

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Review of the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics

Student-Athlete Academic Support Services (SASS)

by the

Student-Athlete Academic Support Services

Review Committee

(April 29, 2008)

INTRODUCTION

The Student-Athlete Academic Support Services Review Committee, as an entity external to the Department of Athletics, has the responsibility of reviewing the Athletic Department's Student-Athlete Academic Support Services. NCAA Bylaw 22.2.2.2 – **Academic Support** - states, “*Members of the Association have the responsibility to conduct intercollegiate athletics programs in a manner designed to protect and enhance the educational well-being of student-athletes and to assure proper emphasis on educational objectives. Consistent with this responsibility, the institution shall demonstrate that:*

1. *Adequate academic support services are available for student-athletes;*
2. *Student-athletes are encouraged and assisted in reaching attainable academic goals of their own choosing;*
3. *When it is determined that individual student-athletes have special academic needs, are these needs addressed? ; and*
4. *The support services are reviewed and approved periodically by academic authorities outside the department of intercollegiate athletics.*
5. *There is a commitment to the fair treatment of student-athletes, particularly in their academic role as students.”*

The requirements of item 4 have been met with the completion and approval of this review. The review committee will address the remaining four requirements in its evaluation of the Office of Student-athlete Academic Support Services.

THE REVIEW COMMITTEE:

The review committee is composed of appropriate academic authorities outside the department of intercollegiate athletics. The members are:

- Malissa Mathis, Assistant Dean, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences;
- Dr. Art English, Professor, Political Science;
- Dr. Tim Edwards, Associate Professor, School of Mass Communication;
- Dr. David Briscoe, Professor, Sociology and Anthropology, FAR;
- Dr. Thea Hoeft, Director of University College Academic Advising (ex officio);

STUDENT-ATHLETE ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES:

Introduction:

The Office of Student-Athlete Athletic Academic Support Services is located in the Jack Stephens Center within the Department of Athletics. This program was implemented to provide the necessary resources and support services that will enable each student-athlete to succeed in academics, athletics and to graduate. Originally established under the Department of Athletics in 1990, the position was transferred to University College Academic Advising in 1998. During its eighteen years of existence, the office has had three coordinators (1990 – 2001, Ruth Milligan, 2002 – 2004, Karen Wisdom and 2005 to present, Dr. Jan Dannaway).

The position of the Coordinator of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services is responsive to the overall academic needs of the program and provides a large portion of the services to the sixteen (16) NCAA Division I sports. Even though the office of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services is within the Department of Athletics, the Coordinator of Student-Athlete reports to the Director of University College Academic Advising outside the Department of Athletics.

Responsibilities for advising students in general at UALR are assigned to the University College Academic Advising Department. This office maintains all University College undergraduate student advisement records and processes academic major declaration forms for undecided undergraduates.

Academic advising is mandatory for all students each semester. The Coordinator of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services advises and gives assistance to all the student-athletes regarding course selection drop/add, major declarations, degree requirements, scholarships, awards, class absences, tutorial assistance and the development of new or improved areas of service.

Purpose and Goals:

The Office of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services serves as an educational resource to students who participate in the intercollegiate athletics program at the University. Services offered by this office are complimented by other institutional service programs.

Goals of the Office of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services are to:

- Assist in monitoring student-athletes' NCAA eligibility;
- Work cooperatively with other institutional academic units (counselors and advisors) to facilitate the selection of courses and majors for student-athletes;
- Provide academic support services that will assist student-athletes in developing the skills necessary to maintain academic progress and earn a degree through counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and career counseling;
- Assist student-athletes with their personal adjustment to adequately meet the academic and athletic demands placed upon them;
- Assist student-athletes in career exploration;
- Encourage student-athletes to accept personal responsibility for their education;
- Promote a cooperative approach between coaches, student-athletes, support service personnel, and academic staff;
- Utilize campus resources to assist student-athletes beyond the athletic department;
- Uphold all ethical conduct standards of the University, the Sun Belt Conference, and the NCAA;
- Extend a caring, committed effort in helping our student-athlete's intellectual, cultural, physical and social development;
- Assist in recruiting prospective student-athletes who will be academically successful during their enrollment at UALR.

Additionally, the program serves as a resource to student-athletes and enables them to receive out-of-classroom academic support. Specifically, the support services for the student-athletes include the following, some of which may be in conjunction with other university programs.

