

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

INTEGRATION OF ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC PROGRAMS

In accordance with the ACM, Lake Forest College held three campus meetings during the 2009 spring semester to encourage campus-wide dialogue about integration. Approximately 40 faculty and staff members provided feedback with representation from a variety of disciplines.

In assessing the dialogue, it became quickly evident that Lake Forest College athletics has a strong history of campus integration and continues to advance each year by developing new programs and traditions. As demonstrated below, our campus has implemented many activities and policies, some unique to Lake Forest and some considered “best practices” by the NCAA and other colleges and universities.

- Missed class time document
- Athletic community conduct and drug policy
- Academic Commitment to Excellence program
- Study tables/progress reports
- Coaches and/or staff involvement with the Early Action Student Support Team (EASST), which assists at-risk students by providing an integrated action plan
- Promote athletics and athletic programs via faculty and staff emails
- Faculty/Staff versus students softball game
- Community service events (food drive, toy drive, etc)
- Campus-wide spring educational program
- Forester Fanatics/F.A.N. Club
- Community Engagement (Playing for a Cure)
- Homecoming t-shirt sales
- Homecoming activities (pep rally, volleyball contest, etc)
- Alumni games
- Faculty/Staff appreciation events
- Faculty/Staff workout opportunities (classes)
- Coaches and/or staff involvement in campus committees and searches
- Coaches attend faculty and administrative staff meetings
- Athletic staff and student-athletes support various campus lectures, events, and activities (Drag Show, MLK speaker, Symposium, Holiday Luncheon, etc.)
- Student Symposium – athletics panel
- Coaches and staff participate in admissions fairs/preview days
- Faculty/Staff members work game management at athletic contests (announcers, clock, scoreboard, etc)
- College choir and pep band perform the national anthem and spirit songs at athletic contests
- Departmental liaisons (Admissions, Alumni/Development, Gates Center for Leadership and Involvement)

While there was much praise and pride surrounding the above initiatives, it also became quite clear that there is a need for continual assessment and communication regarding athletic integration since the campus changes annually in leadership and staffing. Not surprising, athletic scheduling and communication surrounding contests and practices remain the largest campus concerns. Both professors and coaches expressed frustration when messaging is misconstrued, be it from student-athlete to coach or student-athlete to professor. A great example of this is “captain’s practices”. Although these practices are optional, students frequently tell their professors that they must attend these ‘mandatory’ practice sessions or they will not make a team. The irony of this situation is that coaches are not involved, or in many cases, even aware of what their captains are doing since rules prohibit them from being involved outside of the playing season parameters. What became clear is that messaging to captains and to faculty about these activities needed more attention. The athletic department needs to communicate more clearly with the team captains and faculty about expectations surrounding these practices. In turn, the captains need to ensure that students understand that their pre and post season activities are optional and faculty need to communicate to student-athletes that although they understand their desire to improve their athletic likelihood for success, they are fully aware of the athletic expectations for captain’s practices and that missing any academic activity

for them is prohibited. Another example of the need for continued assessment and dialogue related to the newly established Missed Class Time Document that was created to enhance communication between student-athletes and professors concerning any class time missed due to competition. The document, while well received, had a couple procedural glitches. One was that students were asking to have their schedules reviewed at inopportune times for faculty and the second was there was not a duplicate copy provided for faculty. Both of these have easy “fixes”, if you will, but the communication to provide impetus for change was critical.

Attendance of faculty and staff at campus events, whether athletic-related or not, was the second priority of conversation on our campus. Attendance by faculty and staff at athletic contests is a big deal for student-athletes (and coaches) and while campus support is good, there is certainly room for improvement. Faculty and staff feel stressed about all they are being asked to do and many times, returning for an evening or weekend contest, although desired, is difficult given schedules and commutes. The Lake Forest campus culture has changed through the years with more professors and staff now residing in Chicago and commuting (approximately one hour) to Lake Forest. There was agreement that it is not acceptable for faculty and staff on a small residential campus to be inactive or uninterested in co-curricular activities. Much discussion ensued about ways to get faculty and staff more involved with co-curricular campus life. Take-away suggestions ranged from simple suggestions like more ‘kid-friendly’ events or arranging for train shuttle service during the winter months to more controversial ones like making co-curricular attendance more meaningful in annual faculty and staff reviews.

The following sections outline the wide range of suggestions given to improve integration at Lake Forest College:

Communication: Between Faculty and Coaches

Short-Term Suggestions:

- No practices held on Chicago Day during orientation
- Integrate athletics more in student orientation planning
- Have an athletic representative at new faculty orientation
 - o Explain policies and Division III philosophy
- Host an exclusive social athletic event for new faculty
 - o BBQ, picnic, etc.
- Athletic-related topics at faculty luncheon delivered by a faculty member
 - o Homework in the classroom is equal to drills in practice
 - o Explain policies
 - o Skills transfer
- Develop a master calendar with all outside classroom events (field trips, athletics, concert, etc.)

Long-Term Suggestions:

- Hold a seminar or symposium on student-athlete identity (how they are/ who they are)
- Have faculty and staff members act as teaching partners for first-year studies classes (currently being tested)
- Assign coach liaisons for new faculty/staff
- Faculty/Athletic Staff skills seminar
 - o Coaches discuss how they motivate athletes, particularly low-performing athletes
 - o Faculty discuss their classroom goals and how they relate to athletic goal-setting
 - o Integrate sport analogies in the classroom
 - o Bring the concept of team into the classroom

Communication: Between Student-Athletes and Faculty

Short-Term Suggestions:

- Buddy System
 - o Assign student-athlete & non-athlete partners in class
 - o Identify volunteer students to share notes and get handouts for student-athletes when they miss class for contests
- Missed Class Time Documents
 - o Mandate office hour meetings to obtain signatures
 - o Provide an opportunity for professors to obtain a duplicate copy of the form

Faculty/Staff Involvement

Short-Term Suggestions:

- Personal invitation from student-athletes to events
- Kid-friendly events/consideration of day-care opportunities
- Professors wear jerseys before homecoming
- Faculty Involvement Award
- “A” Team Dinner
 - o Invite faculty
- Some sort of a faculty adoption by teams and/or coaches
- Recognize commuting faculty and staff
 - o Shuttles to and from train
- Multiple events on the same day

Long-Term Suggestions:

- Recognize community involvement on faculty and staff evaluations

Miscellaneous

Short-Term Suggestions:

- Make sure majors are listed on the website and in game programs
- “A” Team
 - o Develop an “A” Team poster, similar to the Sportsmanship poster that currently exists
 - o Display “A” Team on website and other athletic publications

Long-Term Suggestions:

- Evening Classes
 - o Reestablish designated slots
 - o ‘Mandatory’ classes on one night per week (Monday) with electives on the other (Wednesday)

In closing, Lake Forest had great dialogue on campus integration last spring. Several of the above suggestions have already been implemented or are currently in the works this fall. Our “take-away” piece from the dialogue is that we need to keep communication, open and honest dialogue amongst faculty, staff, student-athletes, and coaches, about campus integration a campus priority.