

Clustering in Athletics:

**A Review of Public Administration
and the Auburn Football Team**

Committee Information

- Provost forms an *ad hoc* committee (May 8, 2015) to—
- To look into whether or not clustering of athletes in majors has occurred;
- To compare Auburn University to peer institutions;
- To look into reasons for why such clusters, if present, occur;
- And to make recommendations.

Committee Makeup

- Daniel Svyantek (Chair)
- Barb Struempler
- Brian Connelly
- Tina Loraas
- Mary Boudreaux
- Larry Teeter

Clustering

- Clustering is a grouping of a disproportionate percentage of athletes into selected majors when compared to the overall percentage of non-athletes in the same major
- Number of players on team with same major/total team players $\geq 25\%$
- Number of junior senior players on team with same major/ number of junior and senior players $\geq 25\%$

Clustering and NCAA

- Clustering in a major is not considered a violation of any rule by the NCAA
- FARs at FBS schools believe that clustering is function of NCAA own progress-toward degree requirement

Other Proposed Causes (McCormick, 2010)

- *Student-athletes may be underprepared for some majors upon entry to college.*
- *Time management by athletes is critical to balance sports participation and classes.*
- *Preparation time for athletics may interact with the timing of offered classes (e.g., certain classes for some majors may not be taught at a time when athletes are able to take them).*
- *Different majors may have additional requirements for entry (e.g., a GPA requirement in college to become a major) which student-athletes may have difficulty meeting.*
- *College major choice may be, therefore, determined by academic performance in the athletes' first year in college.*
- *Teammates may stick together (Fraternities)*
- College major choice may be affected by the NCAA's 40-60-80 rule.
- Unrealistic career expectations (e.g., I am going to go pro!) may affect choice of major.
- **Finally, student-athletes may receive favoritism in certain majors.**

Clustering in Peer Institutions

- SEC (Upton and Novak, 2008)
 - Auburn 26.5% in Criminology
 - TAMU 51.5% In Ag Leadership and Development
 - Vanderbilt 64% in Human and Organizational Development
- ACC (Fountain and Finley, 2009)
 - 25% in Sport Administration to 73% in Bus Mgt
- Big 12 (Schneider, et al, 2010)
 - 50% of players in one major related to ranking

Clustering at Auburn

- University Senate Meeting (May 19, 2015)
- 28 football players in PUBA
 - $28/120 = 23\%$ (no clustering)
 - $23/48 = 48\%$ (clustering)

Favoritism

- ? : Was favoritism shown towards athletes in PUBA
- Small sample—
 - Athletes received average grade of .94 < non-athletes
 - 7/8 athletes received grades that could affect eligibility
- No evidence in sample
- Recommendation to do full analysis was made

Advising

- ? : Were athletes advised to take PUBA?
- Asked athletics representative, told no formal push to PUBA
- Asked athletics representatives, why go to PUBA
 - *PUBA seen as appropriate for careers in city, county, state or federal government*
 - *Athletes talking to each other*
 - PUBA flexible and no quantitative course required
 - Person-group fit and ***student profiles (unprepared, career-oriented)***

Communication between Athletics and University officials

- ? : Was there communication between the athletic department and the university?
- Yes
- Did it alter decision?
- Alternative explanations exist consistent with administrative and organizational theory
 - Organized anarchies
 - *Leader succession and strategic change*

PUBA and money for program

- ? : Was money offered to PUBA to support program?
 - Yes- offer seems to have been made
 - University turned this offer down
- University has accepted money from athletics in past
- Consistent with practice at other universities (Arkansas, *LSU, Kentucky*)

Recommendations

- Publicize the support provided by Athletics to academics.
- Complete analysis of grading patterns in PUBA
- Time of course offerings should be looked into again
- Realistic career previews
- Create an Athletic “Talons”
- Annual Student-athlete and Student-Athlete Alumni Surveys
- Developing majors may be a possibility
- Utilize the Interdisciplinary Studies degree more effectively