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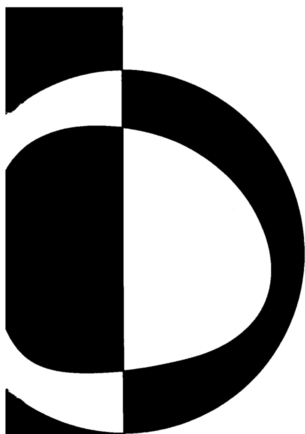

Michael Rifenburg

Supporting Student-Athlete Writers: A Case Study of a Division I Athletics Writing Center and NCAA Academic Mandates

This article highlights programmatic and pedagogical challenges of tutoring student-athlete writers based on the author's experiences in a Division I athletics writing center. Pulling from interviews with athletics department personnel—including the director of athletics—and textual analysis of policy documents, the author offers how stakeholders at various levels perceive and enact student-athlete writing tutoring. Tutoring practices resulted from the NCAA's principle directed toward academics: Principle 2.5 found in the NCAA manual for Division I Athletics. This principle is mainly concerned with compliance and led to unproductive methods of working with student-athlete writers. The center productively revised these methods by forming intra-institutional alliances with campus WPAs, particularly campus-wide writing center administrators. This article highlights the importance of using the collective capacity of those invested in writing to improve writing-related services for student-athletes, and it suggests implications for writing center administrators, staff, and tutors working with student-athlete writers.

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... The admission, academic standing and academic progress of student-athletes shall be consistent with the policies and standards adopted by the Institution for the student body in general.

— 2012–2013 NCAA Division I manual, Principles of Conduct of Intercollegiate Athletics, 2.5 The Principle of Sound Academic Standards

If you think about what we [the athletics department] *are doing, there is nothing more important than having anything and everything we do reflect back on the number one priority and that is creating the best atmosphere for student-athlete academic success.*

— Ralph Smargin, Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics, Director of Athletics[1]

When I started working at the athletics writing center for a Division I research university, which I call Mid-south University (MU), the center offered student-athletes dreary writing-related services. Fearful of committing a National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) violation, MU athletics writing center staff required student-athletes to submit their papers via email. A tutor would upload the paper to Turnitin.com, print off and staple the Turnitin.com report to the paper. Then in green pen and with the student-athlete not present, the tutor would mark the paper according to a coding system printed on laminated lime-green paper: "awk" for awkward phrasing, "#" for insert space, "sub/verb" for subject-verb disagreement, and so on.

When the student-athlete writer returned, they would sit down with a writing tutor, often not the same one who marked the paper, and the tutor would explain the markings. Like the drill-and-practice exercises which Neal Lerner (1998) writes were features of the laboratory approach to writing instruction in the early part of the twentieth century, these student-athlete tutoring sessions employed a systemized approach to bettering writing, not writers. The tutor would then file a copy of the paper and the Turnitin.com report to document the session in case of an internal or external investigation into potential academic misconduct. Some within the athletics department understood collaborative dialogue between writer and tutor as more effective for literate development, but dialogue is challenging to document. As such, the

1 I gave participants the option of pseudonyms. All declined; however, as is typical with research on institutional history and programmatic development, I opted not to use the name of the school, and, therefore, gave my research participants pseudonyms.

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athletics writing center—a space cut off from campus-wide conversations on student writing—embraced rote, hierarchical tutoring.

In this case study, the issue is how stakeholders at various levels within the MU Athletics Department perceive and enact student-athlete tutoring services within the athletics writing center and how the athletics writing center formed intra-institutional alliances with campus WPAs in hopes of bettering these services. Through in-person and email interviews with three central stakeholders and textual analysis of documents outlining policy and procedures within this level II CRLA-certified MU athletics writing center, I show the center initially handcuffed itself to outdated methods of working with student-athlete writers because of a zealous (yet understandable) commitment to preventing NCAA academic misconduct. These outdated methods contrast with more effective methods for working with writers. Moreover, these methods occurred under the disinterested gaze of the NCAA and the increasingly distrustful gaze of the public. Though the NCAA loudly bangs the drums of academic integrity and reform, their over 400-page, spiral bound, 2012–2013 NCAA manual for Division I athletics offers only one principle directed toward academics: Principle 2.5, a portion of which I quoted in the epigraph.[2] The NCAA places the responsibility of academic policy creation, implementation, and enforcement onto individual institutions through the vague construction of this principle. At MU, the result was ineffective and under-theorized student-athlete writing support. Yet the MU athletics writing center productively improved student-athlete writing support through forming intra-institutional alliances with campus WPAs.

