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[Using the Value-Added Approach...](#)

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As professionals in the educational sport environment, we witness the value of the athletics experience every day. Utilizing sport to develop student-athletes as capable, resilient and self-confident people is something we engage in on a daily basis. However, sometimes we forget that constituents outside of our domain may not have the opportunity or the inclination to view and/or understand the personal development that takes place in an educational sports environment; especially if they have never participated in sports activities. We can't expect them to be intuitive or philosophical about the value of sports programs, especially when they are constantly bombarded with negative messages from the media about sport heroes' behavior such as steroid use, cheating and the like. We must prepare ourselves to do a better job in regularly communicating the value our sports program brings to the institution. Presenting value arguments only during the budgeting process to a small number of administrators doesn't convince skeptical faculty, administrators, alumni that there is a considerable return on the institution's significant investment in supporting the athletics program.

As a young administrator, I thought that marketing the value of our program didn't really matter as long as I had the support of the key people on campus. In fact, looking back at the times when we had a

powerful group of administrators and alumni supporting athletics, I didn't care about educating skeptics. I almost had a defiant mindset of "don't even think about challenging us". However, I soon learned that, not only do the "power players" change too often, but there are some very important benefits associated with defining and promoting the value of your athletics program to anyone and everyone involved.

The typical measures of "value-added" are different depending on the goals of each institution. Winning teams that bring recognition to their University create obvious value for schools. However, if winning is the only measure of value and the only thing we promote about our athletics program, what happens when the winning isn't there? There are many other value indicators that can and should be measured and promoted regularly. Some schools rely heavily on athletics to bolster admissions or to help reach goals focused on minority recruitment or gender balance. Other institutions depend on athletes to perform significant fund raising or community service projects. Athletes are often asked to embrace leadership roles on campus or are called upon to enhance relationships with alumni. In addition, the name and reputation of a coach may create a nationally visible, favorable image of the institution. All of these things add value and give more credibility to the athletics program as a part of the University. How well do athletics directors convey to outside constituents that athletes, coaches and the department's efforts at-large are adding much more value to the institution than the obvious?

There is a relatively simple process for incorporating a value-added approach to your administrative tool kit. First, identify which University goals can be affected, positively and negatively, by the athletics department. Then, design and produce the research needed to track the impact the athletics department has on reaching those goals. Such a commitment to always looking for new value indicators, collecting the appropriate data that demonstrates such value, and sharing that data inside and outside of your department, will create a host of benefits. For example, the following represents some benefits that can come from this value-added approach:

- **Graduation Rates and GPAs.** We all know that athletes as a group have better GPAs and graduation rates than non-athletes but we don't regularly communicate these performance results. When this data is shared with the faculty, the administration and alumni, we connect with the core value system of the academic institution.
- **Community Service.** I don't know of an athletic program that isn't committed to a broad range of community service projects. It is very impressive when the university community becomes aware of the breadth of efforts of athletics teams.
- **Enrollment Numbers and Diversity.** Data on the numbers of students recruited by the athletics programs and the diversity of the athlete population, especially at small enrollment institutions, often makes the point that athletics is responsible for a large percentage of new students and makes a major contribution to producing a diverse student population.
- **Branding.** Maintaining data on the number of times the name of the institution appears in the reporting of athletics contest results or other stories about athletics teams by the print and electronic media is a demonstration of the advertising or "branding" value of athletics.
- **Fundraising.** Offering free or discounted contest tickets to academic departments and arranging for the coach to greet donors and guests, is a simple way to contribute to University development efforts.

Once an administrator makes a commitment to data collection, such efforts often generate new questions, which in turn broadens an administrator's thinking and motivates reassessment or the

addition of new program goals and objectives. Examining such data may reveal other “non-traditional” ways that athletics can collaborate with on and off campus groups.

Sometimes, data demonstrates the need for improvement. Whenever a manager is secure and open enough to share both positive and negative data, applauding achievements but also pointing to areas where better performance is required, the university community will most likely respond with a higher level of respect for and confidence in the manager’s leadership.

Sharing facts and data also serves the function of debunking stereotypes and myths. There have been many instances when someone in a meeting has made a stereotypical remark about athletes’ grades. Being armed with the percentage of athletes with a 3.0 or better GPA or the average GPA of athletes has helped me address the remark in a non-confrontational manner and educate everyone in the room who may share such false perceptions.

In addition, when value indicators are the subject of conversation among student-athletes, coaches and management, that process is a great way to get buy-in for data collection. In addition, educating everyone in the athletics department about these measures increases the number of communicators who are voicing the value of athletics. And, if data indicates a “chink in the armor”, it will be easier to address such issues openly.

Overall, the more data we have in our arsenal, the easier it is to market our program in both a formal and a casual way. The athletics director must always be thinking about how he or she can contribute to positioning the athletics department as an important contributor to the overall success of the institution.

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