Student Perspectives of Student-Athlete Treatment in the Classroom

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Socio-Cultural - Other (College Sport) virtual asynchronous
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2020-253 Session: Student Athletes

It has been well documented that for collegiate student-athletes there is a disconnect between the role of being a student and the role of being an athlete (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007). One issue with balancing this dichotomy is how student-athletes are treated in the classroom with some student-athletes reporting faculty members and classmates treat them in a negative manner (Parsons, 2013; Simons et al., 2007). The variable treatment by faculty and peers may be tied to stereotypes about student-athletes. The term stereotype threat is described as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 797). Student-athletes face this threat in the form of the “dumb jock” stereotype that people believe about collegiate student-athletes (Harrison et al., 2009; Parsons, 2013; Simons et al., 2007). This stereotype exists across NCAA divisions and sport types (Feltz, Schneider, Hwang, & Skogsberg, 2013).

Very few studies have examined the perceptions non-student-athletes and the student-athletes themselves have of student-athlete treatment in the classroom. Only one recent study by Wininger and White (2015) has addressed this topic. The purpose of the current study is to expand on Wininger and White’s study and examine perceptions of student-athlete treatment in the classroom by both peers and instructors.

Sport Management students at six universities are being surveyed and represent each NCAA division (DI, DII, and DIII). Only surveys from two DII universities were finalized for this abstract. The complete data set will be available for the presentation. A total of N = 143 surveys were completed and data was manually inputted into SPSS. Of the 143 students who responded, 62.9% (n = 90) were male, 29.4% (n = 42) were female, and most students (n = 103) were White (72.0%). There were 109 (76.2%) non-student-athletes and 33 (23.1%) student-athletes. The majority of students were juniors (34.3%), or seniors (26.6%).

After conducting a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), a statistically significant difference in perceptions of faculty treatment based on students’ identification as a student-athlete or non-student-athlete, F (7, 132) = 4.808, p = .000; Wilk’s L = 0.797, partial η2 = .203 was found on two items: “The majority of faculty members give intercollegiate student-athletes better grades for doing less classwork than non-student athletes” (p = .000) and “The majority of faculty members grade intercollegiate student-athletes’ work more strictly than non-student-athletes” (p < .05).

Non-student-athletes (M = 2.44; SD = 1.00) perceived faculty to give athletes better grades than the student-athletes (M = 1.58; SD = .830) themselves did. Coincidentally, non-student-athletes (M = 2.26; SD = .955) also perceived faculty to grade athletes (M = 1.82; SD = 1.01) more strictly than themselves.

These findings indicate that non-student-athletes and student-athletes have differing views on how faculty treat students, especially in regard to grades. This has implications for all who work with student athletes including faculty, advisors, coaches, and administrators. Having a greater understanding of how students view student-athletes will allow all parties to better serve both student-athletes and the greater student body.