INTRODUCTION

In August 2009, the review committee for the Academic Support Services evaluation submitted a final report covering Items a through h in the Measurable Standard No. 8 as requested by the Athletic Department at Montana State University.

In November 2010, the committee was asked to reconvene to review additional Items i through o in the Measurable Standard No. 8. Fortunately all of the original committee members were still on campus, and the committee reconvened in December 2010. The committee decided to conduct another survey of student athletes and also to utilize a focus group to evaluate the additional items.

Below are the results of our investigation, and attached are summaries of the survey and focus group findings along with other pertinent documents used in our evaluation.

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LEARNING ASSESSMENTS

Student athletes who have been observed having academic difficulty are assessed to determine if their difficulty is associated with a specific learning disorder. Recommendation for this assessment can originate from a coach, professor, or member of the Academic Center staff. Student athletes who are identified as having difficulty are tested by an outside disability testing agency, and the results are provided to the Academic Center. Subsequently, the Academic Center assists the student athlete in finding the appropriate agencies on campus and arranging the appropriate accommodations.

Approximately 2-3 students are tested each year in the Athletic Department. However, it was noted that in reality, some students may choose not to disclose their difficulties to the Athletic Department.

Programs available to student athletes include Disability Re-entry & Veteran’s Services, Gallatin College Programs, Counseling & Psychological Services, and the CATS Program managed by the Athletic Department. Student athletes have also been referred to the TRiO program in the past, although the program is currently unavailable at MSU.

Student athletes who are struggling academically but do not have an identifiable learning disorder are automatically placed in the CATS Program, which accommodates 75-80 students per year including those with disabilities.

Observations:

1. In a recent survey, all student athletes who participate indicated that they struggled academically at some point and at varying levels.
2. It was extremely encouraging to note, however, that 93% of the above student athletes indicated that they have identified and resolved their academic issues. This indicates that those student athletes have found some way to address and work out their problems.

3. The above mentioned survey questioned participants in an attempt to find out their sources of assistance for academic difficulty. Their top five choices were (in order of importance): Fellow students, professors/instructors, fellow student athletes, academic advisors and student athlete support staff.

4. Overall, 73% of the survey participants were satisfied with the academic assistance and/or accommodations they have received at MSU. However, approximately 75% or more participants indicated having never used specific services that they were asked about such as: Disability, Re-entry & Veteran’s Service, Counseling & Psychological Services, Gallatin College Programs and TRiO Student Support Services.

5. Significantly, when asked about seeking assistance with study skills outside of the HDPE 105 course, 83% of the participants in the survey indicated they never sought assistance with study skills.

6. Student athletes who recently participated in a focus group conducted by this committee felt that the Athletic Department does a “tremendous job assessing and helping student athletes who struggle academically.”

7. It was interesting to note that the participants in this focus group felt that student athletes were responsible for maintaining their academic eligibility. They also concurred that the Athletic Department is totally committed to keeping student athletes focused on academics.

8. It was also noted in the focus group discussion that very few student athletes self-identify themselves as having a learning disability. They also acknowledged that student athletes do not use the resources provided by Disability, Re-entry & Veteran’s Services largely because of the negative connotation associated with having a learning disability.

9. Lastly, the focus group participants indicated that the CATS program mentioned above in the introduction to this section was not well-known across the student athlete population.

Recommendations:

1. Based on comments brought forth in the focus group, the Athletic Department is to be commended for their efforts in assisting student athletes with disabilities, documented or otherwise. However, it appears that more should be done to inform student athletes about the importance of taking advantage of services that are available to them within the Athletic Department and across campus.
It may not be possible to erase the stigma that is associated with having a disability; but if all student athletes are encouraged to use everything available to them in order to be successful as a student, perhaps more student athletes who really need help will seek help.

2. Early in the student athletes’ tenure at MSU, it may be helpful for a professional in the disability services field to give a presentation on what learning disabilities mean, literally and symbolically, to help student athletes understand and deal with the difficulties associated with learning disabilities.

