

# Measuring Behaviors and Attitudes

Amy Campbell  
Director of Athletics  
Bryn Mawr

We have talked today about integration- defined it and explored it's meaning. We have talked about the role of hiring and the importance of fair and appropriate evaluation of our staffs and how critical that is to integrating athletics on our campuses. We've pointed out that we can not underestimate the role coaches play in the lives of students and how athletics helps to define or mirrors the institutional culture.

President Fry has described the process and standards he has brought to bear at Franklin and Marshal to address these critical areas.

Much has been written about higher education, it's accountability, responsibility and purpose---but little has been written about athletics within the context of higher education beyond the two inviting books *The Game of Life* and *Reclaiming the Game*. The research for these two books explored quantitatively the effect athletics has on the scholarship of undergraduates. [Notably, the representativeness part of the College Sports Project will provide important data for institutions to draw their own conclusions about athletics and academics]

There is though a collection of essays entitled Universities and Their Leadership which describes higher education in a number of contexts. What is said in a few of these essays maybe easily transferred to intercollegiate athletics. One author, Martin Trow, in an essay entitled, *Accountability of Higher Education*, says

“One of the major functions of higher education, which evades all measurement, is our ability to raise the horizons of our students, to encourage them to set their ambitions higher than if they had not come under our influence.”

If we overlay this statement onto athletics, it challenges us to raise the bar and on our responsibility as educators. Raising the horizons of our students – to encourage them to set their ambitions higher than if they had not come under our influence ---is exactly what I think competitive athletics accomplishes.

We know the simple measures of athletics—the measurement of score – of place – of who wins a championship, or a game. But, we also know that our institutions sponsor broad based athletic programs for reasons far beyond the entertainment and competitive value of sport ---that in Division III we prize competition within the context of educational values...to raise the horizons of our students.

If we were to make a quick list of what we value most in an athletics program it might include the following:

1. The promotion of individual and team discipline and a strong work ethic

2. How to work with as a team, respecting the contributions of each member because athletes must work together in multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-religious and political groups to achieve a commonly prized outcome
3. How to make adjustments to a game plan or – changing ones performance based on what the opponent is doing
4. The important lessons of how to be a leader and how to be a good follower
5. To have fun—make lifelong friendships and play a sport they love
6. Athletics participation increases and promotes fitness
7. It promotes good time management skills
8. Athletics is competitive
9. Athletics promotes self-worth and self-esteem
10. and athletics reveals character
11. Athletics promotes school spirit and institutional pride and represent an institution and athletics puts a public face on the institution  
As Harry Sheehy the athletic director at Williams is fond of saying, when Williams plays Amherst in football – the entire school is united – there are no differences between departments, among faculty, among students and alumni—there is a single institutional desire and purpose ---beating Amherst.

These are characteristics that are easily identifiable within a comprehensive athletic program that is educationally centered. But – how do we determine if we are really teaching towards these goals?

We do have one very public measure – [hold up newspaper] If this were during the academic year – it would have stories about college teams- who won, who lost, points scored, opportunities taken and opportunities missed. The last page is usually devoted to reporting scores – we know each day – who won and who lost, this type of measurement is very public, it is an understandable measure that is consistent across institutions. In addition to the media, our websites carry scores, and in many places instantly relay what is happening on the court, field, pool or track.

But what does this type of measurement- the score - say about the experience – the educational experience of the student. What does it say about how we do what we do? What does it say about our attitudes towards athletics and our behavior? What does it say

about the role of athletics at our institutions and how athletics is assimilated into the broader mission and culture of the institution? How can we take the pulse of department?

How do we know if we have ‘raised the horizons of our students’ and if we really do what we say we do – are our programs educationally based and do they serve the greater mission of the institution.

