

THE FINAL REPORT

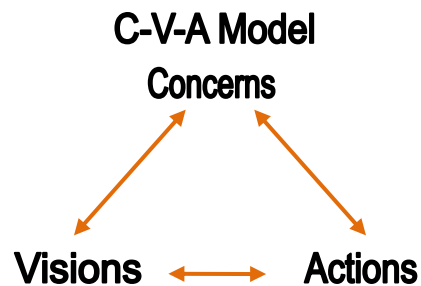
Stress for college students is not unique phenomenon. However, when the student is also an athlete, the stressors become unique. In a study conducted by James Humphrey, Deborah Yow and William Bowden (2000), causes of stress for student-athletes were (a) academic problems, (b) athletics demands, (c) time, (d) relationships with others, and (e) finances. The consequences caused by those stressors were (a) impact on mental/ emotional health, (b) impact on physical health, (c) negative impact on athletic performance, and (d) negative impact on academic performance.

There is a proven relationship between student satisfaction and college expenditures devoted to student development services, such as professional, intellectual and academic development (Astin, 1993). Nonetheless, it is a challenge for student development administrators to continually provide relevant student development programming for students. The CRC athletic department seeks to provide the very same quality student support services to its uniquely challenged student-athletes. The efforts of the CRC Athletic Department will hopefully result in student-athletes being able to maximize their potential athletically, educationally and personally. As part of the Cosumnes River College CASSL innovative grant, I assessed the non-athletic student support service needs of student-athletes at CRC. The objective for the assessment was to:

Create a comprehensive summary through a series of student-athlete focus groups and coach interviews to be used as a guide in developing CRC student-athlete support services programming.

Unfortunately, due to poor participation, I was unable to gather enough information from coaches through interviews to include in this report. However, the information I was able to gather was used as a solid foundation for my research. In order to accomplish the assessment objective, the Concerns, Visions, Actions (CVA) event design was used in the student-athlete focus groups. The CVA communication model is

rooted in the theory that the concerns persons have about a given issue or program are related to the visions they have for the future of their group. Actions are the concrete steps people can take to realize their visions and turn them into reality.



The CVA model used in the student-athlete focus groups is designed to promote self-reflection, as well as, feelings of self-actualization and self-growth for participants. Unlike other assessment tools, the CVA model encourages participants to collaboratively explore their concerns, visions and actions. This collaborative experience challenges participants to give thoughtful and creative responses.

The responses given during the assessment were invaluable. Namely responses were spontaneous and unscripted. Student-athletes had the opportunity to target what *they* feel are key student support services in relation to student success. These ‘real’ perspectives of change and continuation will allow CRC administrators to develop future programming with confidence.

In the focus group sessions, student athletes were asked to list characteristics of a successful student athlete. CRC student-athletes identified the following as the top four characteristics that bring about success in student-athletes off the playing field:

- 1.) the ability to Prioritize;**
- 2.) Self-Discipline;**
- 3.) Time Management; and**
- 4.) Responsibility**

Using the above characteristics as a base, student-athletes were then asked how CRC’s student-athlete support services can help student-athletes acquire, enhance and/or develop these characteristics. Student-athletes were asked to discuss what

current services are working and what makes them successful. They were subsequently asked which services offered could work better and what they would do to improve them. Students were told not to limit their suggestion and/or ideas due to logistics or what they felt was feasible. Each focus group was encouraged to think “outside the box” and develop a “wish list” of services, policies and/or procedures which would help them and their fellow student-athletes be successful as defined by the above characteristics.

Below is a summary of the actions, visions and concerns student-athletes equated with success off the playing field.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It must be noted that at some point in each focus group discussion, student-athletes shared that the visions and actions they generated would work best on student-athletes who had made the initial choice to want to be successful in the classroom. If a student-athlete had not made that choice many of the services would not be effective. Student-athletes in the group sessions also made it clear that some student-athletes were at CRC only to compete in athletics. These student-athletes, they felt, would never make the choice to be successful students. In addition to the four traits of a successful student-athlete, student-athletes in the focus groups noted that the Talon Center and a student-athlete focused class would be helpful in guiding student-athletes towards wanting to be successful students as well as athletes. Below is a definition of each trait, as defined by the focus groups, accompanied by a compilation of the focus groups visions, concerns and actions. Lastly, the student-athletes provided concerns and actions for the Talon Center and a student-athlete specific class.

TIME MANAGEMENT- *The ability to manage the time it takes to complete all tasks (school work, team practice, work and social activities) asked of a student-athlete in a timely manner.*

Vision: A student-athlete who has the tools to manage their classes, practices, work and social schedule.

Concerns: Student-athletes do not have the skills to manage the many different tasks asked of them. College very different than high school; therefore, student-athletes who do not possess the proper tools/ skills need help managing the demands of collegiate academics and collegiate athletics.