3. The CATS program should be examined and evaluated to see why some student athletes are not aware of the program, and if it would be appropriate for the CATS program to be offered to other student athletes (other than those who have been identified) who might want to take advantage of what the CATS program has to offer in support of academic success.

4. MSU’s Disability, Re-entry & Veteran’s Services personnel should be consulted to determine if there are opportunities for them to present their programs to student athletes in a positive fashion. Other appropriate campus services should be given this opportunity, likewise.

SUCCESS SKILLS

In the Athletic Department, success skills are taught in HDPE 105 – Life Skills for Student Athletes. This course is available to all freshmen student athletes. Some coaches do require their student athletes to take the course; however it is not mandatory. Students are introduced to the course during orientation sessions and at other times during the recruiting process.

The course is designed to introduce student athletes to psychological and educational theories and models associated with learning, self-management, personal and career development, stress, coping, and health. Through this course, student-athletes are assisted in identifying and addressing issues that pertain to learning and development among college students, as well as issues that are unique to student athletes.

Courses that address success skills are also taught in other programs and departments on campus, and student athletes are strongly encouraged to take advantage of these courses as well.

Observations:

1. Only 36% of student athletes who participated in a recent survey completed HDPE 105.

2. Approximately two-thirds of students who did complete the course rated its effectiveness and its ability to satisfy course objectives positively.

3. Approximately 41% of student athletes who participated in the survey indicated they were not informed about the course.
4. Only 2% of the student athletes who participated in the survey indicated that they did not take the course, but would have liked to have taken it.

5. Many student athletes who participated in the survey indicated that the course helped them the most with time management and study skills; but some also felt that the area of study habits was underdeveloped and that the course was unnecessary.

6. Student athletes who participated in a recent focus group indicated that little if any of the material covered in the course related to the MSU catalog course description.

7. Student athletes who participated in the focus group indicated that “real-life” material should be part of the course and had different expectations than what the course actually offered.

Recommendations:

1. The Athletic Department should consider reviewing the objectives of HDPE 105, which student athletes it is aiming to serve, as well as when and how they approach presenting the course to student athletes.

2. Based on comments of student athletes in the focus group, it may be beneficial for the coordinator of the HDPE 105 course to consider having an upper division student athlete co-teach the class or speak to the class about their undergraduate experience as a student athlete to give new freshmen and transfer students an idea of what lies ahead for them academically as a student athlete.

3. Also based on the focus group comments, student athletes want to have more information about “life after eligibility” as an undergraduate, as some student athletes do not participate in their sport during their entire undergraduate career.

STUDY HALL

Study tables are offered to all student athletes, but are required for student-athletes in the CATS Program and student-athletes in their first term at MSU. Study tables are managed by the staff of the Athletic Academic Center and are divided into two different tables. One table is for football student athletes only and one table is for all other student athletes. The Athletic Academic Center hires monitors, manages attendance and enforces missed study tables.

Observations:

1. Student athletes expressed that study tables were beneficial in that they forced students to block out or schedule their time better. Although accounts varied, student athletes who participated in study tables recalled being at the tables for approximately 5 to 10 hours per week.

2. Student athletes also reported that they felt the student tables were very useful when they were able to be tutored or work in study groups together. Student athletes in the
focus group felt very strongly that having tutors available during the study tables were very efficient and beneficial.

3. While the idea is good in concept, a majority of students in the focus group felt that the study tables frequently turned into a social event, with student athletes checking email, accessing Facebook, and visiting with each other. Student athletes not involved in social interactions were directly affected by conversations happening in the environment. Approximately 74% of student athletes responding to the survey did not feel that study tables should be required for all sports and/or every academic classification such as sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

4. When queried about study tables provided by the Athletic Department, 26% of student athletes surveyed reported that they would attend an organized study table. Fifty six percent of the student athletes reported that they would not attend a non-mandatory study table while 17.5% responded that they were unsure if they would attend a study table that was not mandatory.

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being “extremely effective,” the average response of student athletes was 5.77. Approximately 60% of the student athletes surveyed felt that the structure and environment of the study tables were conducive to studying. Thirty-two percent of students disagreed with this sentiment, and 10.5% of students were unsure if the current environment and personnel associated with the study tables were conducive to effective studying.