This case study illustrates the importance of using the collective capacity of those invested in writing to better the writing-related services for student-athletes, while still adhering to NCAA academic mandates. I begin with a brief overview of the historically mercurial relationship between college athletics and academics in American higher education, with particular attention to the rise of separate academic services for student-athletes. Next, consistent with the case study research design, I turn to my methodology and methods and offer my findings in two overarching categories: discourses on *prevention* and *improvement.* I then

2 While I focus on Division I, the NCAA also publishes a manual for Division II and III. These manuals also reserve a single principle for academics. All are available as a free download at NCAApublications.com. As of my writing this footnote (summer of 2015), the NCAA has published the 2015–2016 manual. Principle 2.5 and the wording of this principle remain the same as when I quoted from the 2012–2013 manual at the start of my research.

move into how forming intra-institutional alliances countered these discourses and resultant student-athlete writing center services. I end by discussing four implications for writing center scholars and scholarship and place my case study within Jackie Grutsch McKinney's *Peripheral Visions for Writing Center* (2013), in which she calls for an expanded gaze of writing center work. Advocating across American higher education for stronger writing support for our 463,202 student-athletes (NCAA Research, 2013) responds to this call.

Separate Academic Services: A Brief History

Separate student-athlete academic services occur because the multibillion dollar industry of college sports grew alongside yet distinct from the general academic mission of American higher education. This parallel yet distinct growth signals the historically mercurial relationship between athletics and academics. Briefly exploring this relationship provides a foundation for understanding the current state of student-athlete writing centers, particularly within high-revenue Division I schools, and for understanding the challenges facing those wishing to advocate for more effective methods for working with student-athlete writers within a student-athlete writing center or a campus-wide writing center.

Initially, college sports were an extracurricular, student-driven pastime. Yet, from 1890–1910, historian John R. Thelin (2004) writes "the prototypical athletic association underwent a transformation [through a] professionalization of the staff, namely the hiring of an athletic director and coaching staff" (p. 178). The professionalization of college sports altered the landscape of higher education and opened the door for alumni and boosters to also gain control of the trajectory of college sports because of what historian Frederick Rudolph (1968) describes as "student ineffectiveness and faculty indifference" (pp. 382–83). With alumni dollars pouring in, athletics grew and university personnel gained control with the help of alumni and boosters. Thelin describes how Walter Camp, Yale head football coach from 1888 to 1892, diverted monies from smaller revenue sports to football. Through these tactics, Camp deployed an "entrepreneurial strategy that allowed a coach and athletics director to gain leverage over both student groups and academic officials" (Thelin, 2004, p. 179). At the University of Chicago, Amos Alonzo Stagg, Camp's disciple, procured the position of athletic director, a tenured faculty position, a departmental budget exempted from customary internal review, and a direct line of reporting to the president (Thelin, 2004, p. 179). Questionable decisions like these by Stagg and Camp, plus increased safety concerns over the brutality of

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football, led President Charles Eliot of Harvard in 1892 and President Harry Garfield of Williams College in 1908 to call for the banishment of football (Lucas, 1994, p. 178). University presidents were sounding warning bells regarding athletics—sounds which faculty largely ignored—and soon Americans believed a university's mission was to field a football team (Rudolph, 1968, p. 387), a statement just as true today as it was at the turn of the twentieth century.

The NCAA's founding in 1906 continued the professionalization of college sports. Now in the twenty-first century, thanks largely to television revenue and the annual men's basketball tournament, the NCAA reports $895,903,008 in total assets according to an independent auditor's consolidated financial report prepared for the NCAA (*National Collegiate Athletic Association and Subsidiaries*, 2015). In fiscal year 2013–2014, the NCAA allocated $193.6 million to a "Basketball Fund" for conferences to divide among their member-schools based on performance in the men's basketball tournament and allocated $98.1 million to use on Division I Championship events; the NCAA allocated only $26.1 million to academics ("Investing Where It Matters," 2016). A brief glance at these numbers signifies what many within higher education already know: Despite more and more athletics programs operating in the red, college sports are big-business.[3]

In hopes of protecting this business model, many schools implement separate student life and academic services for their student-athletes. The Rankin M. Smith, Sr., Student-Athlete Academic Center at the University of Georgia, the Committed to an Athlete's Total Success program at the University of Arizona, and the Drew and Brittany Brees Student-Athlete Academic Center at Purdue are just a few Division I universities directing resources to separate academic services for their highly-valued student-athletes.