Orientation:

Orientation is a process that begins before admissions and continues throughout the student-athletes' participation in intercollegiate athletics. New and continuing student athletes are required to attend the orientation program held at the beginning of each academic year which serves the dual purpose of acquainting student-athletes with University and athletic department policies and procedures. Attention to this basic requirement assures that student-athletes receive a general introduction to staff, athletic policies, objectives and available resources. The orientation program ensures that athletic goals are consistent with the admissions and educational standards of the University, the NCAA and the Sun Belt Conference. Topics covered include NCAA, Sun Belt Conference and UALR regulations regarding eligibility, financial aid, student housing, support services and drug education. The Coordinator also provides information concerning academic responsibilities, advising, and registration and student assessment. Representatives from various campus constituencies are invited to address specific issues related to student life at UALR.

Records (student-athletes):

To ensure that all necessary requirements for admissions have been fulfilled before advising and certification of the student-athlete, the Coordinator assists new applicants in processing admissions credentials. An active file for each new student-athlete is established and maintained for the purpose of identification, monitoring academic progress and NCAA eligibility. As a general requirement all student-athletes are encouraged to enroll and complete 15 credit hours each semester. Student-athletes are required to demonstrate "satisfactory progress" by meeting established annual NCAA progress toward degree requirements in order to maintain academic eligibility for participation in the athletics program.

Advising:

Academic advising is mandatory for all students each semester and must be completed in advance of registration dates. Academic advising includes both long-term (degree programs) and short-term (undeclared) planning majors and continues throughout the academic year. During announced advising dates, advising sessions are scheduled with student-athletes in order to develop a schedule of classes with consideration given to academic standing, transfer credits, choice of program of study, course requirements, athletic commitments, and career and life goals

Registration:

Following the advising and clearance of student-athletes, the coordinator will register all student-athletes entering UALR for the first time. During the drop/add periods, student-athletes are advised and assisted by the coordinator in making schedule changes.

Monitoring Academic Progress:

Monitoring academic progress requires frequent contact with the faculty. Progress report forms are the primary means for communicating with faculty to gain information regarding class performance. The coordinator will maintain a liaison with the appropriate team coach regarding the academic progress of the student-athlete. Special attention to this component of the program assures the faculty and the student-athlete that attention is given to their academic progress.

Tutoring Support:

The selection and scheduling of the tutors and tutoring sessions are arranged by the Office of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services under the direction of the coordinator. The quality of the tutors involved in the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services program is critical to the success of the program. The goal of the tutoring component is to help students develop the necessary skills to achieve academic success, build self-confidence and competence to earn a degree.

Tutoring is the most valuable resource available to student-athletes. By working with tutors and professional staff, student-athletes generally experience reduced test anxiety and improved grades.

Student-athletes who have been identified as learning disabled are referred to the Disability Resource Center program. Support services from the Department of Athletics and the Disability Resource Center are utilized by student-athletes who need the support of both departments.

Counseling and Career Exploration:

The advisor, in conjunction with the Office of Counseling and Career Planning and Placement, provides services to meet the educational, vocational, personal and social counseling needs of student-athletes.

Prospective Student-Athletes (recruiting):

Prospective Student-athletes who visit the campus are interviewed by the coordinator. Prior to a campus visit, transcripts (high school and college) are reviewed for meeting minimum NCAA requirements for eligibility and admissions to UALR. The coordinator also assists prospective student-athletes with understanding and interpreting ACT and SAT score reports or transfer credits from another college, general education course requirements and what might be expected during a typical first year of academic study and athletic participation at UALR.

Advocacy:

Student-athletes often need assistance in interpreting university policy. As an advocate for student-athletes, the coordinator provides assistance in areas concerning class absences, assignments, intervention strategies and efforts to improve relationships within the classroom and the University. These activities also help the student-athlete in transition to college life at UALR.

Reports:

The official reporting year for student-athletes academic progress begins in the fall semester and concludes at the end of the spring semester. Consequently, an academic performance report for all sports is produced at the end of each semester. Semester and annual Student-Athlete Academic Performance Reports are produced by the coordinator and distributed to various institutional constituents (Chancellor, Director of Athletics, Director of University College Academic Advising, Faculty Athletics Representative, Head Coaches, Athletics Committee, etc...).

