Student-Athlete Welfare Plan: Review and Assessment
Athletics Advisory Board
Committee on Diversity and Student-Athlete Welfare
February 2014

In the spring of 2011, the University of Hawai`i at Manoa concluded a Self-Study of the Athletics Department as the prerequisite for certification by the NCAA. Each of the four sections of the Self-Study Report contained an Improvement Plan, identifying specific steps to bring the Department into fuller compliance with the “Measurable Standards” provided by the NCAA. Monitoring of the Department’s progress in fulfilling these plans was assigned by the Chancellor and in some of the plans themselves to the Athletics Advisory Board or one of its committees.

The first assessment of the Department’s progress on its Student-Athlete Well-Being Plan was issued by the AAB Committee on Diversity and Student-Athlete Welfare on March 15, 2012. It identified steps that had been completed and others on which progress was still required.

For this report, rather than review again the entire plan, the Committee has chosen to focus on the areas in which the plan had not been fulfilled in March 2012.

1. Program Reviews and Exit Interview Process

The Self-Study report concluded that the Athletics Department's Exit Interview Form did not comply with all of the requirements of the NCAA’s “Measurable Standard No. 2.” At the time of the committee’s last assessment, in March 2012, new forms for both the Exit Interview and the Program Review were being devised to meet this standard.

The Self-Study report also noted that the results of the Exit Interviews were not tabulated in any way that allowed a comparison of results from year to year. The Improvement Plan recommended that a process be developed that not only allows easy tabulation but that also achieves the highest possible rate of response.

In this year’s review, the committee noted that significant improvements have been made with student-athlete evaluations and exit interviews by moving the questionnaires from a paper based to digital platform using web-based software to design, collect, and analyze responses. Survey questions were completely reworked and reworded to provide more useful responses and make it easier for student-athletes to complete the surveys.

There are important reasons for having a successful student-athlete survey program:

✓ Well designed Program Evaluations and Exit Interviews are necessary to comply with NCAA requirements (Measurable Standard 2).
✓ Surveys are an important tool for the Athletics Departments to monitor student-athlete concerns and identify problems.
✓ The surveys help improve student-athlete welfare.

The committee is concerned that the response rate for the surveys is not high enough to have reliable, useful, and comprehensive data:

✓ The goal for a response rate from student-athletes on each team should be 95% or higher. For some teams the response rate was as low as 25%. While the electronic survey form has made the whole process more convenient for the students, it has also made it easier for them to avoid it than the old-fashioned paper method, where everyone was sat down in the same room.
✓ The cooperation of each team’s head coach is necessary to achieve high response rates. It is hoped coaches will come to agree that the survey process helps identify important concerns of student-athletes leading to a better run Athletics Department and more successful athletic program.
The cooperation of academic advisors might be solicited in order to increase response rates.

If the electronic survey process is continued, procedures should be implemented to ensure that the student-athletes complete the surveys, such as not being able to practice, register or (in the case of incomplete Exit Interviews) a hold placed on future transcript request without completing program evaluations and exit interviews.

The committee is also concerned that the data that is collected be used in the most effective way.

While the SurveyMonkey software allows a quick and effective way of viewing the composite results for any team in any given year, it doesn't allow tracking of the students' responses from year to year in order to see if there had been any improvement or decline. Not all of the questions are amenable to that sort of analysis, but those on which the students are asked to evaluate the coaches, among others, could be compared from year to year. It also doesn't allow the results from different teams on questions that apply to facilities that are shared by all, such as the training room, to be combined into a single overall assessment. More thought needs to be given to preserving and analyzing the results in a usable form.

The committee was also unsure who got to see the results of the evaluations since there was no efficient way of tabulating them. For instance, there was no evidence that the results on the questions about the support staff – the Training Room, Strength and Conditioning, Compliance, Student Services, Academics – were ever shared with the people who were concerned. Nor was it clear that the results on the questions regarding compliance with the 20-hour rule were shared in any regular way with the Compliance Director.

The committee did not speak to the administrators who oversee the different sports to ask how the survey information was used. It can only assume that the administrators know how to access the survey site and that the results are shared with the coaches in some way. The committee was informed that the Associate Athletics Director/Senior Woman Administrator oversaw the exit interview process, but it does not know to what extent she shares the results of her interviews with the other administrators, with the coaches, or with the relevant staff.

On the whole, while the committee felt that important improvements had been made, the Department had not yet created a system that resulted in a broad enough student response, nor had it found an efficient or effective way of using the information that it gathered. Given the seriousness of some of the students' concerns (see the next section), the committee felt that the Department needed to work harder to make sure that their voices were effectively heard.