While allocating resources to support only student-athletes may carry social and scholastic benefits, William Broussard (2004) suggests this practice leads to "[student-athlete's] geographical... balkanization" (p. 12). Such balkanization can be countered, Broussard holds, through "opening... channels of communication" between athletics departments and WPAs in hopes of "develop[ing] ways to help student-athletes develop critical conscious... [and] pride in... their academic work" (p.

3 To be fair, the NCAA does allocate the most money ($193.6 million) to "Sports Sponsorship and Scholarship Funds." Aware that many athletic departments lose money, the NCAA provides funding to keep some programs afloat. How much of the $193 million is specifically directed to scholarships—and, thus, loosely tied to academics—is unclear from the NCAA's webpage.

12). I agree with Broussard, and the case-study offered here not only illustrates the unfortunate outcome of student-athlete balkanization in regards to writing support but also the positive outcome of Broussard's suggestion of opening communication channels between (often) insular athletics departments and campus WPAs.

Methodology

Social constructionist theory frames this study's methodology. Social constructionist theory views meaning as arising through the interaction of people and historically situated contexts (Blakeslee & Fleischer, 2010; Mertens, 2010). Such a theory allows for situating stakeholder's responses within the larger (social, historical, and cultural) context in which they arose (Merriam, 1998). From this framework, I designed a single-bounded case study because, according to Bruce L. Berg (2009), such a research design involves "systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions" (p. 317). This case is bounded spatially (MU Athletics Writing Center) and temporally (Spring 2013). Following IRB approval and guided by the CCCC Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies, I began data collection in the spring of 2013.[4]

Setting. I collected data at a public Division I research university, which I call Mid-south University (MU). The Carnegie Foundation classifies MU as a Research University/High Activity. With roughly 30,000 total students and an endowment of over $1.4 billion, this doctoral granting university prides itself on academics. When I began my data collection, according to the MU Office of Institutional Research and Reporting, 4,052 first-time freshmen entered with an average ACT score of 25.5, and an average SAT score of 1186. 32.7% graduated in the top ten-percent of their high school class.

MU also prides itself on its athletic success. With 19 varsity sports, MU has notched 27 national championship trophies in men's and women's sports and has a wealth of student life and academic services dedicated solely to their roughly 600 student-athletes. The athletics writing center is one of these services. According to an organization chart found via MU's Office of Institutional Research and Reporting, the athletics writing center is organized within Athletic Academic

4 The Guidelines have been updated since I began data collection. I include the updated link in my references.

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Services and Student Life, which includes the psychological resources office, career center, academic advising, academic services, and a variety of other offices and resources. In total, Athletic Academic Services and Student Life covers 30,000 square feet on the second and third floor of the football stadium. The athletics writing center is a relatively small space on the second floor with five round tables with twenty chairs and a table lining the wall on top of which are four desktop computers. Four cubicles, used by graduate assistants, line the back wall. Two enclosed offices occupied by full-time staff face the only door in and out of the space. At the time of data collection, four writing tutors worked in the athletics writing center. Three of the four were students (two graduate students and one undergraduate) and one was a community member.

Student-athletes are welcome to visit the campus-wide writing center. That said, most prefer the proximity of the athletics writing center. Unlike the MU campus-wide writing center, the athletics writing center does not position itself as a space where student-athletes can freely write and study. The center does not hold events throughout the semester, offer water, tea, or coffee to writers, or advertise their services in the campus newspaper and various social media outlets. They don't need to seek out writers; writers (i.e., *student-athlete* writers) are required to use the services. Once a writing tutoring session is complete, tutors ask student-athletes to leave.

Data collection. This case study reports interviews I conducted with three participants within the athletics department: the athletics director, the tutorial coordinator, and a writing center tutor. These participants represented various levels of experience with writing centers. I offered all my participants the option of email or face-to-face interviews. All but one (the athletics director) opted for the email interview. Four open-ended prompts guided the interviews. I offered these prompts as potential questions for brainstorming and stressed that participants could answer one or all of the questions. I also collected text focused on policies and procedures of the athletics writing center, specifically those found within the Accelerated Learning Program and Athletics Writing Center manual, a portion of which, for full disclosure, I authored.