REVIEW PROCESS:

A comprehensive review of all components of the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services program have been conducted by members of the Review Committee. Interviews were conducted with various individuals and groups across the campus with whom the Office of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services interacts. Documents essential to the operation of the office and results from research on the academic performance of student-athletes were reviewed.

Each committee member was charged with providing their evaluations in writing by answering the following questions outlined in NCAA Bylaw 22.2.2.2:

1. *Are adequate academic support services available for student-athletes? ;*
2. *Are student-athletes encouraged and assisted in reaching attainable academic goals of their own choosing? ;*
3. *When it is determined that individual student-athletes have special academic needs, are these needs addressed? ; and*
4. *Is there is a commitment to the fair treatment of student-athletes, particularly in their academic role as students.*

The review that follows includes observations, and, when deemed necessary, recommendations for changes or enhancements. This review will be forwarded to the Provost, the Director of Athletics, the Director of University College Academic Advising and the Coordinator of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services.

INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS INTERVIEWED:

- Coordinator of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services;
- Graduate Assistant Office of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services;
- Assistant Director of Athletics / Compliance;
- Student-Athlete Advisory Committee;
- Head Coaches;
- Senior Woman Administrator;
- Director of Office of Admissions and Financial Aid;
- Director of Office of Records and Registration;
- Liaison to College of Arts and Humanities;
- Liaison to College of Math and Science;
- Liaison to College of Education.

DOCUMENTS EXAMINED:

- Annual Student-Athlete Academic Performance Reports;
- Graduation Rates Reports;
- Graduation Success Rates Reports;
- Analysis of Graduation Rates;
- Freshman Standardized Test Score Comparisons;
- NCAA APR Reports;
- APR Academic Improvement Plans;
- Class Absence Policy;
- Class Absence Survey;
- Class Progress Monitoring Forms;
- Tutor Request Forms;
- Fisher Fellows program materials;
- Student-Athlete Handbook;
- Student-Athlete Orientation Program Agenda;
- University's New Student Orientation Program Materials;
- Student-Athlete Eligibility Forms;
- UALR NCAA Self-Study Report.

REVIEW

QUESTION # 1:

Are adequate academic support services available to student-athletes?

UALR is committed to a mandatory academic advising system for undergraduate students. This ensures that all student-athletes are either advised by the University College academic advisor who serves as the Coordinator of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services (hereafter referenced as SASS) or by an advisor in their major department each semester. In the later case, the coordinator of SASS is required to monitor junior and senior student-athletes advised outside the office of SASS.

The position of Coordinator of SASS jointly reports to the Division Chief and Director of Academic Advising for the entire institution, as well as the Director of Athletics. What this joint-reporting means is that the Coordinator of SASS, has full and direct access to the most current, and best information concerning advisement, freshmen course placement, testing (CLEP, DEP, etc.), transfer policies, orientation, and university support services available at UALR via information shared in required Academic Advising staff meetings, workshops, and internal communications (email and memoranda). The academic advising and coordinator of all student-athlete support services is uniquely positioned to know of rule changes affecting the advisement and

student services available to student-athletes long before those changes go into effect. This is one of the great strengths of UALR's student-athlete advising office.

The UALR BANNER system places an advising flag (AV) on each student's record which prevents registration, until an authorized advisor sets the flag. The Office of Records and Registration is responsible for the computer program that places the flag on the student record.

The SASS Coordinator is also trained to utilize on behalf of student-athletes the most up-to-date advising technologies available to academic advisors at UALR. In 2002, UALR's Office of Admissions and Financial Aid and the Office of Records and Registration began document imaging: entering student admissions application materials, ACT/SAT and/or Accuplacer Test scores, hardcopies of high school, transfer, and/or international transcripts, and university to student correspondence, so that 2002-to the present academic advisors have access electronically to the entirety of a student's file materials. In 2004, UALR implemented the electronic degree audit system (CAPP, or Curriculum and (Degree) Program Planning system) that automatically interacts with a student's articulated transcript so that advisors may immediately view academic progress to completion of all requirements for a degree program at UALR. This new technology, again utilized daily in advisement by the SASS coordinator, enables advisors to more accurately pinpoint and track a student's completion of core, major, minor and elective requirements, evaluate potential discrepancies requiring "adjustment" paperwork used to substitute and/or waiver transfer courses for fulfillment of UALR degree program requirements, identify potential degree program choices for student's using the "What-If I declared a major or minor" functionality of the CAPP system, and provide an always up-to-date snapshot of a student's fulfilled and remaining degree requirements at any given time.