Actions: Students suggested the implementation of workshops. These workshops would be coach enforced, engaging, and less than an hour in duration. The use of college supplied agendas was also suggested.

RESPONSIBILITY- *Being accountable for your actions in the classroom.*

Vision: A student-athlete who knows where they stand in their class and takes the proper steps to succeed if they aren't doing well.

Concerns: Student-athletes do not know how they are doing in their classes. Student-athletes who do not know where they stand typically do not take their standing seriously. Grade checks help with this concern, but the CRC athletic department seems to only run the grade checks to make sure student-athletes are eligible, not to help them become better students. This makes student-athletes feel as if the athletic department views them as only athletes rather than student-athletes.

Actions: Grade checks help students take responsibility for their actions in their classes. Grade checks should continue coupled with mandatory team tutoring. Other actions points from the focus group included, grade checks should be done at different times, there should be an attendance component to the checks and the grade checks should be completed in person to facilitate student-athlete professor relationships. Another noteworthy suggestion was having a prepared schedule of missed classes due to athletic contests developed by their coach and given to professors at the beginning of the class.

SELF-DISCIPLINE- *Making a decision to be successful and doing what is needed to reach your goals.*

Vision: A student-athlete who has made the conscious decision to be successful. This student-athlete knows what to do to be successful and does what is needed to be successful.

Concerns: Student-athletes who haven't made the conscious decision to be successful. Some students do not know what it takes to be successful or where to get help.

Actions: Interaction with Counseling was the main action point. Every student-athlete needs to meet with the athletic counselor at least once a semester. Interaction with counseling as well as tutoring requirements with grade checks and grade checks being

completed in person to facilitate student-athlete professor interaction was suggested. The Talon Center staffed with more teachers/instructors in the actual center was also listed as an action point, as well as a student-athlete centered class.

PRIORITIES- *The ability to decide what responsibilities take precedence over others.*

Vision: A student-athlete who knows that academic success is most important followed by athletic goals.

Concerns: Student-athletes do not know how to prioritize, they are unable to prioritize successfully due to outside constraints (work, family, transportation etc.), and they are not encouraged by athletic administration to emphasize the student in student-athlete.

Actions: A reward system would be developed for student-athletes and teams who have achieved their academic goals (i.e. new equipment, food vouchers, apparel for a teams' or student-athletes good academic mark). A mandatory and transferable class for all new student-athletes that would help them prioritize their responsibilities early in their career here at CRC. The class must be taught by an instructor who athletes can relate to and who is strict. The class would cover areas such as organization, study skills, note taking and time management.

Students were also asked to evaluate two services/programs that are currently in place. Their answers are as follows.

TALON CENTER

Concerns: For many students, the Talon center isn't being taken seriously. It is used as a place to only socialize. For those who use the center for academic purposes, the resources are too few (not enough tutors/ instructors).

Actions: One action would be to develop two different areas for students to gather. One area would be a social place to gather and hang out. The other area would be strictly for

doing academic work (i.e. study hall). The person who is in charge of the center should be strict. Another action would be to have the option to earn Talon center hours in other academic areas such as the tutoring lab, library, writing lab etc. Lastly, a Talon center that had times for specific subjects was suggested or specific team usage times were suggested.

STUDENT-ATHLETE SPECIFIC CLASS

Concerns: If students are required to take a class it should be transferable and should be very engaging. If the class isn't transferable and the professor isn't relatable student-athletes will not take the course seriously and it will be a waste of time.

Actions: A course should be developed for new student-athletes. The course should be mandatory for new students to take so they will know how to be successful in college. The course should have guest speakers and should be relatable to the student-athletes. This class should cover all the support services so student-athletes know where to go to get help.



CONCLUSION

The general purpose of student support services at Cosumnes River College is, *'to assist students with career decision-making, problem resolution, and goal achievement'*. The CRC Athletic Department is also committed to offering similar support services. Through this research the CRC Athletic Department has gained valuable knowledge about their student-athletes. It is clear that student-athletes know what it takes to be successful and understand that success lies squarely on the shoulders of each student-athlete. They have defined a successful student-athlete to have the ability to prioritize, to have self-discipline, to understand the dynamics time management and to be responsible for their actions.

This process has revealed that student-athletes seek structure and guidance by their coaches and athletic administrators. The multiple mentions of “mandatory” classes, workshops, grade checks, tutoring and interaction with counselors and professors suggest student-athletes are seeking structure. However, such requests of mandatory events seem to be contradictory to the statement that student-athletes must make the decision to be successful on their own. I understand this dichotomy between thought and action to mean that student-athletes know what it takes to be successful, but left to their own initiative are not self-disciplined enough to do what it takes to be successful. The added structure is needed to reinforce what they already know.