I consolidated my findings into two overarching categories: discourses of *prevention* and *improvement*. In the final phase of analysis, I positioned these categories with my reading of collected texts in an attempt to highlight points of connection and departure between how individuals understood and implemented the current policies and how the policies are captured in writing. Though I did not undertake formal observations, my four years of working within the space provides a third point of data. When necessary I relied on personal experience and my

own account of the workings of this space to make sense of potential disconnects between my interview transcripts and text-based data. I emailed my initial draft to my three participants to ensure I was fairly representing the space and their responses. The tutorial coordinator alone responded and with brief, positive feedback.

Focal participants. Using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2014; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014), I interviewed three individuals who represented the MU Athletics Department at various levels: Ralph Smargin, the athletics director, Charlotte Carren, the tutorial coordinator, and Patrick Hollett, a writing tutor and Ph.D. student in philosophy. A former student-athlete himself, Smargin arrived as the Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics, Director of Athletics at MU in 1998, oversaw the second renovation of the academic center in 2002, and now governs an annual self-sustaining athletics budget of nearly $100 million.[5] Under his guidance, MU developed a career center, psychological resource office, and writing center solely for student-athlete use. While Smargin has been at MU for close to two decades, Charlotte was finishing her first year as a full-time staff member prior to my data collection. Charlotte worked within athletic academic services while completing her M.Ed. degree in Adult and Higher Education with an emphasis in Intercollegiate Athletics Administration program. Following completion of her degree, Charlotte landed a full-time staff position as tutorial coordinator responsible for coordinating the student-athletes' and tutors' schedules for all subjects except math and foreign language. Charlotte oversees Patrick, who was finishing his dissertation and on the job market. Though he did not have experience as a writing tutor, his strong commitment to teaching and undergraduate learning positioned him well as one of four student-athlete writing tutors.

Researcher positionality. Reflecting on positionality, Keith Ballard (1996) argues researchers should focus "on research as an essentially human activity and... embedded in personal, social, cultural, political, historical, spiritual and gendered bodies and contexts" (p. 103). I endorse Ballard's argument and write with an awareness of how my experiences impact my research. I played soccer in high school and college and later coached a high school soccer team. My graduate work found me embedded within two different Division I athletics programs where I worked closely with student-athlete writers and wrote my thesis and dissertation on student-athlete literacy. I subsequently completed a

5 According to a 2013 *USA Today* article, MU is one of eight out of 228 total public Division I universities with a self-sustaining athletic department (Berkowitz, Upton, & Brady, 2013).

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year-long case study of the learning practices of the basketball players at my current institution, the University of North Georgia. In collecting data for this article, I undertook what Corrine Glesne (1999) calls "*backyard* research" (pp. 26–28) as I researched an athletics department where I worked for close to four years as a program development coordinator. In this position, I was responsible for the hiring and training of writing tutors and working closely with the tutorial coordinator on day-to-day student-athlete and tutor scheduling. Additionally, I took a graduate class taught by Smargin, who became a mentor for my work within college sports. These collective experiences have no doubt colored my interpretation of the data. As Ballard (1996) rightly asserts, research is an "essentially human activity" (p. 103). Yet, my hope is that through hearing the voices of various staff members and filtering these voices through the key documents within this space, I can begin to balance the biases I bring to the site of study.

Findings

Discourses of prevention. The central goal of the MU Athletics Writing Center is avoidance of academic misconduct. Policies and practices dictating how to work with a student-athlete writer and policies and practices describing the atmosphere in which this work will occur help achieve this central goal. As Smargin told me, "There are several ways [one] can violate NCAA rules, but the most hurtful to a program is blatant academic misconduct."[6] Such a direct statement from the athletics director trickled down to Charlotte and Patrick. Charlotte wrote that "both the NCAA and compliance [sic] have to protect the institution and its athletics department first," and Patrick used a form of the verb "to prevent" six times and the phrase "academic misconduct" four times in his written response.[7] The preventive posturing is borne at two levels: locally with the Compliance Department and nationally with the NCAA.

The Compliance Department, which Charlotte introduces, enforces these preventive responsibilities through monitoring and maintaining social media sites, coordinating potential future student-athlete

6 I have slightly edited excerpts from the in-person interview with Smargin. I omitted false starts and added punctuation and capitalization. For my complete interview transcript with Smargin, see my website mrifenburg.wordpress.com. Under "Research," click on "A Division 1 Athletics Director Speaks."