The review committee found that on a daily basis the SASS Coordinator uses both UALR enterprise-level student records systems: BOSS (web-based) and BANNER (Oracle Database-based) systems, WebNow (Document Imaged Student Records Archive), CAPP (electronic degree audit system), as well as all of the university's required student forms as necessary (e.g. CAPP record adjustment requests for transfer courses, special exception/ waiver paperwork, transfer of Arkansas Private and/or Out-of-State Associate's degree forms, Undergraduate Advisement Forms, etc.). The review committee finds the coordinator's knowledge and utilization of academic advisement technology, policies, and procedures is excellent in comparison with that of other academic advisors at UALR.

Student-athletes also benefit from Coordinator's years of experience at UALR and his familiarity with all student support resources on-campus as well as the professional and personal relationships that he's developed over time with key student services' resource personnel in the Offices of Records and Registration, Admissions & Financial Aid, Student Housing, Disability Resource Center, University College—Counseling and Career Placement Center, University College—Academic Advising, University College—Testing Services, Campus Life, Dean of Students, all of UALR's academic

college Dean's offices, as well as with chairs and faculty in individual academic departments across UALR. Thus, speaking in the sense of the qualifications of the personnel employed in SASS at UALR, the review committee finds them to be more than adequate.

In interviewing both student-athletes and coaches, the review committee found that their awareness of student-athlete support services at UALR was quite good. Both student-athletes and coaches were aware of where to go on campus to receive support in strengthening academic skills (University Writing Center, Speech Communication Lab, Math and Physics Support Center, Reading Lab) and students commented that they received the Office of Campus Life's *Solution Finder* publication during orientation sessions which provided them with a quick-and-easy reference on what office to contact at UALR to receive assistance and support with concerns ranging from accessing bus schedules to whom to contact for information about potential major and minor programs at UALR. Student-athletes indicated that they frequently accessed websites for detailed information on academic major and minor programs beyond the information provided in Orientation packets and/or the *UALR Undergraduate Catalog*. Some students stated that they would like campus websites to be updated more frequently, but most agreed that they received good information from online campus resources and academic program websites. All of the student-athletes interviewed by the committee were very positive about the level of student support that were currently receiving at UALR and confident that the academic advising that they received from the SASS Coordinator (when undeclared), from academic major departments (upon declaring majors), and the assistance that they received in scheduling and registering for courses was above-average (more than adequate).

Tutoring services are provided and funded for all S-A's experiencing difficulty in courses evidenced by faculty feedback on exams and assignments. Tutoring requests from S-A's are evaluated by an established process to ensure that the S-A's are attending classes, turning in assignments and doing everything that they are responsible for in the course(s). Tutoring interventions have been a very effective means of strengthening student-athlete academic performance.

The Graduate Assistant in the SASS office is charged with connecting student-athletes requesting tutoring with subject-specific tutors, and she reported that all student-athletes have been receiving tutoring from experienced tutors who must go through an application and interview process in order to work with student-athletes. While sometimes, according to the Graduate Assistant and some athletics coaches, it can be difficult to find tutors in academic subjects for which tutors were rarely requested, such as social sciences' areas. They stated that the SASS Coordinator works diligently to arrange tutoring in such situations by calling college dean's offices or academic faculty for assistance in locating appropriate tutoring staff. When asked by the review committee whether students ever had to drop classes because tutors for the subject in question could not be found, UALR coaches replied that this had only occurred in one or two specific instances that they could recall, and the problem in both situations was that the students waited until too late in the semester to request a tutor. The findings of the review

committee was that the SASS office works diligently with coaches and student-athletes to secure effective tutoring for those needing additional support in classes.

The SASS office houses a computer lab that is open and accessible to all student-athletes for study halls, writing papers, using required software (such as MS Office Suite), connecting to the Internet, and providing computer access at times when other campus computer labs may not be otherwise available to fulfill the needs of student-athletes with sometimes after-hours needs to use the lab due to games, practice, or training. Student-athletes interviewed indicated that they had all used the computer lab at some point in their academic careers and felt that the computers provided were adequately meeting their needs. Student-athletes also reported that they now had access when traveling to games off-campus or out-of-state to wireless technology on a bus specifically chartered for its wireless capability. The student-athletes were all very positive about this opportunity to utilize necessary computer access while away from campus.