Recommendations:

1. The Athletic Department should give more weight to and enforce study table participation more diligently. Monitors should be provided at each session and should be given more authority to maintain an “academic” environment at the study tables. Instead of simply being able to sign into a study table, student athletes should be required to stay and work at the study tables for a designated period of time.

2. The culture surrounding the study tables should be altered. As many student athletes reported, a number of students felt that it was acceptable to use the allotted study time for recreational activities on the computer or for socializing. Coaches and other Athletic Department personnel should be instrumental in expressing their expectations for study tables and assisting with enforcement.

3. Student athletes spoke to the benefit of having tutors in attendance. This committee recommends providing multiple tutors for different subjects, either at different tables or during different nights for the courses that student athletes report encountering the most difficulty with. This may also be an opportunity for older student athletes who have successfully navigated particularly challenging courses to tutor and promote cross-sport mentorships.
MENTORING

The student athlete mentoring program was established in 2007 following the findings of an Athletic Department review. This review identified challenges that student athletes were facing on the MSU campus that could, in part, be remedied through role models and positive relationships. A mentoring program was designed to assist new student athletes, especially minorities and those originating from out of state. The mentorship relationship was intended to forge key relationships between faculty and staff of the university and student athletes at the collegiate level.

The current program is a yearlong program and includes topical monthly meetings. Student athletes are joined by their mentors to listen and discuss relevant first year and student athlete issues. Some issues presented in the past have been cultural adaptation, personal finance, classroom communication, community service, and time management.

Outside of the scheduled monthly meetings, mentors and mentees are encouraged to meet throughout the year to discuss a number of topics. Mentors are recruited in the spring and trained during the fall of each year in a brief session. Mentors generally have 1-4 mentees during the year.

Observations:

1. There appears to be a disconnect regarding individuals on campus who are aware of the existence of the mentoring program. While some faculty have been contacted a number of times, other staff members do not recall ever being contacted.

2. Based on the recent survey, the degree of satisfaction with the program varies greatly for student athletes. Of 30 respondents, 10% felt the program was “not effective at all,” while 20% of respondents felt the program was “extremely effective.” Other categories received ratings from 1 to 10%.

3. Mentors in the past have overwhelmingly responded in the affirmative that they would like to participate in the program again. In surveys conducted by the Athletic Department, student athletes have suggested future topics and improvements to the program, indicating a sense of ownership and support for the program from faculty and staff.

4. In interviewing previous mentors, some have claimed that they were not required to attend the training session provided at the beginning of the fall. They were also not provided with materials to help support or guide them outside of the training session. Mentors suggested that the program was strong but that communication could be more proactive.

5. Some mentors and mentees reported that it was often difficult to get together for the monthly meetings and other outside meetings due to busy schedules for both participants.
6. Some sports have difficult practice schedules to work around, which result in mentees not being able to meet with their mentors as frequently as they would like. In the survey, several mentees also reported only meeting with their mentor once.

7. When asked if the mentoring program should be limited to first year students, 40% of student athletes replied “No.” Only 26% of the respondents replied in the affirmative, while 34% were unsure. Similar responses were received to the question of whether or not it should be expanded to include all sports and/or activities, with approximately one third of respondents answering “yes,” “no,” and “unsure,” respectively. In the focus group, several participants felt that mentoring would be more beneficial after the first year.

Recommendations:

1. Passive communication tools such as email and press releases are the primarily vehicles of communication publicizing the mentoring program and soliciting mentors. While time consuming, it may be a worthwhile investment for the Athletic Department or former mentees to utilize more far-reaching communication tools such as a Monday Morning Memo or even a brief video to better communicate the benefits of the mentoring program. It may also be helpful to more actively solicit mentors from Bozeman and its surrounding communities.

2. To address observations two and four above, more formalized training and regular communication should be provided for mentors. In order to participate effectively, mentors should be mandated to attend a more comprehensive training, and they should be provided with regular updates in order to better control the mentoring experience. The mentoring relationship would benefit greatly if mentors understood what stresses were happening in the mentee’s sport at certain times, and important issues that student athletes might be dealing with at key times during the academic year.