7 I only edited excerpts from written interview responses with Charlotte and Patrick to clarify pronouns when the antecedent is unclear.

campus visits, checking student-athlete daily classroom attendance, and staffing an anonymous phone line and email address to report potential violations. The nine-person Compliance Department is located one floor above the athletics writing center, populated largely by people with law backgrounds, and reports directly to the NCAA; therefore, Compliance does not appear on the organizational chart for the MU Athletics Department as found via the Office of Institutional Research and Reporting. Despite Compliance's organizational distance from the athletics writing center, their proximity to the athletics writing center allows them to hold a steady gaze on all activities within the space, lead three staff-wide meetings a year (which I detail shortly), and send periodic emails reminding all staff members not to bet on basketball tournaments or fantasy football.

The tone Compliance sets for the athletics writing center is grounded in the second-half of Compliance's vision statement found online:

> The [MU] Athletics Compliance Department will strive to decrease secondary violations through education and monitoring while remaining vigilant in our efforts to report instances where compliance was not achieved and implementing appropriate corrective measures when necessary.

The use of "vigilant" and "appropriate corrective measures" smarts of policing, not educating. Because of this policing, the athletics writing center finds itself in an odd position of responding to dictum given by Compliance, dictum given out of fear of academic misconduct and not interest in pedagogical advancement. As Charlotte mentions, "[tutors] must be cautious in offering 'too much' help" and "abiding by lengthy manuals of procedures and rules leaves no room for error for either the student-athletes or the faculty and staff members." Required compliance meetings provide an overview of the lengthy manuals and procedures Charlotte describes. I attended these meetings numerous times. The director of Compliance would walk hundreds of people in the audience—select athletics academic services staff members and all undergraduate and graduate tutors and advisors—through PowerPoint slide after slide. Compliance required us to sign a paper acknowledging our attendance and awareness of NCAA academic compliance mandates.

Patrick focuses on preventive responsibilities in his response because of the gravity of these meetings. He writes of "consequences for academic behavior," "stop academic misconduct," "preventive responsibilities," "preventive character," and so on. Patrick even writes

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that the "primary responsibility as writing tutors here is preventive." It is worth noting, however, that at times Patrick leverages "preventive" to consider accidental plagiarism and grammatical and mechanical missteps in a student-athlete's writing. For Charlotte and Smargin, preventive measures defend against academic fraud. While Patrick is on the watch for academic fraud, as well, he also looks to "fix misconceptions about plagiarism and remedy bad habits to produce better, more responsible college writers" and to "stop bad writing habits before the SA's get too far along in their college careers." Such phrases again draw attention to the drill-and-practice approach to writing instruction espoused by the athletics writing center.

During my two-hour face-to-face interview with Smargin, I expressed my concern with what I perceive to be Compliance dictating pedagogy. He replied:

> I think you raise a fair point. Compliance isn't making decisions about what we do in academic services as long as it's in compliance with the NCAA rules. And they are there to ensure there is ongoing monitoring and checks and balances in place so that someone doesn't go astray. There are several ways we can violate NCAA rules, but the most hurtful to a program is blatant academic fraud. And even as intentional as we are about integrity and trying to do the right thing, people with intent on doing something wrong can find a way to beat the system eventually... Having said that doesn't mean that [Compliance] gets involved with determining academic initiatives. If there are some that send out a threat from a compliance standpoint, we will run it by them.

I pushed a bit more in a follow-up statement: "To speak candidly, sometimes [in the athletics writing center] we are frustrated because we feel Compliance is more concerned about us not breaking rules than they are about us helping the student-athletes." Smargin replied,

> Fair question, and being very blunt, it is something we need to watch. It doesn't mean we don't want the strict compliance with the rule, and we don't want to be proactive in protecting ourselves. But we are here to promote education.

In his response, Smargin operates proactively by wanting to ensure "integrity" despite people "intent on doing something wrong." I see Compliance as disruptive to pedagogical advancement; Smargin sees Compliance as a necessary protective element against a "threat."

Even though I agree with Smargin, it is unfortunate a writing center must actively position itself with a group which projects a policing gaze.

At the national level, the preventive posturing comes from the NCAA, which offers the following statement on student-athlete academic support in the NCAA manual for Division I Athletics. Principle 2.5: Principle of Sound Academic Standards, reads:

> Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be maintained as a vital component of the educational program, and student-athletes shall be an integral part of the student body. The admission, academic standing and academic progress of student-athletes shall be consistent with the policies and standards adopted by the institution for the student body in general.