Although every sport does not require students to attend a scheduled study hall while on campus, students identified as needing extra study time due to academic performance concerns or those students identified as “at-risk” were assigned mandatory study halls by coaches in conjunction with recommendations from the instructors of the student-athletes. Also, student-athletes reported that when participating in team travel, coaches required students to spend a designated amount of time in study, which varied from sport to sport. The review committee found that both the facilities and encouragement provided to student-athletes for the purpose of studying and/or completing course assignments was above adequate. While some student-athletes voiced the opinion that they would like the computer lab to be available twenty-four hours a day, most student-athletes stated that the lab was accessible when they needed it to be. The findings of the review committee are that campus computer facilities and area of wireless connectivity provide adequate support for the technology needs of student-athletes.

The review committee was impressed by the established policies and procedures for identifying and assisting “at-risk” student-athletes. From the time of first advisement with the SASS Coordinator, when students are evaluated for academic potential on the basis of high school and/or transfer transcripts, tests scores (ACT, SAT, and/or Accuplacer), and self-reported student information (e.g. anxiety levels concerning specific course requirements) to the close semester-by-semester monitoring of academic progress reports provided to coaches and SASS by individual course faculty, student-athletes are under close watch for indicators that more academic assistance is needed. Coaches also play an integral role in connecting student-athletes to either campus student services available to at-risk students, such as subject-specific labs, and tutors provided by the SASS office in conjunction with University-College—Academic Advising, or assigning student-athletes to subject-appropriate study groups with teammates, peer mentors, or non-student-athlete subject-specific majors taking classes with student-athletes. While the Coordinator and coaches both expressed further need for transcript and test score evaluation to occur earlier for student-athletes, such as during the recruiting process, the review committee found that the identification of potential “at-risk” student-athletes was far more adequate than the evaluation for “at-risk” non-student-athletes at

UALR. However, considering the time, effort and financial resources required to recruit qualified prospective student-athletes with the additional importance of establishing and maintaining acceptable NCAA Academic Progress Rates (APR), strong consideration should be given to a collaborative early assessment process. This must include coordination with the offices of Admissions and Financial Aid and Records and Registration to determine the admission status of entering freshman and transfer student-athletes.

Strengthening advising and early declaration of a major are one of the Chancellor's December 2007, Retention Summit items. This is especially important in terms of the overall retention of all UALR students.

Meetings between the Athletic Department, Assistant Athletic Director for Compliance, the Coordinator for Student-Athlete Academic Support Services and designated college personnel responsible for the development of degree plans in recent years have strengthened the highly collaborative nature of this process.

A mid-term grade for all developmental, 1,000 and 2,000 level courses is a proposed institutional policy. The commentary on the faculty senate motion is as follows: *“For many years research has shown that feedback and performance- particularly frequent and timely feedback- contributes significantly to student success. Reporting mid-term grades is a formal process that provides students with our evaluation of performance at a point in the semester when such information may increase the likelihood of their success”*. Source: Faculty Senate notes 4/18/2008.

Student-athletes are encouraged to be academically advised well in advance of registration. They are sent notices (email and postcards) by University College for undeclared students and departments. The Coordinator of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services sends via email, each coach a list of S-A's that have not been advised 2 weeks prior to the registration period. Coaches reinforce to their team members that early advising means early registration and the best course selection and in most cases conflict free practice schedules. If conflicts occur with practice schedules coaches put academics first and demonstrate flexibility. S-A's remarked in several interviews that they felt this was a great advantage to register early.

Recommendations:

- The institution should consider establishing a collaborative early assessment process to include the offices of Admissions and Financial Aid, Records and Registration and SASS to determine the admission status of entering freshman and transfer student-athletes during the recruitment process;
- Develop a list of student-athletes and their intended or declared major at the end of each academic year to be sent to college dean designate;
- A collaborative annual performance evaluation of the SASS Coordinator should be developed between University College Academic Advising and the Department of Athletics;

- The institution should consider adding another full-time advisor.

Conclusion:

Adequate academic support services are available to S-A's.

QUESTION #2:

Are student-athletes encouraged and assisted in reaching attainable academic goals of their own choosing?

