

MONMOUTH, IL 61462

The Integration of Academics and Athletics

A Report to the Associated Colleges of the
Midwest

Monmouth College

6/23/2009

This report emerges in the context of preparation for an ACM-sponsored workshop on Academics and Athletics at Coe College (upcoming, Fall 2009), and follows from a Monmouth workshop on the integration of academics and athletics on June 22, 2009, as well as elicited email correspondence from faculty, coaches, student athletes, admissions and alumni-relations administrators and others. It was prepared by Dean Jakoubek in consultation with Brenda Tooley, associate dean, and faculty colleagues.

The Integration of Academics and Athletics

Context

As a result of a change in the configuration of our physical education department and the arrival on campus of a new athletic director, Roger Haynes, Monmouth College has been engaged in intense and wide-ranging discussions about the integration of academics and athletics for the past two years. These discussions have involved administrators, faculty committees, the physical education and education faculty, and coaches. Many of the topics raised within ACM deans' discussions have also arisen in our internal conversations. And, of course, at the same time, the College has also been involved in discussions about changes within NCAA Division III and the possibility of an ACM athletic conference. "Integration" is a key word in the Monmouth strategic plan, and the goal of mindfully integrating athletics and academics is one critical aspect of our mission as a residential, liberal arts college. The questions ACM initiative leaders have posed for this pre-conference discussion connect well with our exploration of vision and values.

The Campus Workshop (June 22, 2009)

The campus workshop at Monmouth included representatives from faculty, student athletes, student affairs, and academic affairs. The total number of participants was not as large as we would have liked (nor was it, in this, representative of the interest on campus in the issue of the better integration of academics and athletics), and we are committed to providing opportunities for further discussion, including, perhaps, at a faculty fall conference workshop on the topic of athletics and academics.

Seven members of the Monmouth College community attended the workshop. One individual had several decades of coaching experience. Another has longed served as the NCAA Faculty Athletic Representative for Monmouth and is on the Faculty Senate. Both men and women were represented. Unfortunately, we had no coaches in attendance, only one student athlete, and no members of the Admissions Office; faculty representation was limited to members of the social sciences division (economics & business, accounting, education and sociology). In future, we intend to expand this initial conversation to include more members of the Monmouth College community. The Coe workshop will provide a valuable launching pad for continuing conversations at Monmouth.

And so, how was the relationship between academics and athletics at Monmouth characterized at this workshop? We quickly agreed that "it depends on who you ask." Some persons present saw a healthy balance; others thought athletics took priority over academics for at least some students (and more frequently for students within specific sports). Clearly, positive perceptions of balance and complementarities between athletics and academics were more likely to occur in a context of continuous, informative, well-structured communication between faculty and coaches. Equally clearly, we haven't achieved this level of communication except in an ad hoc way at Monmouth to date. A number of participants spoke about how easily one can resort to stereotypes (particularly of specific teams) in making judgments about the integration of academics and athletics and their relative priority

for our students. Helpfully, participants at the workshop were quick to cite specific examples of academic-athletic partnerships and the achievements of scholar athletes to confront blanket statements. One participant summarized the discussion by saying “no one sees [the relationship between academics and athletics] as horrible but we do see issues [that we think should be addressed].”

The keynotes emerging from the workshop were: Communication, Consistency and Comprehensive Integration.

- ▶ **Communication:** between coaches and faculty (as instructors and as academic advisors), between admissions representatives, faculty and coaches, and with alumni;
- ▶ **Consistency** of messages, practice, and procedures: what might we do to make our rules for and expectations of student athletes, and lines of communication between all parties, more uniform and transparent?
- ▶ **Comprehensive Integration:** developmental, cross-divisional, mutually respectful and continuously creative collaboration is our ultimate goal.

The Integration of Academics and Athletics: Issues We Need to Address

The transition from ‘student athlete’ to ‘young scholar’

- ▶ The transition from high school athlete to college student athlete does not happen by accident. Some students come to college solely for the purpose of continuing their athletic career for another four years. Helping this subset of the “student athlete” population develop “academic motivation and muscles” equal to their athletic equivalents requires intentional, focused and sustained effort on the part of faculty, coaches, academic advisors and peer mentors. Yet our mission (and our ethical obligation to the students we admit) requires such effort. For other student athletes, the transition can happen more easily, but it still requires attention.

Disaggregating the elements: varsity athletics, intramural sports, and physical education

- ▶ The conflation of and overlap between athletics and “physical education” contributes to a variety of problems. For example, if the Physical Education major is perceived to be (or is in fact) less rigorous than other majors, and if a number of athletes major in Physical Education, then problems with “student athletes” are compounded (both in terms of faculty members’ perceptions of student athletes, and of the actual disengagement from academics of some athletes). We are all still playing catch up here. The evolution of the field of Physical Education over the last two decades has led to many changes, including the creation of exercise science, pre-health-service, sport psychology, recreation and sports marketing programs, and other tracks and new fields of inquiry separate from the classical teacher-preparation programs that for many colleges initially gave rise to the creation of physical education departments and their majors, minors and certification programs.