Slotted between principles on sportsmanship and nondiscrimination, Principle 2.5 is the only principle on academics. The principle is vague because the NCAA is not fully sure how academics should operate inside athletics departments, particularly at the high-stakes and high-dollar level of Division I athletics. As a result, they leave it up to individual athletics departments. Some may argue the principle is not vague but malleable enough to fit the needs of individual member institutions. Others may argue the NCAA is respecting the sovereignty of each member institution—for it should be remembered that NCAA membership is voluntary. However, according to the "About" section on NCAA.org, the core purpose of the NCAA is to "govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the *educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount* [emphasis added]" ("About Us," 2015). Seven core values follow this core purpose.

Academics are central to the core purpose and three of the seven core principles, yet only one statement in the manual concretely reflects this purpose and these principles. Read through the entire manual for Division I, III, or III—free pdfs are accessible on NCAApublications.com—and one will never come across a section detailing how to work *academically* with a student-athlete. The creation and ultimate enforcement of academic policy is up to individual institutions (i.e., the institution's Compliance Department). As a result, the MU Compliance Department decides how one can academically work with the roughly 600 student-athletes. Compliance casts a heavy gaze over academics because of fear of academic fraud. This gaze encourages rote, hierarchical tutoring, and form after form after form.

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Creating an atmosphere allowing for control supports the prevention of academic misconduct. Charlotte's language is striking, particularly her opening sentence in which she writes, "First and foremost, a tutor needs to keep in mind [their] primary duties. Tutors have been hired to supplement what the student has already learned in class." Glossing over this language, one gets the sense that tutoring support for Division I athletics is a business. Charlotte's language feels like a contract detailing employee duties. While such documents can be helpful, this language imbues the athletics writing center, dictates their everyday practices, and prescribes the atmosphere of the athletic writing center. The athletics writing center refrigerates ideas; it does not incubate ideas.

Such language is influenced by (or influences) the atmosphere in which student-athlete writing tutoring occurs. In his second paragraph, Patrick moves toward describing a stop-gap approach to student-athlete writing tutoring where the responsibility to quell "bad writing" habits of student-athletes resides with the student-athlete writing tutors:

> In my mind, our primary responsibility as writing tutors here is preventive. Stop academic misconduct before it makes its way to campus where the consequences are more dire. Stop bad writing habits before the SA's get too far along in their college careers. The regulations and rules that dictate what are and are not appropriate ways to work with a student-athlete do not leave much room to cultivate good writing techniques. Rather our jobs, as I see it, is to block the "bad" rather than foster the "good."

Like Charlotte, Patrick positions the primary job of a student-athlete writing tutor at the forefront of his response. Patrick does acknowledge that "the regulations and rules ... do not leave much room to cultivate good writing techniques"; however, I am taken by how acutely this preventative approach plays into how he works with a writer. But here is a bind: As a graduate teaching assistant in the Philosophy Department, and as someone who was working through multiple drafts of his teaching philosophy and on the job market, Patrick was acutely aware of teaching and how to talk about his teaching to a broad audience. Patrick appears to want to "cultivate good writing techniques," but the incessant monitoring, the vague NCAA compliance mandates, and the atmosphere of preventing misconduct force Patrick into a defensive posture, jettisoning teaching for the sake of preventing misconduct.

The Accelerated Learning Program and Athletics Writing Center manual additionally influences Charlotte's and Patrick's responses. Following a letter from the Senior Associate Athletics Director for Academics and Student Life, an Equal Opportunity Statement, and a

brief bio on the former student-athlete and professional athlete after whom the space is named, the program leads with "Rules, Policies, and Procedures." This section touches on sports wagering and sexual harassment, as well as use of the internet and the copy machine and dress code. The next section dictates how tutors should interact with student-athletes, an interaction which stems from Compliance's interpretation of the vague NCAA Principle 2.5. Stipulating that "[t]utoring sessions are designed to provide assistance for student-athletes in order to enhance the chances of academic success," the program lists five tutor responsibilities:

1. Develop a subject-centered educational plan for the best academic potential in your student-athlete.
2. Create realistic and content driven subject level learning goals with the student-athlete.
3. Encourage the student-athlete to keep an open line of communication with the professor.
4. Focus only on your content area.
5. Report if the student-athlete hasn't completed necessary reading and preparation to make the session meaningful.