In answering this question, the review committee looked at three specific areas of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services, namely:

- The Orientation(s) provided to student-athletes;
- Degree Program Information concerning the Requirements of Majors and/or Minors at UALR made accessible and/or provided to student-athletes during academic advisement; and
- Counseling and Career Planning Services accessible on-campus and/or directly provided to student-athletes via the Fisher Fellows Life Skills Program.

In addition to helpful information about academic majors and career planning that is provided in these three key areas, during the review committee's interviews with representatives of academic colleges and programs, it was discovered that many prospective student-athletes during the on-campus recruiting visit schedule appointments to speak with major college advisors about degree programs of interest long before they committed to attend UALR. These early, scheduled appointments with prospective major degree program colleges and/or advisors were viewed as indicative of a comprehensive commitment on the part of SASS and the Athletics Department to encourage and assist student-athletes in the informative choosing of an obtainable academic goal.

Two separate orientations are currently available to student-athletes at UALR, the general freshmen and/or transfer student orientations coordinated by the Office of Campus Life (formerly not mandatory, but becoming mandatory as of Summer 2008), and the specific student-athlete orientation mandated by the Athletics Department. While many student-athletes stated to the review committee that they were unable to attend the general campus orientations due to their not being on campus until early August (most general orientations occur May-July), those student-athletes who were able to attend the general orientation felt that they were a helpful introduction to the campus, providing specific degree program information, a campus tour, information about student organizations, clubs, and Greek Life, as well as providing extremely helpful resources such as the *UALR Undergraduate Catalog*, *Campus Solution Finder*, *Campus Life Planner (day planner with academic dates)*, and a myriad of informational brochures. Students who were able to attend the general orientation sessions particularly enjoyed the opportunity to take a campus tour and find their classrooms before the beginning of the semester. While students who attended both orientations couldn't quite remember the differences in

information provided by each, students seemed to believe that the information provided in the general orientation was helpful, particularly in exposing them to information about potential major degree programs. In the general freshmen and transfer orientation sessions, there is an hour-long breakout session for academic colleges during which students who've expressed interest in the programs of a specific college are able to interact with the deans and faculty of that college, are provided with information on college majors and minors, and are able to ask specific questions about declaring majors, degree program requirements, resources, opportunities, and career planning options.

The Student-Athlete Orientation was attended by all but one student-athlete that the review committee interviewed. The student-athletes who did attend the orientation found it extremely helpful in orienting them to the policies, procedures, responsibilities, and resources available to them as student-athletes from the Athletics Department, but didn't remember receiving much in the way of major degree program information being shared during this orientation.

During the Student-Athlete specific orientation, students do receive the same campus publication resources that students attending the general student orientations receive: *UALR Undergraduate Catalog*, *Campus Solution Finder*, *Campus Life Planner (day planner with academic dates)*, as well as the current edition of the Student-Athlete Handbook (revised 2006).

During a student-athlete's initial academic advising session with the SASS Coordinator, information concerning core curriculum requirements and general UALR graduation requirements and policies is discussed with student-athletes, and students are welcomed to ask questions about potential degree options, career planning, and interest-assessment opportunities (such as, taking the Myers-Brigg Personality Assessment Test). In subsequent advising appointments, students are intentionally guided towards the informed selection of academic majors reflecting their academic goals, aptitudes, and interests. At no point in this process, as evidenced through student-athlete and coaches' interviews, are students discouraged from pursuing a realistic academic goal, however, students who express interest in majors unsuitable to their academic aptitudes, say a student-athlete who wants to major in Math, but doesn't perform well in that subject, are counseled to bear in mind the rigors of degree requirements in that subject and are directed to seek further advice on the matter from faculty advisors in that area of interest.

The review committee specifically asked how students who are majoring in degree programs requiring internships, field work, or cooperative education hours which conflict with team travel, games, or practice/ training schedules are accommodated. A student-athlete who is currently majoring in Education, which requires so many clock hours in the classroom during the senior year, said that while arranging her schedule to accommodate these requirements is a bit challenging, that her instructors, advisor, and coaches had met and worked-out solutions to her scheduling difficulties. A later interview with a representative from the College of Education affirmed to the review committee that the College of Education is aware of the challenges its degrees pose to the schedules of student-athletes, and that the College advisor, coaches and student-athletes

work closely together to guarantee that reasonable and workable solutions are found to ensure that student-athletes desiring degrees in such programs are encouraged and assisted in meeting their goals.

