Published on Sports Management Resources

## Q: Why and how should student-athletes be involved in governance?

Why? The athletics program exists for its educational impact on the growth and development of student-athletes. Yet, in many athletics programs, the pressure on coaches to win or, at the high school level, to demonstrate that their athletes receive college athletics scholarships, creates incentives for these goals to take precedence over the educator's "duty of care" responsibilities. Thus, the athletics director must keep in touch with student-athlete issues and challenges. A formally constructed and regularly meeting Student-Athlete Advisory Council should be the cornerstone of the athletics director's communication with student-athletes. Student-athlete participation should also extend to voting membership on the Intercollegiate Athletics Council (or similarly titled athletics policy board) that is directly responsible for recommending all athletics department policies to the president or principal. Student-athletes should also serve on standing and ad hoc committees devoted to student-athlete life/welfare, leadership development programming, media training, career mentoring, and community service programs. Student-athlete representation on these committees and councils ensure that there are opportunities for student-athletes to learn how to govern. As important, the presence of student-athletes allows members of oversight bodies involved in the governance of athletics to make "reality checks" on whether the needs of athletics department consumers are being met.

How? Whenever student-athletes are given the opportunity to serve on committees and councils with faculty, alumni, and trustee representatives, consideration should be given to helping them prepare for such service. The athletics director or an assigned senior staff member should meet with the students for an orientation session that covers everything they need to know. Don't assume that student-athletes have had extensive committee experience. A good orientation will remove any initial fears about interacting with authority figures. Topics that should be considered are:

- expected dress and being on time for meetings
- reviewing the policy or governance document describing the structure and function of the committee/council on which they will serve
- reviewing a sample agenda and materials and how a meeting is conducted
- reviewing the minutes of a previous meeting of the council or committee
- reviewing a list of committee/council members, explaining who they are, and proper initial forms of address (Mr., Dr., etc.)
- discussing expectations regarding confidentiality of documents and privacy laws related to

employee and student-athlete data they may be asked to review
- discussing how they should communicate what they learn to student-athletes on their teams

Who? Consideration should also be given to the experience and maturity of student-athletes who will be asked to serve. For policy committees that require high levels of sophistication, consider establishing minimum requirements such as junior class status, good academic standing, or previous experience as a member of the Athletes Advisory Council or in student government. Allow former student-athletes who may be completing their fifth years or enrolled in graduate schools to serve. Consider always having at least two students on committees that also include faculty, staff, alumni or trustees so they don't feel isolated or alone. Consider always having multiple year and staggered student-athlete terms of service so there is always an experienced student-athlete teaching a newly appointed student-athlete.

Last but not least, at the end of the year of any student-athlete's service on a committee or council, assign a staff member to do a one-on-one follow up to assess their experience and whether he or she needs additional mentoring. Consider whether the committee or council on which the student-athlete is serving should have another non-athlete committee member assigned to be a mentor.

Topics

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