The first three responsibilities are helpful. The fourth strikes me as a bit odd, but I can understand the reasoning. Based on my experience, the final responsibility is the most critical responsibility for a tutor, because it reflects the desired atmosphere of the space: one of control, of policing. Unfortunately, this responsibility shows the athletics writing center operating from a fear of academic misconduct. One gets the sense of entering a doctor's office when walking into the student-athlete writing center. Silence abounds. Month old magazines sit in the corner. During a 30-minute session, student-athletes sign multiple forms adding their student ID number and sport. Such an atmosphere counters what Elizabeth Boquet (2002) describes in *Noise from the Writing Center*: "We [writing center tutors and administrators] must imagine a liminal zone where chaos and order coexist. And we would certainly do a service to ourselves... if we spent as much time championing this chaos... as we do championing the order" (p. 84). In Boquet's space, consultants and administrator consider conventions and, if needed, adapt conventions to meet the rhetorical demands of twenty-first century composing. Yet imagine providing Boquet's chaos/order amalgamation to a lawyer running the Compliance Department at a high-profile Division I

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university. MU's Compliance Department runs from such a suggestion, misunderstanding that theory, practice, and effectiveness ground Boquet's statement. Instead of embracing chaos/order, the MU Athletics Writing Center lays stagnant in an unproductive milieu struggling under the weight of preventive posturing.

Discourses of improvement. In hopes of improving this atmosphere, the athletics writing center connected with the director of the campus-wide writing center and upper-level athletic and academic administrators. The director of the writing center, the associate director, and the program assistant surveyed 57 peer institutions to learn about writing-related services offered to student-athletes, specifically online writing assistance. Thirty institutions responded, and the campus-wide writing center authored a report to the faculty athletics representative in which they detailed their findings. In the wake of this report, two changes to the athletics writing center occurred, which illustrate the importance of intra-institutional relationships to establish best practices in learning while still adhering to NCAA mandates. These were seismic shifts in tutoring philosophies and practices. Like other writing centers undergoing similar shifts, administrators and tutors struggled to adapt even though the changes were needed.

First, the athletics writing center overturned the nearly decade-long adherence to the green pens and laminated lime-green coded sheet and moved toward a collaborative writing session between writer and tutor. Now that athletic administrators were convinced through the research report that the athletics writing center was not offering extra academic benefits to student-athletes if their model of writing tutoring mimicked that of the campus writing center and peer institutions, student-athlete tutors covered global concerns in student-athlete writing. Student-athletes no longer came in after a tutor read and marked their paper. Instead, student-athlete and tutor collaboratively set the agenda and moved past solely remarking on usage, punctuation, and "awk" sentence construction. However, because of the harsh penalties that often come with academic misconduct, Turnitin.com remained a mainstay in the athletics writing center, despite a CCCC resolution voicing opposition against plagiarism detection services like Turnitin.com (CCCC Secretary's Report, 2013, pp. 377–378), and the fact that the campus-wide writing center director did not support its use.

The second change was the adoption of asynchronous online tutoring, a development especially helpful for student-athletes traveling or injured and physically unable to visit the athletics writing center. Curiously, though implementing asynchronous online tutoring aligns

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with writing center best practices, Patrick viewed this change as helpful for accomplishing his preventive duties:

> The recent implementation of "online sessions" has ... made these preventive duties easier to complete. There is no person behind the writing, no face, nothing familiar; just a computer screen and a text document. It is easier to point out errors and prevent academic misconduct and be satisfied with only doing this under these impersonal conditions.

Scholars of writing and technology, particularly members of the Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, may take issue with Patrick's assertion of "no person behind the writing ... just a computer and a text." Patrick continues to project his primary goal of prevention onto the pedagogical changes underway. Such a continued projection should be admired; no matter how tutoring methods shift, Patrick attempts to project what he believes to be his primary duty onto these shifts. However, it strikes me as unfortunate and a bit eerie that the panoptic gaze of Compliance is so strong as to force Patrick to continue looking for ways to implement his—really, Compliance's—primary duties into new technologies and methods for working with writers.

Charlotte also provides suggestions for improvement within the athletics writing center: "Perhaps opening lines of communication by allowing the tutors to coordinate and discuss academic strategies and study skills with our Academic Assistants for the betterment of the students would be a considerable improvement."[8] Where Charlotte only hints at inter-departmental communication, I want to be bolder: I endorse intra-institutional communication. I endorse conversations about the writing strengths and weaknesses of our student-athletes that extend beyond clandestine hallway whispers in the athletics department to face-to-face meeting with all the many persons who have a stake in student (all students') writing.