Appropriate measurement and evaluation of our programs allow us to ask the next questions, it allows us the necessary information to correct course when necessary, to adequately reflect the institutional culture and to remain in synch with the needs of the institution and the students. It allows us to:

1. Determine if the athletic experience is reflective of the academic mission
2. It helps to acknowledge the important role athletics plays at our schools
3. It allows us to assess the balance between competition and the broader athletic goals
4. It begins to quantify the athletic experience and how it is viewed by the greater college/university community

Why is it important to think about measurement when we talk about integration and what are the common themes among communication, hiring and evaluation? I would suggest this is the piece of the puzzle that ties together the facets of integration, and undergirds the process, integrating athletics with the greater goals of the institution. Without some kind of tool and intentional plan that lets us know if athletics does what it says it does, that allows us to determine if our behavior matches our attitudes – most of what we do is reduced to a score as the sole validation of our effort or of anecdotal information or stories. Alone, a score doesn’t serve an evaluation of an athletics program particularly well or fully.

So, what do I mean when I say does our behavior match our attitude? A few simple illustrations. It is very common for coaches to say the academic experience comes first—athletes are students first. And, they mean it. The faculty are heard saying – we value athletics as an important part of our students lives, and administrators value the role of bringing the alumni and students together for a common purpose in addition to it’s role in enhancing student life. Admissions departments know the value of a strong program in attracting scholar-athletes to the institution. We say all the right things in support of academics and in support of the values of a broad based athletic program. But how exactly, does that transfer to behavior. Do coaches (and conferences for that matter) know, understand and take into account when the high stress time is for each undergraduate class. When mid-terms and finals are scheduled, when senior thesis are due, when sophomores declare a major, when first year students are introduced to their academic expectations during orientation? Are allowances being made to accommodate what are the signal points of the academic year? This is a tough one- this is hard, because forces beyond our institutions dictate so much of what we do and when. But – we can be

intentional about our decisions and help to minimize the conflicts during the most important moments of a student's academic career. One suggestion – is not to schedule any athletic contests the first week of classes of either term. While this is not a common practice- it does send a strong signal to the faculty that the 'behavior' ---the decision not to schedule games the first week of classes – supports the academic priorities. We can have faculty and deans meet with freshmen when they first arrive on campus for fall preseason intentionally linking a freshmen's first experience at our schools which is athletic – to the broader mission of scholarship.

Doing things like this requires some courage because they buck up against a system that is fairly autonomous -- conferences determine the schedules and along with the NCAA membership, determine start dates and playing rules. Making an intentional decision to do something different without jeopardizing the competitive balance--is not easy, but it does reclaim the authority of the institution to decide what is best for their students and the College/University.

On the academic side – athletes are often face conflicts when review sessions or guest speakers are scheduled during practice time or afternoon games. While it isn't always possible or practical to schedule around athletic practices or events, it would be helpful to insert some flexibility and arrange a co-curricular academic schedule that includes evening seminars or on dates that rarely conflict with a contest, realizing that most co-curricular activities – athletics included, take place in the late afternoon. Again- is there an intentional decision – that includes information about athletics in the decision process. Does the behavior match the attitude.

Another example – athletics on most of our campuses is more than a million dollar enterprise, usually employing at a minimum of 20 full-time staff. On many campuses upwards of 25% of the undergraduate student body participate as varsity athletes and adding clubs and intramurals- that could skyrocket to 80% or higher in participation. Athletics is an enterprise that commands a significant financial and facility commitment and is a key component of student life. Athletic directors have a good handle on student life, on the calendar and where the pressure points are during the academic year particularly with regard to facilities and who is on campus when. Including athletic directors in conversations of student life, use of facilities, calendar changes can be very helpful.

Finally, our student-athletes – who come to us with a range of interests and abilities, should be given the opportunity to participate in activities – and programs - in addition to their athletic pursuits. We talk a lot about the larger value of athletics and it is reasonable to encourage student-athletes---- who are good leaders, know how to manage their time, know what it means to have a commitment---- to participate in activities, in organizations and academic opportunities in addition to their athletic pursuits. They can be wonderful role models and leaders on our campuses.