3. This program must be embraced by the entire campus, especially coaches and trainers, in order for it to be successful. More care should be taken when creating events and times for mentees and mentors to connect. Coaches and trainers should work with the mentoring coordinator to approve dates in the semester that will work for all sports. Mentors should also be clear about the scheduled times they are required to meet with their mentees as well as what the expectations are for meetings outside of the scheduled times.

4. Based on student athlete feedback gathered by the committee, we feel that the Athletic Department should consider expanding the scope of the program to all sports and beyond the first year in college.

FIRST YEAR/TRANSFER ORIENTATION

All student athletes are required to attend a session of MSU Orientation which is required for all incoming students. Orientation is two and a half days long and is offered at four times before the fall semester begins. Orientation is also offered before the spring semester begins, and it is
shorter and only offered once. Additionally, the Athletic Department hosts an orientation for any student athlete in the summer bridge program.

Observations:

1. In speaking with the athletic staff, it is articulated that they feel it is important and required that student athletes participate in the larger and comprehensive MSU Orientation provided for all students in the University.

2. Of the 92 student athletes who participated in the recent survey, 78% reported entering MSU as a first-time student and attending both the MSU Orientation and the athletics orientation. Three percent reported being first year students and only attending the athletics orientation, while 2% reported being transfer students and attending both orientations. Ten students or 11% of the respondents reported not attending any orientation. It is not clear if these students are limited to one sport or one classification, such as transfer versus first-time students.

3. On a scale from one to ten, with ten being extremely effective, the students rated the effectiveness of the orientation program(s) with a mean score of 6.70. The mode was 7.

4. Students entering MSU in the summer, such as transfer students or early admits, have the opportunity to attend a one hour orientation, presented by the Orientation Office and University Studies. These sessions are held on the afternoon of the first day of classes at the beginning of each six week session.

5. Overall, students felt that they gained information from both orientations. Some of the comments were as follows:
   a. “I just thought it was nice to be told about the different things that were available [sic] to us to help us get through college successfully”
   b. “…learning the campus layout, meeting the athletic and department academic advisors… help with registering for classes.”
   c. “The aspects of helping to pick classes not only for my major, but also recommendations of core classes was very helpful”
   d. “It helped me to become comfortable with the lifestyle of a student athlete and helped me adjust to college life as a whole.”
   e. “I enjoyed talking to other student athletes about what being a student athlete is like on campus and academically [sic]. I also enjoyed talking to students who were currently enrolled [sic] in my area of study to get some insight on what was to come in the way of classes and experiences on campus.”

6. The student athletes felt there were a number of things lacking in the orientation program(s). Some of the comments were as follows:
   a. “I thought there was a lack of letting students know the programs that were available on campus, such as the writing center.”
   b. “Needs more interaction with the other students because that is very important.”
   c. “It was two long and there wasn’t [sic] enough fun activities. It was two pretty boring days.”
d. “Needed more in depth exploration of departments of a student's desired major.”
e. “I didn't know where anything was in the Fieldhouse when it came time to practice.”
f. “It is not clear what you need to prioritize in your agenda in order to accomplish your goals as a student and as an adult.”

Recommendations:

1. The Athletic Department should continue to require the standard MSU Orientation in addition to the student athlete orientation. Comments appear to indicate that students are getting good information from both orientations which are applicable to their lives as students and athletes.

2. Overall, it appears that a vast majority of first-year student athletes (78%) are attending both orientations, which should be given due recognition. However, the 10% of students who are not attending any sort of orientation is of some concern. This committee recommends that the Athletic Department employ methods to ensure their student athletes are attending both sessions. The Athletic Department should communicate appropriately with coaches, and in turn, with student athletes, the importance of making time for their training schedules and for attending Orientation. In student commentary, it is also clear that students appreciate being mentored or taught how to be a student athlete by older students or coaches. This component should be utilized in student athlete orientation for all sports.

