

Rethinking College Athletes: What We can Learn from the Development of a European Culture of Support for Student-Athletes

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Abstract

There is wide variance around the globe in the way athletes enrolled in higher education participate in their athletic careers. In a select number of nations – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. - organization of college athletics is formalized. Elsewhere, university-based athletics are organized less formally. Thus, substantial differences in the supports for athletes in higher education exist between nations. Across Europe, separation of school and sport creates a difficult setting for athletes who are working toward or aspire to gain a college degree. The European Commission has recognized this and has encouraged researchers - through EU funding and by setting up a working group, later an expert group of scholars and experts - to examine the issues surrounding so-called dual-career athletes. At the same time, non-binding policy documents have been created for stakeholders such as EU member states' central and local governments, sport governing bodies at the European and national level (federations/associations), local sports clubs, and educational institutions. As with college athletes in the U.S., substantial athletic and academic pressures on athletes in university setting across Europe exist. Government agencies, academicians and educators in Europe have all recognized a pressing need to provide an accommodating setting for elite student-athletes who are attending colleges and universities while they train and compete, including creating specific provisions, adaptable schedules, tutoring, mentoring, and course delivery that enhance educational experiences and outcomes. The development of academic and athletic supports in Europe appear research-based and address athlete well being more so than those in the U.S., making an examination of the current status of the research, policies and practices of European university student-athlete supports valuable for gaining understandings that can be brought to American college sport. Thus, the purpose of this presentation is to review the process of policy development in the area of so called dual career athlete supports in Europe and how a scholarly approach has been applied in creating related policies. Conclusions and recommendations will follow this review.