Howard University Department of Athletics

Intercollegiate Athletics Support Services
Assistance for At-Risk Student Athletes

Prepared by the

Office of Institutional Assessment and Evaluation
“Working together to create a culture of evidence-based decision making…”

Gerunda B. Hughes, Ph.D., Director

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Intercollegiate Athletics Support Services

Assistance For At-Risk Student-Athletes

The Identification of At-Risk Student-Athletes (Questions 1 and 6)

Student athletes, like students in the undergraduate general population, may be at-risk for academic underachievement or failure. To identify incoming freshmen students who may be at risk, Howard University uses the results of various types of assessments to determine the level at which students would begin their course-taking. The assessment data are used to make placement decisions for English and mathematics. For example, the English Department uses the results of the writing section of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) to make decisions about placement in CAR-Verbal, English 002 or English 003. Student-athletes who score at or below the score cut are placed in CAR-Verbal. These student athletes are at-risk of academic underachievement in college writing and grammar. Similarly, student athletes who take the mathematics placement test and score at or below the prescribed cut-score are placed in CAR-Mathematics. These students are at-risk of academic underachievement in college mathematics. Student athletes whose score place them in CAR-Verbal or CAR-Mathematics must also take CAR-Study Skills. Student athletes must satisfactorily complete (80% mastery of knowledge and skills) all CAR courses before enrolling in regular college courses -- English 002 or College Algebra I. Student athletes as well as all other students who enroll in English 002 are given a diagnostic writing assessment to measure areas of strength and weakness. No diagnostic test is given in College Algebra I.

Student athletes who are upperclassmen are classified as “at-risk” based on their grade point averages, personal profile or a coach’s recommendation. Student athletes whose grade point average is 2.0 – 2.5 are monitored to prevent academic probation.

Support Services for At-Risk Student-Athletes (Questions 2-5, 7, 8)

Howard University makes support services available to all students in the general population, at-risk or not, through the Center for Academic Reinforcement, the Howard University Counseling Center, and the Office of Special Student Services. In particular, the Center for Academic Reinforcement offers the course, “College Study Skills” to help students who may be at risk of academic underachievement or failure to increase their chances of success in college. The course is designed for students to develop or improve their learning and study skills: the “why’s” as well as the “how-to’s” of effective methods and strategies such as goal setting and time management that have been shown to lead to success and confidence in college. Emphasis is on practice and application of the skills for college, career, and lifelong learning. According to the syllabus, the course enables students to achieve and maintain success in his/her college course-work. The Howard University Counseling Center provides a variety of counseling and psychological services to students to help them meet challenges in learning and contribute to their total development. Services include individual consultations, group counseling, diagnostic testing, drug education, and information dissemination. The Office of Special Student Services provides special services for new students, accommodations for students with disabilities, and also programs supporting military students.
In addition, student athletes are provided support services by the Athletics Department. These support services include orientation sessions, tutorial assistance, mandatory personal academic counseling sessions on a monthly basis, and study hall. Student athletes are made aware of these services from the time of their initial enrollment at Howard and throughout their matriculation. Knowledge of these support services are communicated by personal academic meetings with athletic academic advisors, freshman orientation, team meetings with coaches, the Student Athlete Handbook, and the tutorial handbook.

**Staffing for At-Risk Student-Athletes (Questions 9 and 10)**

A variety of staff are available to provide academic assistance to at-risk student athletes. They serve as learning assistants, mentors and tutors. They include instructors in the Center for Academic Reinforcement, professors in the School of Education, and peer tutors. Peer tutors must be upperclassmen, juniors or seniors, who have at least a grade point average of 3.0. The staff to student ratio is unknown.

**Policies Regarding the At-Risk Status of Student-Athletes (Questions 11 and 13)**

*Study Time*: Student athletes are not expected to remain in an “at-risk” status. Several policies and practices are implemented to move them to “regular” status. The Athletic Department requires at risk student athletes to log a minimum of 6 hours per week in study hall or with tutors. Some coaches require more than the minimum number of hours.

*Academic Probation*: Each school/college has its own policies regarding academic probation posted on its respective website. Generally, good academic standing requires that a student maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. A student incurs probation when his/her cumulative grade point average falls below that required for “good academic standing.” A student who is on academic probation may enroll in no more than 12 credit hours in a single semester; is denied financial aid; and cannot participate in any athletic-related activities as a student-athlete.

**Summer Bridge Programs (Question 14)**

Several summer bridge programs are offered at Howard University. A freshman orientation program is sponsored by the Center for Academic Reinforcement. All new students, including new student-athletes, are invited to attend a residential 4-day program. Other summer bridge programs are more extensive. For example, the School of Business sponsors a 2-week summer bridge program in which at risk students, including at-risk student-athletes, take refresher courses in English and mathematics. At the end of the summer bridge program, participants are enrolled in college courses based on their performance in the refresher courses. Some students enroll in courses that earn them college credit to a degree while others maintain their “at-risk” status and are enrolled in courses in the Center for Academic Reinforcement. Continuing student athletes’ academic progress is monitored and recommendations about summer school are made by coaches and athletic and academic advisors. There are financial aid funds to support student-athletes who must take courses during the summer to remain on target.
Comparisons of the Academic Profiles of Student-Athletes with the General Student Body at Howard University (Question 12)

Question 12: How do the academic profiles of at-risk student-athletes compare to student-athletes, at-risk students and the general student body at Howard University?

By definition, “at-risk” students face a greater probability of academic failure than students who are not “at-risk”. To answer the aforementioned question, we examined two indicators of students’ academic profiles: combined SAT scores (which are used as part of an index to determine the level of “at-riskness”) and graduation rates.

*Combined SAT Scores*

The line graphs in Figure 1 show the mean SAT scores for four groups of students – male students, male athletes, female students and female athletes -- over three consecutive academic years beginning in 2005-06. The graphs indicate that male and female student-athletes had lower combined SAT scores than their counterparts in the general study body in every year. This information suggests that, as a group, student-athletes may be at greater risk of academic underachievement during their first year at the University than their counterparts.

![Figure 1](image-url)

The graphs in Figure 1 also indicate that there are different patterns of performance on the SAT between male and female student-athletes and males and females in the general student body. Among students in the general student body, female performance on SAT is consistently lower than male performance for each academic year shown. On the other hand, superior performance on the SAT alternates between male and female student-athletes across the years.
Graduation Rates

The second indicator for assessing comparisons of academic profiles among students is the graduation rate. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the graduation rates for male and female in the general student body compared to the graduation rates for male and female student-athletes for three consecutive academic years beginning in 2004-05. The graphs indicate that for two of the three years (2005-06 and 2006-07), the graduation rates for male and female student-athletes exceeded those for males and females in the general student body.

Figure 2

Howard University Male Graduation Rates by Academic Year

Figure 3

Howard University Female Graduation Rates by Academic Year

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Finally, Figure 4 shows the graduation rates for students in the general student body (students overall) compared to the graduation rates for student-athletes for three consecutive years beginning in 2004-05. These graphs represent the aggregation of data presented in Figures 2 and 3. Therefore, consistent with those results, for two of the three years shown, the graduation rates of student-athletes exceeded those of the general student body (students overall).

The performance of student-athletes at graduation in comparison to their performance at the beginning of their matriculation is evidence that academic support programs, such as tutoring services, academic advising, etc. that are implemented by Athletic Department are successful.

**Figure 4**

![Howard University Student Graduation Rates by Academic Year](image)

**Individuals interviewed:** academic support services staff, coaches.