3. Outliers exist in the levels of satisfaction with the current Orientation program(s), which indicate that better quality control and standardization should be implemented in the experience of each student athlete regardless of standing or sport. Surveys or focus groups centering on the Orientation experience for student athletes may prove beneficial in determining methods of enhancing the student athlete experience.

4. This committee recommends that summer orientation be expanded into either a different format or extended time. It may also be beneficial to have summer orientation scheduled the evening before the first day of classes. Student athletes may also benefit from a format other than the lecture format used for summer orientation.

5. While a number of positive comments were made about both orientations, many of the comments about what could be improved are similar to the comments made by the general student population regarding the standard orientation. Student athletes and the general student population report that the days are so packed with information that the sessions become boring and “easy to tune out.” With that in mind, it may be practical to incorporate more spirit or team building activities during both student athlete and overall orientation. It is important to consider students’ attention spans as well as their perspectives. Restructuring the orientations could further engage students, increase enthusiasm about their choice of school, and build long-lasting bonds during the crucial pre-entry and entry phases of their experience.
**POST ELIGIBILITY PROGRAMS**

Post eligibility programs are available to any student athlete who meets the criteria shown on the Post Eligibility Scholarship Application attached to this report. Basic criteria are that the student athlete have a cumulative GPA of 2.5; their GPA must be at least 2.0 for the semester prior to receiving a post eligibility scholarship; they must be enrolled in at least 12 credit hours during the award period; repeat courses are not paid for; the scholarship only applies to undergraduate courses; the student athlete must take HDPE 305 – Leadership for Student Athletes; and student athletes may be assigned work responsibilities by the Athletic Department.

HDPE 305 is an upper level elective course that emphasizes leadership development and transitional issues, including career development, as student athletes prepare for life after their collegiate career. It is also open to any junior or senior level student athlete.

During the academic year 2010-2011, fourteen student athletes are participating in the post eligibility program on full or partial scholarships.

Observations:

1. The Athletic Department provided the committee with the course evaluation from HDPE 305 from Spring 2010, and based on eight criteria, the course was highly rated (between 3.71 and 4.00). Some of the criteria were: master of subject matter, organization of course, stimulation of interest, impartiality on grades and overall effectiveness. Seven student athletes participated in the evaluation of the course. (A copy of the evaluation is attached to this report.)

2. Generally speaking, student athletes in the recent focus group were aware of the existence of the 5th year scholarships, but they seemed to be uncertain about the requirements, how to apply and other aspects of the post eligibility program.

3. The committee feels this is an excellent opportunity for student athletes who are on the five-year track to continue their scholarship benefits, and scholarship criteria appear to be fair.

4. Information gleaned at the focus group indicates that there may be some disparities across the sports, and some student athletes did not feel comfortable talking about scholarships.

Recommendations:

1. Based on the information that surfaced from the focus group, the committee feels that the Athletic Department should make a concerted effort to explain post eligibility programs that are available to student athletes at a more salient time in their college career, perhaps in their junior year.

2. Since the committee did not include any questions in the survey related to post eligibility programs, suggestions over and above what emerged from the focus group cannot be offered at this time. We recommend that the post eligibility program be
reviewed more thoroughly by the next committee charged with evaluating the items in Measurable Standard No. 8.

ANY OTHER RELEVANT SERVICE PROVIDED TO STUDENT ATHLETES

There were no additional relevant services identified in the Athletic Department that the committee could evaluate at this time.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS REPORT:

APPENDIX I - FOCUS GROUP REPORT

APPENDIX II - STUDENT ATHLETE SUPPORT SERVICES SURVEY – FEBRUARY 2011

APPENDIX III - 5TH YEAR POST ELIGIBILITY SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION & CRITERIA

APPENDIX IV - INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION – HDPE 305 – SPRING 2011
APPENDIX I

FINAL REPORT: FOCUS GROUP SESSION

Athletic Academic Review Committee

February 15, 2011

OVERVIEW & METHODOLOGY

As part of the decennial NCAA accreditation process, the Athletic Department at Montana State University (MSU) requested that the AARC, formed in the Summer of 2009, reconvene to review seven items from the Measurable Standard No. 8 that were initially not required by the Athletic Department in 2009. To this end, two members of the original and current athletic review committee, Jamie Thornton and Scott Myers, facilitated a single focus group session with eight student athletes on February 1, 2011. The session started at 6 pm and lasted for 93 minutes. The session was audio recorded, and detailed notes were taken by both facilitators. A total of eight student athletes participated in the focus group sessions.

