

S1 00:18 Our first speaker today comes to us from Notre Dame, and he really burst out public scene last year when Sports Illustrated did a profile on him. So please give our speaker a big warm welcome, Mr. Adam Sargent from Notre Dame.

S2 00:40 Howdy. Thank you very much for having me here. It's an honor to come down and be able to share some thoughts with all of you about the role that I play at the University Notre Dame. It's a role that exists at many different institutions around the country. Thank you much. Thank you. Really any division one school that has college athletics is really mandated to have an office like ours. My title is Associate Director of Academic Services for student athletes. My day-to-day routine, my responsibility is to serve as the academic counselor for the university's football team. It's a role that I have done in that office for almost 15 years. For the first seven years I worked with all sorts of the different Olympic sports, and for the last seven years I've been the academic counselor for the football team.

S2 01:39 It's from that vantage point that I want to share some thoughts with you all today, specifically talking about working with the revenue producing sports - most notably, men's and women's basketball, football. I imagine that many of you who have been interested in sport and who have existed in the college campus are aware that there are some controversial topics, some issues. It's not a mystery as you look around the country you see media headlines that deal with issues of integrity, issues of investment that surround major division one college athletics. It's from that vantage point, that population that I want to speak to you today a little bit.

S2 02:21 Not that long ago - I'd say right around 10 years ago - the NCAA started to institute some measures in an attempt to regulate, and to raise the standard of graduation and progress towards degree within college athletics. It was long overdue. There were many documented situations of programs that had shameful graduation rates that had student athletes involved in their program, but really had no infrastructure and no meaningful education occurring. I think that the attempt for the NCAA and what they did in instituting what I'm going to refer to as the APR, and I'm not going to go into great details; I only have 15 minutes. Is a measure that will look at each semester whether a student is retained, and whether that student is eligible. You receive a point for each one, and if you do perfect eligibility and retention over the course of that year you will get four for four points. I think this should be applauded. I think this has been a good move by the NCAA, and it's been embraced by the colleges around the country.

S2 03:41 And as a result, in my field - academic services - you've seen a relative explosion of offices that have added staff members, new buildings have been erected on college campuses designed to work with student athletes on academic support. You've seen additions of learning specialists. You've seen all new software that's been introduced to help organize and manage time and communication amongst the student athletes to help improve the quality of their experience. The idea here again was to address a concern where you had supposedly amateur athletes competing in sports that were generating millions of dollars for institutions, for TV networks. And in return many of which were

leaving without a degree, without a proper education, and this was an attempt to help stem that dynamic.

S2 04:42

When you institute policy and you put in specific parameters - metrics to measure - you can see a response to that. At its best you have people making better progress towards their degree. At its best you have people better engaging in the curriculum. At its worst you find new ways to meet those parameters to avoid potential penalties that may come if the institution or the program is not making proper progress. But you don't necessarily have an improvement or a substantial improvement in the quality of the education. You have ways in which people will work aggressively to avoid being ineligible, to avoid being dismissed so you get your points. But are they really engaging in a more deep and meaningful way?

S2 05:40

I don't think it was an organic trend. I don't think it was an organic change; it was a response to the legislation. People who work in our field - specifically academic counselors that work with student athletes - but that can be expanded to professors that work with students on campus, fellow students that collaborate with their student athletes. All of us I believe have a responsibility, and what drives me is to help ensure that this population that arrives to universities, often times underprepared, their profile may be significantly different than the standard incoming students. Their level of investment, their orientation to how you engage at in a college campus in a meaningful way to richly learn and develop, and to grow, may not be as intact. Part of it might be the background, part of it might be the quality of the experience they had leading in to it.

S2 06:49

The other part of it is their on investment. It's no secret, if you exist on a college campus and you see or hear stories about high profile student athletes that define themselves more so by the athlete than they do the student, they don't embrace that experience. My job, and what drives me and my passion is to try and help those students develop a more meaningful way, part of it is done through support. I talked about the new buildings; they've expanded staff, learning specialists, tutors, mentors, working on time management, working on study skills, educational technology. All of these are tools designed to support students learning, and those are important, and those have value.

S2 07:43

The other side of the job in addition to supporting students - and this is a more difficult, a more artful - is the act of challenging the students. As much as the support can be a wonderful thing, if you're not oriented, if you're not invested it might not result in a meaningful education. So, how do I do that? It's a hard thing to do to create a sense of ownership. For sake of time I want to talk about two main themes that I try and weave into the tapestry of my interactions with these students, and it's something that I think is applicable to anybody in field when you're looking at human performance.

S2 08:25

One; you have to be very candid. You have to be very honest. My position is one that's artificial. I'm a counselor that they didn't hire, that they can't fire, and if you talk to them at times, they'll say, "We can't escape the man. He drives me crazy." And that's okay, that's all right. In that format, that intrusive format where I insert myself in their lives, and we look and establish an open dialogue, it can be threatening, it can be a challenge that is maybe difficult to absorb because it has happened before, and because we're looking at really core traits.