In the instances in which a student indicated that he or she wished to discuss the evaluation in person, the committee hopes very much that this is done.

2. Program Reviews

The 2011 Improvement Plan charged the AAB Committee on Diversity and Student-Athlete Welfare with reviewing the student-athletes’ Program Evaluations and Exit Interviews and preparing an annual report for the Athletics Director and the Chancellor.

The committee members divided up the teams and examined the program evaluations and exit interviews for the preceding twelve months.

The committee's review revealed that across all teams, students reported to have had an overall positive experience as a student-athlete this past season (Question 20). Overall, responses reflect that the majority of student athletes indicated that coaches met most of their expectations and reported satisfactory support for academics. Aside from concerns from the water sports teams and the sanitary conditions of the locker rooms very few reported a health or safety concern.

However, the committees review revealed areas that should be looked into further, which may need to be addressed by appropriate administrators or units. We don't feel that it is appropriate to point to
issues raised on particular teams or with regard to particular coaches in this report, which may become public, but we do want to point out that the students on some teams did raise serious concerns about certain coaches’ behavior, particularly with regard to their perceived fairness and their ability to communicate effectively with the team. (In most cases, to be completely fair, the students had high praise for their coach.)

Additionally, the following issues appeared in the responses from more than a single team:

- Dirty, moldy, and unsanitary locker rooms are a frequent complaint.
- The students also seem to feel that the laundry system is inadequate. This is a new complaint, not commonly observed in the past, but this year a significant number of students mentioned that the “clean” laundry was still smelly and in some cases still seemed unclean.
- Student on some teams had complaints about the adequacy of their apparel and gear.
- Some students mentioned problems with the upkeep of their facilities and with the accessibility on weekends of both their practice facilities and the academic center.
- On certain teams, a significant number of students reported that they felt that “voluntary” activities that went beyond the 20-hour NCAA maximum were actually required.
- The students on certain teams indicated a significantly lower level of support for academics than on others.

The committee also noted that the level of awareness of the Emergency Medical Plan varied widely from team to team (see section 4 below).

3. Updating the website

The Self-Study report noted the need to make student-athletes more aware of the contents of the Student-Athlete Handbook. One of the recommendations included in the Improvement Plan was that the Department “create a drop-down menu for ‘Current Student-Athletes’ on the Athletics Department website, with links to new web pages with critical information on topics such as eligibility, amateurism, and compliance issues, and a link to the Student-Athlete Handbook.” As of the date of the 2012 report, none of this had been accomplished, and the Committee added another recommendation, “that the Department abandon the current pdf format and create an electronic version of the Handbook as an interactive webpage where a single authorized version would always be available for updating and revision.”

It still appears that nothing has been done.

The committee assembled a small group of students from the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee to examine the Department website <hawaiiathletics.com> and to offer suggestions for improving its usefulness for student-athletes.

Some of their initial observations were identical to those that had been made in the past:

- At the top of the home page, there is still no tab for student-athletes, though there is one for “Fans” and for “Recruits.” A short menu of links for student-athletes has been placed under the “Athletics Department” tab, but none of the student-athletes we spoke to had thought of looking there.
- The first of the five links on that menu is for the Student-Athlete Handbook. It leads to a single 76-page MS Word document that can only be used if one scrolls through page by page. No internal links are provided, either in the Table of Contents or in the Index.
The second link, “Academic Services,” leads to a page with a brief description of Student-Athlete Academic Services that appears to have been lifted from a media guide, and it is of no use to student-athletes. It contains a link for the “Student-Athlete Academic Services website” which leads, however, to an old page with a bunch of dead links. It does not lead to the site that SAAS actively maintains that appears as the homepage on the Nagatani Center computers.

The third link, “Student Affairs Office,” also leads to a page of text from a media guide. It contains two links, for “Recruiting Checklist” and “Transcript Evaluation Request Form.” These are intended for coaches, not for student-athletes, and both are out-of-date.

The fourth link, for “Student-Athlete Ticket Sign-up,” leads to another page that is out-of-date, because it appears to be intended for student-athletes who wish to attend games for which admission is charged in other sports. As students, they are no longer required to pay for admission anyway.

The fifth link is for the Manoa campus home page, which is useful, but not of highest priority, and not what a student-athlete might be looking for at this site.

The Compliance Office has put together a page of information on NCAA rules for student-athletes, but it is currently found under the tab for “Recruits,” along with the separate page of compliance information for boosters.

The student-athletes made the following suggestions:

- Create a tab for Student-Athletes. If there is not enough room, the students suggested that the current tab for “Shop” could be dropped and that a large, more visible button could be placed on the home page, perhaps where the button for “Student Information” is now.

