

NCAA Faculty Athletic Representatives' Perceived Mattering

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Abstract

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member institutions must appoint a faculty athletics representative (FAR). The chief academic officer at each institution is responsible for the selection of the FAR, and the representative must hold a faculty rank and not be an athletics administrator or coach. The FAR is the primary point of contact for student-athletes to report “any action, activity or behavior by anyone associated with the athletics program inconsistent with this constitution’s principle of student-athlete health and well-being” (NCAA Division I Manual, 2022, p. 7). The specific duties or responsibilities of the position are determined by the institution but FARs are often in a unique situation where they have responsibilities with both academics and athletics. FARs are often responsible for certifying student-athlete academic eligibility as well as working as a liaison between the academic components of the university and the athletic department (Cooper 1992, Leary, 2014; Munger 2014). There has been limited research on FARs though the NCAA conducted an extensive study on FARs in 2011 and published the results in 2013 (Miranda & Paskus, 2013). The NCAA report provided demographic data, perceptions on their working environment, as well as general thoughts on academic issues and the role of athletics in higher education. Martyn et al. (2019) examined FARs through a social identity lens, as they recognized the challenges that FARs face regarding their dual role at a university. Their qualitative study involving nine FARs found challenges associated with competing social identities (Martyn et al., 2019). The 2023 College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) Conference had two scholarly presentations focused on FARs with one examining role satisfaction and one examining the effectiveness of the position (Eckstein & Nagel, 2023; Hardin et al., 2023). Examining the experiences of college athletic employees in general has been a focus of recent research in relation to organizational support, burnout, job satisfaction, turnover, and other management issues (see Bravo, 2019; Siegele et al., 2020; Smith et al, 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Weight et al., 2021). FARs have been included as part of samples in research but are generally an understudied group. The precarious role that FARs have as a liaison between academics and athletics as well as the ambiguous language describing the role of a FAR presents challenges regarding their actual role and impact. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine FARs’ perception of their perceived mattering. Perceived mattering is conceptualized as feelings of importance, significance, or value to others within a social group or work environment (Richards et al., 2016). Perceived mattering was measured by a modified version of the Perceived Mattering Questionnaire - Physical Education developed by Gaudreault et al. (2018). The scale was modified for the current study to measure if Faculty Athletic Representatives (FARs) perceived if the FAR role matters and if academic integrity mattered. Four questions were used to measure each of the four total dimensions on a 1 to 5 rating scale with a higher mean score indicating higher perceived mattering for both their role and academic integrity. The respondents do perceive their role as FAR matters and that academic integrity matters. The FARs were more positive regarding their perceived mattering with athletic department staff as the mean scores for both subscales were significantly higher than the mean

scores regarding their relationships with academic faculty and staff. Paired sample t-test results show that FARs perceived mattering was significantly higher among their athletic department staff colleagues vs. academic department faculty and staff ($t = 14.644$, $p \leq .001$). This was also the case for the perceived mattering for student-athlete academic integrity as FARs indicated athletic department staff had a significantly higher mean score than academic faculty and staff ($t = 6.783$, $p \leq .001$). FARs find themselves in a challenging situation as they balance their dual role within academics and athletics which often have competing interests. These are certainly controversial issues which can create conflict at the institutional, conference, and NCAA level. The viewpoint of a faculty member may differ and conflict with the stance of athletics, but it is important for FARs to maintain unbiased in their position. The interests of both entities are important, and the FAR is critical in bridging the gap. Thus, perceived mattering is important as FARs need to believe the work they are doing is important. Thus, it is important to recognize organizational socialization as an important area of concern in relation to organizational culture and behavior; ensuring the proper onboarding and training of FARs into the organization can enhance their role clarity, acceptance, and influence their job performance. The FAR needs to be performing at a high level due to the demands of the position thus it is critical to understand their perceived mattering with the role. High levels of perceived mattering are critical as FARs are a facilitator between the academic and athletics and aid in creating better relationships across campus.