- S2 09:07 What I talk about, and what I try to address and what I tried to normalize is that we are all wonderfully flawed humans. As much as I'm going to be aggressive in addressing traits that are keeping these young men and women from getting an education, it's true of all of us. As humans we possess all of the traits inherent to humanity, the wonderful traits; love, compassion, respect, and also the other traits on the darker side; laziness, jealousy, dishonesty. These are part of who we are. And the sooner you can start to recognize that possessing those traits is not wrong, it's human, you can start to talk about them more candidly and more honestly. And that's an important part of what I do.
- S2 10:04 In addition to addressing these traits and encouraging them to see them, to look at them honestly. To see how those traits are impacting the outcomes in their lives and how they might be inhibiting their level of engagement, their ability to connect in a meaningful way with the curriculum, to receive an education. I work with them to recognize how their choices, how they portray these traits affect the outcomes in their lives.
- S2 10:37 Now, it might seem like common sense, it might seem like of course that's something that everybody knows about, but to really speak candidly and to look and to see how people choose to display those traits. And the result that it partakes whether it's not doing well in school, whether it's having damaged relationships with your peers, with your classmates with your teammates. These are critical dynamics that I do, and I encourage the faculty to incorporate in those dialogs.
- S2 11:12 It's something that needs to happen because if we are not challenging these students, if we are not candidly and honestly putting them in contact with their circumstances, and they are competing, and they are generating revenue, and the university is making money, and the TV networks are making money, then what you have is exploitation. What you have is systematic exploitation. Now, that's existed for far too long. The students involved are culpable, it's their choice, but many of these young men and women coming in at 17, 18, 19 are not coming from backgrounds where they have been supported, where college is the next natural step, where their peers, their parents, their aunts and uncles have had college degrees that pursue professional lives. A lot of them arrive to college campuses without an appreciation of what occurs in this environment under the best of circumstances. And it is our responsibility to help those students receive the orientation that they need to better appreciate what happens on the college campus.
- S2 12:37 If we are not doing that, we are failing them, if we are not doing that we are failing to live up to the mission of what these wonderful institutions claim to do. And that is not just to make sure students are eligible, that is not just to make sure that students are arriving close to a degree. If that degree does not represent an experience that has been steeped in rigor, an experience that has cultivated a since ownership, growth, independence, then that is not an experience worthy of what we say we represent at these magnificent institutions. And it's not just the students that need to be challenged, if there are administrators on campus, if there are coaches on campus that are not embracing their mission to help develop these young men and women, they also need to be challenged. They also need to recognize why these institutions exist, and the primary reason is not to generate revenue. The primary reason is not to win games. The primary reason is to ensure that we are developing our young

people into impressive autonomous adults that are able to leave and to go out and to touch the world. And to make sure that we are helping them develop those skills, if we're not we are failing as an institution, as a community, and it's something that deserves the attention of everybody on a college campus.

S2 14:30 I think that's a good summary of what my points are. I appreciate the chance to come here. This is not something that can be done overnight. I think that we're making good progress, but it has to be more than simply subtle shifts, it has to be more than not being penalized, it has to be communities embracing what this is all about, and that is an education in a deep and meaningful way. Thank you very much.

[applause]

S1 15:10 Thanks, Adam thanks for a great talk. I've got some questions for you from some of our audience. Nicky S. "Since the implementation of this program have you seen a significant increase in the academic success of students at your school?"

S2 15:27 Yeah. I think that we've actually been one of their front runners. We've had a department like this for many, many years, going back to the actual '60s and '70s. But I have seen as the trend of college athletics becomes increasingly professional - for lack of a better term - where revenue is out of control, where the media scrutiny is so great that winning seems to become the only thing that's important, or the primary that's important. I have found that the jobs gotten harder. I have found that it's become even more essential because the students that are arriving on our campuses have an inflated sense of self. They've been told that their contributions athletically are important to the recruiting process, and I think that one of the most important pieces that we do is to ground this population. To remind them why colleges exist, and to help them maintain focus so that they are pursuing their passion, which may be sports, but also receiving a top-notch education. And that has become more and more challenging.

S1 16:37 In your answer, it leads directly into this great question we got from Robert R., it says, "For instructors and professors, in your opinion, what is one thing that you see not being done inside the classrooms to challenge and inspire athletes to excel in the academic realm, and what can we do differently?"

S2 16:54 That's a great question, and I think a lot of college professors aren't going to like my answer. But the reality is, classroom management is your responsibility. I know that a lot of college professors do not invite that as part of their obligation. They look at their role as an expert doing research, and sharing information with bright minds who have paid to come and be a part of their classroom. But, the reality is these students - all of them - are on this campus. And it's above are pay grade to decide whether or not it's our responsibility to educate them, that decision's been made, they've been admitted. I really think that if you value your position, and if you recognize why an institution exists, it is to help orient students, and if they don't have what you expect college students to have, and that is a sense of what is appropriate in a classroom, then that's just as much the education as the content as that you're exchanging.

S1 17:48 Fascinating question. Responsibility all away around.

S2 17:51 All the way around.

S1 17:52 To wrap up our questions here and I want to thank the audience, all the audiences for the questions. We've gotten about 15 questions here in the last just two minutes. Andrew J. who says, "Howdy from James Madison University." And we have to say 'howdy' back. "With this technology driven society that we all live in. Do you feel as if the media is catalyzing student athletes to even further take on the role of the athlete, and less of the student?"

S2 18:17 Yeah. I think that's a reality. I think that's true. I think that celebrity unfortunately is a sickness that's weaved our way into society, and that celebrity - not necessarily the accomplishment - has become the almighty achievement. I think that when you receive such great attention for your athletic prowess that that's naturally going to result in students to gravitating towards those accomplishments. I don't know how you stem that. I don't know how you change that, it seems like the country really is wanting more and more and more coverage. I think it's probably naïve, or unrealistic to think that the media may be would be less willing to give all-encompassing coverage to college students. As we've seen both on this campus and at Notre Dame, it's received a lot of attention, and it's something that I think is probably, unfortunately, is probably going to continue.

S1 19:16 It would be nice sometimes if they remembered that these our 19 and 20-year-olds kids, growing up.

S2 19:18 It would be. It would be. No question.

S1 19:24 Adam thank you so much for being here.

S2 19:26 My pleasure Tim. Thank you all for hosting. I appreciate it.

S1 19:28 Join me in thanking Adam Sargent.

S2 19:31 Take care.
[music]