of athletics. This may be a product of the eco-

conomic atmosphere of the schools surveyed; many are enrollment-driven institutions and did suffer some hardship from the economic downturn. Here one might be encountering the tension of scarce benefits on campus and athletics programs apparently receiving those benefits and further attention. Additionally, Division II faculty members are quite different from Division I and Division III. As one might expect, Division I faculty focus on the external constituents (alumni, fans, etc.) and the external benefits of revenue and identity that are generated from athletics. Division III faculty on the other hand see the role and function of athletics as being primarily directed at the internal constituents; it the student participants in athletics that benefit both positively and negatively from varsity sports.

Implications and Future Research

If faculty members are indeed best suited to defend and observe the academic integrity of an institution and if they are to do this through faculty governance structures and activities, then it seems apparent that they are to have some oversight of athletics, particularly if we believe that athletics is an educational and developmental activity rather than some financial endeavor. To believe it is otherwise is to both reject academic and developmental primacy as well as faculty involvement. But how should faculty go about this? What are the contemporary attitudes of faculty and the limitations to that involvement? This research at the very least has suggested that there is a diversity of opinion on the part of faculty regarding athletics and that certain demographic characteristics, chiefly institutional divisional status, play a role in influencing those attitudes. Furthermore, this research suggests the challenges of faculty interaction with intercollegiate athletics. If faculty members are to interact in a more effective and efficient manner with athletics, then certainly many of the challenges—structure, cost-value tension, academic performance of students, FAR involvement—will need to be addressed.

Yet this research is only a beginning. There is certainly a need to build on this research and perhaps conduct a more comprehensive study of all three divisions at the same time; additionally, Division II as a whole should attract more attention. Quite simply, there is such a dearth of research surrounding faculty and intercollegiate athletics which makes it all the more curious when the athletic-academic divide and student-athlete academic performance is often the central thesis of current research on athletics and American higher education. Moreover, this study is only a jumping off point to describe the attitudes of faculty; future research should investigate the cause and the socializing factors of those opinions.

As intercollegiate athletics, particularly at the Division I level, continues to blossom and grow financially, the role of faculty will take on a growing importance. Their voice will need to be heard loudly and clearly; without that voice, the direction of intercollegiate athletics may take on a new and unintended direction.

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Management Whitepaper

Faculty Attitudes Toward Athletics at NCAA Division II Institutions

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I. Research Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of Division II faculty members toward intercollegiate athletics, particularly in comparison to previous research which investigated similar attitudes of Division I and Division III faculty members. Moreover, this current research examines faculty attitudes regarding the role and function of athletics in higher education as well as the role of faculty in the oversight and governance of athletics. This research reveals significant differences in attitudes of faculty based on institutional divisional status but also reveals that other demographic variables have some measure of influence on faculty attitudes. This research is particularly useful for presidents and athletics directors as it may get at the heart of the academic-athletic tension on many campuses and may assist those interested in fully engaging faculty in the programming and oversight of college athletics.

II. Issues

Faculty members do have central roles in the governance of the university, particularly in two areas. First, faculty play a role in university-wide governance, often in the form of academic senates or other groups that serve to advise the administration on prominent university issues. Second, and perhaps even more powerful, faculty act within the academic units of the institution (i.e., departments, divisions, schools, colleges) to manage the curricular business of the institution, controlling in some sense the very heart of the academic activity of any college or university.

Faculty governance of athletics, however, seems a much more difficult piece to define. Faculty members generally have two means of representation in the governance of athletics. First, most institutions have formed a faculty oversight group for athletics, yet the purpose of these groups is inconsistent. Some may set policy, others may be more advisory in nature, while a few may even be quite powerless and are formed as a mollifying action by the president of the institution on behalf of a vocal faculty. Second, the NCAA has mandated that all institutions name a Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) that will be active in institutional athletics affairs. But similar to the oversight group, the FAR's role is ill-defined.

Scholars have suggested that faculty attitudes toward athletics are varied and diverse. Faculty status, gender, and knowledge of athletics all seem to be mediating factors in the attitudes faculty members hold toward athletics. The institutional divisional status (NCAA Division I, II, or III) also seems to have great influence on faculty attitudes toward athletics. Moreover, faculty members do recognize that athletics can serve to enhance—or in some cases, reduce—institutional prestige and identity. Faculty can also play a role in the oversight of academic and fiscal issues that relate to athletics. Yet faculty members are often disconnected from athletics and lack key knowledge about its processes and structures. Instead, they look toward presidents to provide leadership and oversight of athletics.

III. Summary

This current study aims to answer two specific questions. First, what are the attitudes of faculty members at Division II institutions surrounding general issues in intercollegiate athletics like student-athlete eligibility, the treatment of women's athletics programs, the time demands placed on student-athletes, and the academic performance of student-athletes in comparison to those not participating in varsity sports? Second, what are the attitudes of Division II faculty members in regards to faculty governance and the place and status of intercollegiate athletics at their respective institutions?