These eight students were recruited via an email/internet solicitation process. First, an email was sent to head coaches across all scholarship sports at MSU. The email asked the coaches to send back the names of student athletes who would be willing to participate in the focus group study. Second, an email was sent to an athletics advisor to provide the names of 5th year student athletes who would be willing to participate in the focus group study. Third, the student athletes whose names were forwarded were then contacted about their interest and instructed to visit a Doodle® Easy Scheduling calendar link to assess their availability on specific days and times. Based on the responses, February 1, 2011 at 6 pm was chosen as the date and time for the focus group session. This group of eight student athletes was not meant to be representative of the entire population of student athletes at MSU.
Further, several head coaches did not respond to the initial email solicitation, and some of the contact information for student athletes was either inaccurate or no longer valid.

This focus group was completely interactional, where communication was prompted by a question from the facilitators, and student athletes then directed their responses to the facilitators and also among each other. From there, the facilitators encouraged additional interaction among the participants, including asking further questions and referencing other topics. This report is organized by the five prompts and topics covered in the focus group session, followed by a summary of the main themes revealed by the student athletes’ responses. (Please see the Appendix for the exact wording of the five prompts.) All identifying information has been removed and care was taken to make sure no responses in this report could be connected to an individual student athlete at MSU. The focus group participants: (a) represented a mix of eligible and post-eligible student athletes, (b) included three male and five female student athletes, and (c) spanned eight male and female sports.

**Question #1 [Study Tables]**

The first prompt centered on study halls and study tables, which are offered to all student athletes, but required for student athletes in the CATS Program and student athletes in their first term at MSU. The study tables are divided into two different groups—those for football and those for all other sports. There was widespread agreement that study tables are a great idea, especially that they require student athletes to “block” out specific times each week to devote to studying. On average, the participants recounted that they were required to spend about 5 to 10 hours per week at study tables, when study tables were required for them individually. The other dominant theme was that the participants viewed study tables as an effective approach to study for and be tutored in specific subjects. For example, one participant recounted that many student athletes would gather together to study math, especially if a math tutor or graduate student was one of the monitors for the study table session.
However, there was also nearly unanimous agreement that the study tables often turned into a social event, where the student athletes would mainly talk or use their computers to email or update their Facebook page. Some participants even recounted that this social atmosphere of the study tables made it nearly impossible to study at all. Still, the student athletes do generally support the idea of study tables, but had some pointed suggestions including: (a) give monitors more authority to maintain and enforce a more “academic” environment surrounding the study tables; (b) work to change the culture and perception of study tables as being a social event; (c) do not allow student athletes to simply sign in and then leave the study tables, i.e., enforce attendance; and (d) have tables organized by specific academic topics (e.g., one for math; one for history) and then make tutors or graduate students from these disciplines available for assistance.

**Question #2 [Learning Assessments]**

With this prompt we hoped to gain insights about how effectively the Athletic Department identifies and assists student athletes who are struggling academically. We also asked the participants about the culture and perceptions surrounding the term “learning disability,” given that so few student athletes use MSU’s Disability Services programs.

The participants were unanimous and adamant in their conviction that the Athletic Department does a tremendous job assessing and helping fellow student athletes who struggle academically. Several themes emerged including: (a) the Athletic Department has numerous and systematic tools, programs, and policies to track the academic lives of student athletes; (b) the Athletic Department is both earnest and committed to the “academic” part of the word “student athlete;” and (c) the fault for not doing well in school or losing one’s eligibility lies entirely with the student athlete and not the Athletic Department; that is, no student athlete really “falls through the cracks.” Instead, the participants concluded that the student athlete just did not want to put in the effort to do well in school. Overall, the participants reported on a mature and well-designed approach to assessing the academics of all student athletes.
regardless of sport. Any issues mentioned by the participants about the approach to learning assessment by the Athletic Department centered more on small tweaks to ongoing programs and practices, and less on wholesale changes or improvements. The biggest issue mentioned by the participants was that the CATS program is not well-known across the student athlete population.