Another area involving athletes – and coaches– is articulating the distinction between sportsmanship and gamesmanship. This is an area which has changed dramatically over

the last few years and has been most influenced by the media and television coverage of Division I sports- notably basketball and the highly active role of parents. It has become an accepted practice- to harass opponents and officials in the name of ‘gamesmanship’ – creating an assumed advantage for a team- that is within an expanded definition of sportsmanship. What was once determined to be unsportsmanlike behavior – is now seen as ‘part of the game’ and expected as a sign of support for ‘the team’ or a son or daughter. The distinction between what is ‘good’ gamesmanship and what crosses the line to unsportsmanlike conduct should always be an institutional/departamental decision—but it should also be an intentional decision that is reflective of the department. Behavior matching attitude.

Striving for excellence has become an intercollegiate athletic mantra commonplace in Division III – striving for excellence is code for striving to be a conference champion - a national champion - with all of the attendant support needed for coaching staffs, facilities, equipment, travel and increased budgets to remain competitive while seeking excellence.– (this is not by the way an unworthy goal or one that is in conflict with integration) But as we think about measuring and articulating the values we ascribe to athletics let me suggest a subtle shift – a distinction of sorts on how we might talk about achieving excellence. I suggest it may be helpful – in support of our goal of integration, if we think of excellence within the context of our actions. Meaning---instead of striving for excellence as an outcome--- strive for excellence in what we do, in how we do it, in our actions and behaviors, in how we teach, coach and administer. Is our work excellent, is the process excellent. This is different than seeking to achieve excellence as the end game. Let our work be of that standard – of excellence and the outcome will be reflective of our effort. It is a subtle, but I would suggest an important shift in how our behavior can match our attitudes and values.

In the end, each institution will determine how best to measure, to judge the effectiveness of its athletic program – beyond the public record of wins and losses. There are very few instruments available that measure or in any way begin to quantify and identify patterns of behavior. Many departments have developed their own exit surveys. Let me suggest several types that over time, may paint a portrait of a program and provide an initial baseline, from which, to guide the department and college.

At your table are draft copies of example surveys. Faculty, student-athletes, and student non-athletes a series of similar instruments used to gage the connection between attitudes and behavior. Professor Kim Cassidy, chair of Bryn Mawr’s psychology department, helped to construct the surveys.

You will notice there are five parts to the survey – each measuring a different aspect of the athletic experience.

1. Positive Experience/Benefits of Athletic Participation
2. Connection to the Community/Integration
3. Perception of community (campus) support
4. Connection to the Classroom

## 5. Athletic culture

The three questionnaires ask the same questions – but framed for the particular audience. By using a 1 -5 scale, we can get some composite scores and compare them across groups and over time.

The fourth survey is one I've used at Bryn Mawr for the past five years. It addresses the quality of the athlete experience, the coach, the culture and the impact the athletic experience has had on athletes as undergraduates. This has been a very useful tool and over the five years has enabled me to identify sport trends and trends within the athletic department.

All of these surveys help to quantify the experience – within the athletic/department culture and how that culture fits more broadly into the institutional culture and primary academic mission.

These four surveys can be complimented by one on one interviews with student athletes, non-student athletes, faculty and coaches.

These are just a few ideas about the how to determine if the behavior on campus around athletics is consistent with the attitudes and the value the institution places on the athletic program.

The area of measuring attitudes and behaviors about athletics, about the student experience as a way of evaluating a program beyond wins and losses is highly under developed. But it is an area which will provide direction, assessment and help to validate our experiential conclusion that a strong intercollegiate athletic program is an important co-curricular component in support of the primary mission of the institution.

And finally, I'd like to return to Martin Trow in his essay *Accountability of Higher Education* when he says:

“Our impact on our students can never be fully known; it emerges over their whole lifetimes and takes various forms at different points in their lives”

This I think, is the greatest legacy that we can leave – by way of our integrity, knowing that our behavior, in all aspects of the athletic enterprise, supports the fundamental mission of the institution.—“helping our students to raise their horizons.”