Along with seeking structure and guidance it is clear student-athletes seek to be understood. When there was a mention of athletic administrators, professors, teachers or anyone else working with student-athletes, they were adamant that person needed to be able to relate to them. Individuals working with CRC student-athletes, in regards to student-athlete support services, must understand their unique demands and must relate that to them. If a student-athlete focused class is reinstated, it would be most successful if student-athletes feel the instructor understands their plight while also having the ability to provide structure and accountability. Student-athletes named the ability to provide structure and accountability as being “strict”.

Lastly, student-athletes mentioned several times they did not want to be seen as only athletes; instead, they wanted policies and procedures to reflect the importance of their academic pursuits. The timing of grade checks and consequences for not meeting

academic standards were seen by athletes as being in place solely for keeping student-athletes eligible. Student-athletes were concerned that questions were not being asked as to why they weren't doing well. They also felt harsher consequences should be in place for students who were "counseled" and still do not meet their prescribed academic standards.

In conclusion, I believe the assessment was a success for the CRC athletic department and CRC student-athletes. The intrinsic value CRC Athletics derived from the completion of this project include:



An increased understanding of the academic support needs and visions of student-athletes;



A support services tool that may be used for creating new and relevant programming for student-athletes; and

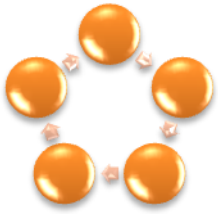


An increased sense of ownership from student-athletes that the CRC Athletic Department is working diligently to understand the academic and personal support needs of student-athletes.

CRC Athletics now has a starting point for developing, enhancing and guiding future student-athlete support services. I suggest the information from this report is used as a guideline for program creation as well as program upgrades. I also suggest an assessment like this is done again in one year with possibly a more specific focus on one of the aforementioned success traits. This would help student-athlete support services better gauge their effectiveness in providing student-athletes with relevant and engaging services.

In addition, the benefits of participating in this assessment for CRC student-athletes are great. They have been given the opportunity to socially construct a new reality of student-athlete success. Upon the conclusion of many of the focus group sessions, student-athletes commented to me and their fellow student-athletes about how much they enjoyed being able to talk about what it takes to be a successful student-athlete. In my opinion, these comments are also a statement of self-reflection and inquiry. There were many instances where one student would offer a vision and another student-

athlete would offer an action for that vision. This type of dialogue increases the participating student-athletes awareness of the concerns, visions and actions of all student-athletes. These same student-athletes become aware that they have answer for many of the unique demands of being a student-athlete.



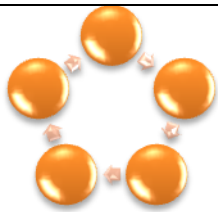
ASSESSMENT

I met with student-athletes for 90 minutes in focus group sessions to discuss their concerns, visions and actions for student-athlete support services at CRC. No other CRC athletics staff members were allowed access to focus group sessions. The objectives of the focus group sessions were to:

- 1.) Discuss identifying attributes of student-athletes who are successful academically;
- 2.) Discuss current CRC student-athlete support services programs that successfully support student-athletes who strive to be academically successful;
- 3.) Discuss obstacles and challenges facing student-athletes who strive to be academically successful;
- 4.) Discuss new or alternative ways CRC programs can continue to support student-athletes who strive to be academically successful.

In order to recruit the most successful group of student-athletes for this assessment these guidelines were followed:

- 1.) Student-athletes must be **volunteer** participants.
- 2.) Student-athletes must have completed one semester as an eligible student-athlete.
- 3.) Student-athletes must be given brief description of the objective of the assessment and their participating role at least three days prior to their scheduled meeting.
- 4.) Student-athletes must be given a minimum of **10 minutes** to discuss with teammates before, during or after practice mutual concerns, visions and actions according to scope of assessment.



PARTICIPATION

This assessment relies heavily on participation of CRC Athletics. I solicited help from Liz Belyea and Allah-mi Allen to get student-athlete and coach participation in the assessment project. Unfortunately, I was able to meet with only three coaches. The information I gathered from these informative meetings was used as only background information.

There are four men's teams (Baseball, Basketball, Soccer and Tennis) and five women's teams (Basketball, Soccer, Softball, Tennis and Volleyball). The focus groups were composed of the same gender, but consisted of a mix of sports. According to CRC Athletics, there are approximately 150 student-athletes. My goal was to meet with at the very least 25% (approx. 37) of the student-athletes on campus. However, I met with only two men's teams (Baseball and Basketball) and three women's teams (Basketball, Soccer and Volleyball). I met with approximately 11% (16 students) of the student athletes on campus.