One problem that does persist and, perhaps hampers the Athletic Department from fully engaging in learning assessment, is that student athletes largely regard the term “learning disability” as pejorative. For this reason, very few student athletes will self-identify themselves as having a possible learning disability or using the resources provided by the Disability Center at MSU. These perceptions and this culture exists largely because student athletes have “too much pride” and believe that such a diagnosis would carry with it a “stigma” attached to the individual student athletes. The focus group participants said that they know very little about learning disabilities, how to identify learning disabilities among their fellow student athletes, and what to do if they think a student athlete is struggling with a learning disability. They were in full agreement that all student athletes should be provided with an information session on learning disabilities, or have MSU’s Disability Services visit with each team.

**QUESTION #3 [LIFE SKILLS VIA HDPE 105]**

In this topic we attempted to get the participants to talk about HDPE 105, Life Skills for Student Athletes, which is a suggested course for first-year or transfer students. The course is designed to introduce student athletes to learning and academic issues at the college-level, especially issues involving time management.

Only two participants remembered taking this course. They mentioned that the course mostly consisted of keeping a journal and learning how to use a day planner. Little if any of the material covered the course’s description in the MSU Catalog (which was read aloud to the eight student athletes): “This course is designed to introduce student athletes to psychological and educational
theories and models associated with learning, self-management, personal and career development, and stress, coping and health. Through this course, student athletes will identify and address issues that pertain to learning and development among college students and issues that are unique to you as a student athlete.” As with the study tables, all participants agreed that HDPE 105 could be an important and vital resource for new student athletes. However, they all agreed that changes would need to be made in the delivery of the course.

One change to HDPE 105 that was suggested, and endorsed by the other participants, was to have older and past MSU student athletes come to class and discuss their experiences as student athletes and then as non-student athletes after graduating from MSU. Many of the participants did not believe that first-year student athletes had a true understanding of life after sports. If the course is designed to teach life skills, the student athletes thought that some real-life material should be part of the course.

As we talked about the concept of “life skills,” several participants brought up the topic of life after eligibility and being an undergraduate student. These student athletes felt somewhat “abandoned” by their coaches and team, the Athletic Department, and MSU. A couple of themes dominated this discussion including: (a) that they could be a resource or asset for their former team and teammates, but are not asked to be; (b) that more information about post-graduate scholarships should be provided (see below); and (c) that they would like more information and guidance about employment and occupations after (original emphasis) sports. This last theme really struck a chord with most of the participants. They felt that some form of role-modeling was important to show student athletes the opportunities that await them in the labor market or even in graduate-level programs.


**Question #4 [General Academic Success Skills]**

This part of the session focused on what programs and practices outside of the Athletic Department should be incorporated into the formal academic resources and program offered by the Athletic Department. We also prompted the participants to think of an ideal academic-related program or resource not yet offered by the Athletic Department that would go far in helping student athletes.

The major theme that emerged was that all participants believed that the Athletic Department had plenty and successful academic programs to help student athletes (see Question #2 responses). The suggestions to this prompt were generally a continuation of the last part of the conversation surrounding Question #3. That is, life after being a student athlete. The participants were adamant that some type of career or occupational counseling or program would be immensely beneficial to all MSU student athletes, especially given that professional sports is not an option for nearly all MSU student athletes. They were also adamant that career counseling should begin during the student athletes’ freshman or transfer year. The participants indicated that they wanted programs that “bridged the gap between being an undergraduate student and the next step,” and “programs that emphasized more of the ‘student’ part of ‘student athlete.’” Several participants spoke fondly of their experiences in the mentoring program during their freshman year; and they did not know if it still existed. They suggested that some type of mentoring program would be helpful during their junior and senior years, also.