Faculty members at institutions in three Division II athletics conferences (Conference Carolinas, Peach Belt, South Atlantic) in the South were surveyed using a 40-question survey instrument which asked respondents to note their level of agreement—*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *undecided*, *agree*, *strongly agree*—with a statement regarding intercollegiate athletics (i.e., In general, athletes should meet the same admissions standards as the general student body). Faculty members were also asked to respond to two open-ended qualitative questions addressing the issues of faculty governance and place/status of intercollegiate athletics. In addition, nine demographic questions such as age, gender, tenure status, academic discipline and academic rank were included on the survey instrument. Responses were analyzed to note the differences in answers based on demographic characteristics. Additionally, responses were compared to previous research that investigated faculty attitudes at Division I and III institutions.

IV. Analysis

In general, the median responses of Division II faculty fall in the middle when compared to Division I and Division III faculty. This should not be surprising given the polarizing nature of institutional division choice and emphasis on athletics. Division I institutions invest great financial sums in intercollegiate athletics and generally operate outside the institutional norms and processes. Division III institutions invest substantially less and seem to integrate athletics into the overarching fabric of the institution. Faculty members in each division seem to recognize this polarization and exhibit this in their attitudes toward athletics. Division

II picks up some elements of the seriousness of athletics as observed at Division I, yet faculty seem to see some of the limitations of a smaller athletics enterprise and may view this with an attitude more akin to Division III colleagues. This similarity of Division II and Division III faculty—both with strong differences to Division I—seems to occur most often around statements and issues of student-athlete and student body comparison and the relative place of athletics on campus. Division II and III faculty seem to recognize athletics as a student-driven activity, one with strong similarities to other student activities on campus, as opposed to being primarily a financial endeavor as it is at the Division I level.

As to the demographic of institutional status, private institutional faculty members at Division II institutions often presented more negative attitudes toward athletics than their public school colleagues. Perhaps the explanation for such difference in public and private institutional faculty attitudes lies in institutional enrollment patterns. To this end, private schools generally have smaller overall enrollments but carry a much greater percentage of student-athletes as a portion of overall enrollments. And with such a large percentage of the student body—and in some instances where private institutions are utilizing athletics as a primary enrollment strategy—the student-athlete population is markedly different from other students. Student-athletes in fact may not be as integrated at private institutions; they are recruited for athletics talents and may be seen as “separate” from the very outset of that recruitment.

The open-ended question on faculty governance asked faculty to comment on the role of faculty governance of athletics at the institution. Those Division II faculty with positive comments noted a visibility in faculty governance of athletics and an effective institutional communication strategy, that is, that faculty were “in the know” because issues of athletics were regularly shared with faculty. More specifically, these faculty noted a strong faculty athletics representative on campus, an active faculty advisory group, and a faculty associate coach program whereby specific faculty were linked up to specific teams and often visited practices, met with students, or travelled to away competitions. Division II faculty members with negative opinions toward faculty governance noted a lack of power of the existing governance components. In essence, Division II faculty here saw faculty governance as a sham. Moreover, it should be noted here that the strong majority of all responses to this question did not exhibit positive feelings about faculty governance. In this, it seems they are looking for faculty governance and either finding it lacking or not finding it at all. In some extreme cases, faculty are not even looking for any kind of interaction with athletics. There is no interest; athletics is a separate world apart from the academic life.

When asked about the role and function of athletics on campus, Division II faculty with positive feelings toward athletics note a more banal utilitarian function than either Division I or Division III faculty. In this they note that athletics is positive in that it assists in institutional enrollment and “keeping the doors open”

in some drastic cases. Also, athletics provides some level of diversity through international students on teams as well as attracting more males to campus. Those in Division II with negative responses toward the role and function of athletics focus comments on the cost-value tension that is apparent on campus; they note a significant devotion of resources toward athletics with little return on that investment. This is quite different from their Division I and III colleagues who express negative feelings toward athletics around the academic-athletic tension, that is, that athletics seems to distract and remain disconnected from the primary academic enterprise. Overall, Division II faculty seem to focus on institutional benefits as a product of the role and function of athletics, quite a different perception than Division I and Division III faculty.

V. Implications

As intercollegiate athletics, particularly at the Division I level, continues to blossom and grow financially, the role of faculty will take on a growing importance. If faculty are indeed best suited to defend and observe the academic integrity of an institution and if they are to do this through faculty governance structures and activities, then it seems apparent that faculty are to have some oversight of athletics, particularly if we believe that athletics is an educational and developmental activity rather than some financial endeavor. To believe it is otherwise is to both reject academic and developmental primacy as well as faculty involvement. But how should faculty go about this? Their voice will need to be heard loudly and clearly; without that voice, the direction of intercollegiate athletics may take on a new and unintended direction.

This research, then, can be useful for presidents, administrators, and faculty leaders as they try to engage the faculty group on campus with athletics issues and concerns. At the most surface level, this research—particularly when placed alongside previous studies—provides a surface look at the attitudes and opinions of faculty in regards to athletics. Here one can better understand the issues and concerns of faculty, those things that are most important or those issues that might be discarded. Yet this research also can provide a roadmap of sorts in understanding the institutional and personal characteristics which would allow the most meaningful engagement of faculty on these issues. Institutional status and divisional status do have an influence on how faculty perceive athletics. Moreover, gender, tenure status, and past participation in athletics also play a role in that perception. Knowing the issues of faculty is certainly enlightening, yet knowing the issues of particular faculty at particular institutions is perhaps something even more powerful.