Student-athletes enjoy the same access to University Counseling and Career Planning services that all UALR students have as well, but student-athletes at UALR also have access to other resources to encourage and assist them in obtaining the skills and information that they need to achieve academic goals that other UALR students do not have, specifically the Fisher Fellows Life Skills Program. The review committee initially was not very familiar with the Fisher Fellows Life Skills Program because the workshops and presentations offered student-athletes through this program are not publicized to other students on the UALR campus because the Fisher Fellow Program is specifically designed for and geared to equipping student-athletes for success in athletics, academic, and life, in general. Fisher Fellows speakers and presenters understand the needs of UALR student-athletes because of their unique personal experiences as former student-athletes who are successful in various post-collegiate careers. Through Fisher Fellows, student-athletes have received training on topics ranging from Eating to Compete, How to manage personal finances, and How to Manage Time Wisely to How to Deal with Effectively with Stress, Set Goals to Succeed, Make Wise Career Choices, and Explore Opportunities in Community Service.

Research reveals that current S-A's have declared majors from thirty-eight different academic disciplines including:

INFORMATION SCIENCE	1	ECONOMICS	2
PSYCHOLOGY	6	INT'L. BUSINESS	7
HISTORY	5	NUTRITION	1
CONSTRUCTION MNGT.	1	MUSIC	1
GEN. BUSINESS	16	LIBERAL ARTS	2
HEALTH SCIENCE	30	NURSING	2
MASS COMMUNICATION	5	ELECTRICAL ENGR.	1
GENERAL STUDIES	1	PRE-MEDICINE	1
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	3	BIOCHEMISTRY	1
MECHANICAL ENGR.	1	SECONDARY PHYS. ED.	1
MATH	2	EARLY CHILDHOOD ED.	1
ACCOUNTING	6	AUDIO./SPEECH PATH	2
SPEECH COMM.	3	FRENCH	1
BUSINESS MNGT.	4	SPANISH	1
SPORTS MNGT.	1	MARKETING	1
SECONDARY ED.	1	ENGLISH	1
FINANCE	1	STUDIO ART	1
COMPUTER SCIENCE	1	INT'L. STUDIES	1
BIOLOGY	7	KINESIOLOGY	1
UNDECIDED	42		

Observation:

- A recommendation of the review committee is that more time in student-athlete orientations be devoted to providing information concerning degree program choices available to students. This recommendation has already been addressed by the SASS Coordinator and Athletics Department in that for the May and August 2008 Student-Athlete Orientation Sessions, academic colleges have been invited to provide “break-out” sessions so that students with interest in the majors offered by a specific college may gain more exposure to degree program information and possibilities.

Conclusion:

S-A’s have currently selected 38 different majors of their own choosing. S-A’s in the past review period have been successful in graduating from as many majors. Student-athletes are encouraged and assisted in reaching attainable academic goals of their own choosing.

QUESTION #3:

When it is determined that individual student-athletes have special academic needs, are these needs addressed?

This question has already been partially answered under question one with the discussion of the review committee’s impression of how “at-risk” students are identified and their needs addressed. An array of services are offered to all students who have special needs in order to support their academic success and persistence to graduation. The UALR Disability Resource Center collaborates with students, faculty, and staff to create usable, equitable, inclusive and sustainable learning environments. Disabilities are one of many aspects that add to the diversity of UALR’s campus community. Student-athletes with any type of disability are individually served and accommodated as are all other UALR students in similar situations. Faculty and staff collaborate with Disability Resource Center staff to provide classroom instructors and course design that breaks down barriers to a student, full participation and an accurate evaluation of their level of achievement. The Disability Resource Center provides support and assistance through adaptive technology resources, note-takers, translators (into ASL or Braille).

As previously discussed under question one, student-athletes enjoy access to tutors for the majority of subjects they enroll in, they have full access to the University Writing Center, Math Lab, Speech Communication Resource Lab, and Reading Lab in which they can receive more highly-focused assistance with subjects they might be experiencing academic difficulties with. Coaches work very closely with the faculty in identifying student-athletes who seem to be struggling in a subject or across the board, so that with early intervention, students may receive extra assistance when and as needed.

Short-term personal counseling is also available to students who may be experiencing a range of concerns from homesickness to test anxiety. The career counseling program available through the Office of Counseling and Career Planning Services can assist students move from indecisiveness to a decision about an occupational area.