- The “Fans” tab should perhaps be “Students and Fans.” There should be a link there for the Manoa Maniacs (there is none now). There should also be a link to the page of information for boosters that the Compliance Office has created.

- Most of the links currently listed under “Fans” are for Facebook and Twitter pages. These should be deleted here, and included instead as buttons on the list of Sports, as is done at the University of Colorado Athletics Department website [http://www.cubuffs.com/] and others that the students examined.

- If more room is needed, the “Multimedia” tab could perhaps be placed under “Students and Fans.” The “Multimedia” menu should also contain a link to the UH Productions page, or perhaps to the videos on specific sports that UH Productions has created. (Someone would have to keep these links up-to-date.)

- Use the drop-down menu from the Student-Athletes tab as a central location for the links that student-athletes actually need.

- Place an interactive copy of the current Student-Athlete Handbook on one link. Take advantage of the opportunity offered by the web format to make the information that the Handbook contains more accessible than it is in its printed form.

- Under “Academic Services,” provide a page with links to the Nagatani Center homepage and to the Travel Letters site. If possible, provide a link to the site on which the student-athletes record their attendance at study hall, so that they can check their hours from off-campus locations.
✓ Under “Student Affairs,” provide a page with links to the forms that Student Affairs requires from the student-athletes; for instance, applications for summer school, for scholarship renewal, for Student-Athlete Opportunity Funds, etc. Include the deadlines.

✓ Create a link to the Compliance page for student-athletes that is currently located under “Recruits.” Update and expand this page to cover all of the information that the Compliance Director conveys during the annual NCAA meeting.

✓ Create a separate menu item for the ACS website (where the student-athletes report their practice schedules). Include links to any forms that the Compliance Director requires the student-athletes to fill out, which are now transmitted by email.

✓ Consider the possibility of creating new pages for the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and/or the Student-Athlete Development Office.

✓ Either update or eliminate the page for student-athlete ticket sign-up.

The student-athletes that we spoke to had ideas that went beyond making the site useful for themselves. One suggested that including links to pictures of fans might be a valuable promotional device. The same student pointed out that in the description of the facilities, no one had thought to include directions on how to get to the Waipio Soccer Complex. Some had looked at other schools’ sites for ideas. One saw a countdown to the next big game that he thought was a particularly effective way of getting attention.

But with reference to their own needs, the student-athletes felt in brief that the website needed to be both more complete and more logically organized. They wanted to see all of the information that they might be looking for in a single, centralized location, and they felt a real opportunity was being neglected.

4. Emergency Medical Plan

The Improvement Plan notes that “Student-athletes are largely unaware of the emergency medical plan for their venue,” and the 2012 Report indicated that no progress had been made on correcting this deficiency. It also noted the need to update both the Emergency Medical Plans (which describe how to handle injuries to athletes) and the Emergency Evacuation Plans (which concern the fans in the stands) to include all of our venues.

The Committee examined chapter 13 of the Athletics Department Manual, and it found that it provided detailed and comprehensive Emergency Medical Plans for each practice and competition site.

It is less persuaded, however, that the contents of these plans are communicated effectively to the student-athletes. The Program Evaluation form asks the students (in question 35) “Were you informed of and aware of the Emergency Medical Plan (EMP)?” Responses varied. On one team, only one-third of the students said “yes.” One committee member counted 51 of 84 students who replied with “no.” Current efforts to inform students about their respective emergency medical plan and/or retain the information are not as successful as they could be.

5. Student-athlete use of personal cars

The Self-Study report noted that “Athletics Department policy regarding student-athletes’ use of personal vehicles is unclear,” and the 2012 Report indicated that no clear policy had yet been formulated.

The committee found that no progress had been made in this area in 2014.
The Sailing team brings 25-30 students to its off-campus practices. It uses two university vans, which hold 7 passengers each. The remaining students travel in their own cars or catch rides with teammates. The Men’s Golf team is prohibited from using university vehicles because of abuse of the privilege by team members (who have long since graduated) in the past. They too are required to arrange for transportation on their own, either in their own cars or by riding with teammates.

**The committee in concerned about equity, liability, and the safety of the student-athletes.** It doesn’t seem fair that some teams get transportation to their practice sites and others don’t, or that students who are providing rides to others are not compensated in some way for their costs. More importantly, while the students who drive university vehicles must be approved in advance, there is no prescreening of the students who give rides to others in their own cars, and in the event of an accident, there is no certainty that passengers would be covered by the appropriate insurance.

**The committee recommends that the Department examine this issue and that it formulate a policy that provides the same level of transportation support to all student-athletes, that places greater responsibility for transportation upon the coaches, and that places highest priority upon the safety of the student-athletes.**