**Question #5 [Post Eligibility]**

The session concluded with a specific topic—post-eligibility or 5th-year scholarships. We wanted to assess how much student athletes knew about these opportunities. In general, the participants were made fully aware of the 5th-year scholarships by the Athletic Department, and most were informed about them during their first year or transfer year at MSU. Yet, most participants also mentioned that while they knew about the existence of the scholarships, they knew little about the details of the
scholarships, such as: how to apply, what the requirements were, and whether or not they could be combined with other scholarships or fellowships. However, when they began to seek information about these scholarships the participants mentioned that the Athletic Department was extremely helpful.

The discussion of these 5th-year scholarships ended quickly, and the conversation turned to two additional topics. First, we returned to the idea of life as a post-eligible student athlete, as some participants thought that more support could be given to 5th-year student athletes. Second, all participants agreed that they felt conversations about scholarships and scholarship money were off-limits, especially if these conversations were about disparities across the sports. One participant mentioned that he or she was “frustrated by scholarship divisions, but felt no right to talk about it.” Many participants thought that greater transparency regarding scholarships was needed, and that student athletes should be much more informed about their own scholarship terms and standards.
FOCUS GROUP APPENDIX

QUESTION #1 SPOKEN PROMPT: “Let’s first talk about study halls and study tables. As you may know already, study tables are offered to all student athletes, but required for student athletes in the CATS Program and student athletes in their first term at MSU. The CATS program is for those students who struggle academically, and may have been identified with a learning disability. Study tables are managed by the staff of the Athletic Academic Center and are divided into two different tables. One table is for football student athletes only, and one table is for all other student athletes. The Athletic Academic Center hires monitors, manages attendance, and enforces missed study tables. Could you please discuss your own experiences with study tables and the experiences of others that you have heard directly from them?” [Follow up prompt if necessary, straight from survey: “Do you feel that the structure of the study tables and the personnel administering the study tables create and maintain an environment for student athletes that is conducive to effective studying?”]

QUESTION #2 SPOKEN PROMPT: “As we mentioned in the first topic, after their first term at MSU, study hall tables are still required for student athletes who are in the CATS Program and those student athletes who have been tested by the Disability Services office. This question has two parts: First, how successfully does the Athletic Department identify and attend to student athletes who are struggling academically? How often and why do some students who need additional help escape identification? Second, historically student athletes are very reluctant to use the testing and diagnostic services of the Disability Services offices. Could you please speak to several reasons why this may occur and how these reasons could be addressed?”

QUESTION #3 SPOKEN PROMPT: “Let’s stay on the topic of academics by discussing HDPE 105. This course is designed to introduce student athletes to psychological and educational theories and models associated with learning, self-management, personal and career development, and stress, coping, and health. Through this course, student athletes are supposed to identify and address issues that pertain to learning and development among college students, and issues that are unique to student athletes. We would like to get a sense of how well HDPE 105 prepares students for, and fits with academic life at MSU. That is, is what you learn in HDPE 105 directly useful, applicable and relevant to your day-to-day academic life in your major, courses and coursework?”

QUESTION #4 SPOKEN PROMPT: “There are a number of academic sources and resources outside of the Athletic Department that are designed to help you navigate the academic side of MSU and that of being a student athlete. Which ones of these should become a formal program or resource incorporated and offered by the Athletic Department? Another way to think of this is imagine the academic struggles that are common to MSU student athletes. What would your ideal program look like?

QUESTION #5 [Post eligibility]: OK, this is our last topic. One program that is fairly new to MSU is the post eligibility scholarship program. What do you know about these 5th Year scholarships? Especially
pertaining to their availability and the eligibility requirements? How much are they discussed among student athletes and around the Athletic Department?

CLOSING PROMPT: “Thank you for your time and participation. As stated earlier, your identity will remain anonymous, and all documentation from this focus group in no way can be connected to you personally. You also can obtain a full copy of the written report from this focus group session by contacting Scott Myers in the Department of Sociology.”