After interviewing student-athletes, the SASS Coordinator, and coaches, the findings of the review committee was that we wished that intervention strategies like the ones employed in athletics were adopted across the University! The retention and success rate (graduation rate) of student-athletes is evidence that the special academic needs of this group of students are being well-met.

Recommendation:

- Improve early assessment of prospective student-athlete records to determine special needs;
- Explore new information “pathways” in established communication practices with faculty to obtain specific, detailed course requirements;
- Strengthen the program and strategies for “at-risk” student-athletes to include early assessment, intervention strategies and frequent monitoring of class progress.

Conclusion:

Yes, when it is determined that individual student-athletes have special academic needs, these needs are addressed.

QUESTION #4:

Is there a commitment to the fair treatment of student-athletes, particularly in their academic role as students?

The review committee was particularly sensitive to this issue because of our awareness of the challenges that student-athletes face which can differ in some respects from the challenges of other student populations, particularly those of traditional age students. Student-athletes more resemble non-traditional students who balance the demands of work, family, and academics in that both groups of students must carefully schedule classes to meet other responsibilities, both groups must manage time very wisely to succeed, and both groups require intensive advising to ensure that academic goals are met in a timely manner. Since UALR is primarily a non-traditional campus, academic advisors, faculty, and staff are generally aware of the challenges faced by students with responsibilities and demands beyond the classroom, and so are sensitive to scheduling extended office hours to accommodate the availability of student-athletes for meetings, as well as employing creative solutions such as receiving course assignments at more flexible times (say before a scheduled event requiring team travel), with prior arrangements made on the front-end. Coaches and student-athletes alike, when interviewed about such challenges by the review committee, expressed how emphatically the department of athletics stresses the importance of student-athletes introducing themselves to faculty on the first day of class in order to give their instructors schedules of dates that the students will be out-of-class, offering to work closely with their instructors to arrange for assignments to be turned-in ahead of deadlines, rather than expecting the special treatment of turning-in assignments late.

The findings of the review committee, among student-athletes that were interviewed, was that they were treated fairly in comparison with other students on most levels at UALR. The only concern that the student-athletes voiced was that the campus dining services consider offering after-hours and weekend service to student-athletes and other students who may be on campus at odd times.

Recommendations:

- Add a campus tour to the student-athlete orientation for those who are unable to attend the campus wide orientation.

Conclusion:

Yes, there is a commitment to the fair treatment of student athletes, particularly in their academic role as students.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

As a result of this review, we found that the University and the Department of Athletics competently, effectively, and efficiently provide the necessary and required academic support services that enable our student-athletes to have successful academic experiences, to graduate, and to lead productive lives after college. Procedures and policies are followed and student-athletes are provided the necessary information about the various services. The student-athletes interviewed were positive in their remarks about SASS and other university support services.

We also found that there has been an increase in the cooperation between the campus units that supervise support services (academic advising, registration, orientation, disabled student services, testing, academic support, etc.) and the Athletic Department's Student-Athlete Academic Support Service which has lead to better communication, enhancement of services, and beneficial partnerships. All of these enhancements have benefited our student-athletes and decreased their isolation from the activities of the student body at-large. In addition, checks and balances are in place in the advising/registration process that protects the integrity of the University and ensures that student-athletes will receive academic schedules that will meet their academic progress needs.

While there have been continuing improvements in our academic services, we believe that we can ensure that recent improvements will be maintained and that initiatives necessary to enhance the weaker areas of our programs and actions recommended in this review will be completed.

Submitted by:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The institution should consider establishing a collaborative early assessment process to include the offices of Admissions and Financial Aid, Records and Registration and SASS to determine the admission status of entering freshman and transfer student-athletes during the recruitment process;
2. Develop a list of student-athletes and their intended or declared major at the end of each academic year to be sent to college dean designate;
3. A collaborative annual performance evaluation of the SASS Coordinator should be developed between University College Academic Advising and the Department of Athletics;
4. Consider adding another full-time advisor.
5. Improve early assessment of prospective student-athlete records to determine special needs;
6. Explore new information “pathways” in established communication practices with faculty to obtain specific, detailed course requirements.
7. Strengthen the program and strategies for “at-risk” student-athletes to include early assessment, intervention strategies and frequent monitoring of class progress.
8. Add a campus tour to the student-athlete orientation for those who are unable to attend the campus wide orientation.