Communication between coaches and faculty

- ▶ The transition from the coach-faculty model to the separation of faculty and coaching roles obviously and in many ways contributes to the lack of integration between academics and athletics, even on a residential liberal arts college campus. Faculty are far less likely than in the past to know the college's coaches and to appreciate the role of athletics. Coaches are less likely to have the academic credentials valued by faculty or any sort of routine contact with the academic program. Daily duties of the two groups have virtually nothing in common. The professionalism of almost all non-teaching roles within higher education is reflected in athletics.
- ▶ High performance standards for recruiting outstanding student athletes and winning games have become drivers for coaches in response to enrollment pressures and alumni expectations. At times, perceptions about expectations do not match reality (i.e., coaches and faculty may believe that coaching evaluation is based on win-loss and recruitment records, when, in fact, internal motivation on these fronts applies much more pressure than do external measures).
- ▶ The question of ends and means (and the related issues of mixed messages and special treatment) needs to be explored, the college's position(s) articulated and practices rationalized. If coaches require study tables for their team members, does this inculcate rule following (unreflective compliance based upon external authority and fear of punishment) or does it inculcate motivations and habits worthy of a liberal arts education (consensual compliance based upon understanding and agreement)? Does the rule-based nature of competitive athletics advance or hinder the principle-based goals of the liberal arts?

The Integration of Academics and Athletics: Possible Actions and New Practices

Mission, Vision, Values

- ▶ Expect and practice honesty in explaining the financial stake that a college has in athletics; focus on adapting programs in financially-viable ways over time. Similarly, be honest about how a college has evolved its athletic program: what decisions were made, by whom, for what reason. Perpetuate those practices that are aligned with current mission and values, not those from a previous time. Ensure that marketing of athletics (through coaches, admissions, alumni) accurately portrays the liberal arts mission and residential setting of the college.
- ▶ Ensure that statements of mission, vision and values for athletics are aligned with the mission, vision and values of the college.
- ▶ Develop a strong intramural program with a mission and program well-aligned with the College's goals as a residential, liberal arts college, connected to all other aspects of educating students for a *life-time* of meaningful, fulfilling, and creative work and leisure.

Communication between Faculty and Coaches

- ▶ Integrate orientation for new faculty and coaches, for example by holding some common sessions, having a single orientation that serves all new educators (faculty and others), involving coaches whenever possible in strategic planning processes, committee work and college events, etc.

- ▶ Draw on faculty leadership (through formal and informal structures) to ensure there is an ongoing dialog between faculty and coaches.
- ▶ Use common rules for all teams (i.e. amount of study table time, rules for alcohol use in season, etc) so that faculty know what is expected of student athletes. (This suggestion came from a student athlete who praised a coach for certain practices and recommended they be adopted by others.)
- ▶ Ensure robust safety nets for student athletes that heighten and reinforce collaboration between the advisor, the coach, and the student athlete.
- ▶ Ensure that coaches who teach are judged by the same standards of excellence as faculty in other departments.
- ▶ Seek and support individuals who combine teaching and coaching, whether by involving coaches in teaching/team-teaching courses that fit their expertise (e.g. team-teaching a course on school and sports with a faculty member from the education department) or by incorporating coaching duties into the work of a faculty member (e.g. a history faculty member serves as the assistant soccer coach, either for overload pay or as part of his/her annual duties).

Supporting Student Athletes as Scholars and Athletes

- ▶ Evaluate how well-aligned academics and athletics are by using assessment, including exploring what a student athlete has learned from classes and from sports.
- ▶ Coordinate programs that serve student athletes through the teaching and learning center, especially as part of student athletes' orientation to college.
- ▶ Foster dialog for student athletes and faculty and coaches who have questions or concerns. For example, student athletes should know they can approach the Student Athletic Council members if they think practices are excessive but they are afraid to speak to the coach.
- ▶ Develop mini-programs or workshops for parents of student athletes, introducing them to the academic expectations and academic-support resources of the College (thus reinforcing messages the students receive).

Student Leadership and Peer Mentoring

- ▶ Build robust peer-mentor programs for new and under-class student athletes. Team captains or representatives from the Student Athletic Committee can provide highly credible messages about the value of a liberal arts education, the relative importance of athletics compared to academic success, strategies for balancing academic study and participation in sports, and finding meaningful academic pursuits and adult mentors.
- ▶ Develop leadership seminars for student athletes or ensure that student athletic leaders participate in college-wide leadership programs that are active.

The Development of Academic Courses (and a possible thematic minor) focusing upon Athletics as a Subject of Inquiry

- ▶ Develop courses within academic programs that take athletics as the field of inquiry (sports economics, history of sport in America, competitive sport in the classical world, etc.)

- ▶ Create a thematic interdisciplinary minor centered on sport.
- ▶ Ensure that any Physical Education major represent the academic, intellectual values of the liberal arts (e.g. be inquiry-based); explore the range of options across the ACM colleges (kinesiology, sport science, etc.).
- ▶ Organize international trips that combine demonstration competition and international study for teams, in partnership between the coach and an academic department.
- ▶ Integrate pre-health-services profession programs and curricula with physical education courses and collaborative research.