Alliances between people committed to student writing illustrate the need for writing center scholars to use their collective capacity to advocate for strong writing-related academics services for all students. Such collaborative work is illustrative of what Jane Nelson & Margaret Garner (2011) refer to as "horizontal structures of learning" throughout their description of the University of Wyoming Writing Center.

8 Academic Assistants are largely graduate students seeking a M.Ed. in Adult and Higher Education with an emphasis in Intercollegiate Athletics Administration. Academic Assistants are given a set of student-athletes with whom they meet weekly and individually, ensuring the student-athlete is completing course work.

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Through a horizontal structure of learning, individual departments or campus academic services do not delegate the role of facilitating student engagement and deep-learning. Instead, through establishing "meaningful and productive relationships with people across campus" (p. 10), all share a commitment to implementing and facilitating best practices for student learning. Under a horizontal structure of learning, then, the responsibility of offering student-athlete writing support does not fall solely on the shoulders of the athletics department; all campus stakeholders share the responsibility.

Implications and Conclusion

Thus far, I focused on how stakeholders at a Division I athletics writing center perceived and enacted student-athlete writing tutoring services and how the center formed intra-institutional alliances with campus WPAs in hopes of bettering these services. At the close, I offer four implications for writing center administrators, staff, and tutors:

1. Writing center administrators, staff, and tutors should advocate for a proper academic atmosphere for student-athletes by gaining familiarity with national athletic academic reform organizations such as the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, the Drake Group, and the Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics. While these groups do not always agree on the best method for academically advocating for student-athletes, the steady-stream of white papers, policy statements, and research reports, complete with best practices authored by these organizations, provide qualitative and quantitative data helpful in constructing a case for improving academic conditions for student-athletes.

2. For campuses with separate student-athlete writing centers, writing center administrators and staff can ensure the policies in place mirror those policies in the campus-wide writing center. Starting and sustaining collaborative dialogue with the person overseeing the athletics writing center can provide a glimpse into the pedagogical practices undergirding the space.

3. Again, for campuses with a separate athletic writing center, tutors can work in the campus-wide writing center *and* the athletic writing center. During my time at MU, other tutors and I split our time between these two writing centers. Cross-pollination ensures the policies in place in one space mirror those

in the other. Additionally, it provides tutors a chance to engage with student-athletes, a population that often feels isolated from the student body and campus (Tracey & Corlett, 1995, p. 90, 95; Bell, 2009, p. 34;).

4. For campuses with only one writing center visited by all students, writing center administrators, staff, and tutors should understand how NCAA academic policy is enacted and enforced on their campus through connecting with the Faculty Athletics Representative or the athletics department administration. Regardless if the campus writing center is connected with the athletics department, NCAA academic policy must be followed. Understanding these policies and how to work closely with student-athlete writers under these conditions is in the best interest of all.

If classroom instructors on our campuses adopt our practices for working with student-writes then, according to the NCAA's own language, athletics *must* implement our strategies. If the student-athletes at our respective colleges and universities are to receive quality writing support, then we need to build bridges to athletics departments and show that the principles we implement in our writing center are the *policies and standards adopted by the institution for the student body in general.* For our practices to be the standard, we need to make intra-institutional connections. An athletics writing center unconnected to campus conversations on student writing and tutoring is not operating in the best interest of campus stakeholders. Yet an isolated athletic writing center is common within high-profile athletics departments and often cast positively by athletics department stakeholders. Alanna Bitzel (2012) describes the writing services offered for football student-athletes at Texas, an athletics department operating with a budget of over $100 million: "[The center] is removed from and not accessible to the rest of campus, emphasizing that at least one part of the student-athletes' lives is not available for perusal" (para. 4). I appreciate the desire to keep high-profile student-athletes out of the constant spotlight and allow them to concentrate on their studies. That said, I have concerns with what I perceive to be insular athletics writing centers. A writing center cut off from the rest of campus does not allow the writing center to "serve as the focal point for establishing a culture of writing on campus and in the larger community" (p. 37), a phrase Emily Isaacs & Melinda Knight (2014) use to describe the new models of writing centers which they extol.

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I doubt high-profile athletics writing centers seek to be these focal points described by Isaacs & Knight. Yet, this narrow understanding of what a writing center can and should do is what Grutsch McKinney critiques in *Peripheral Visions for Writing Centers* (2013). She pushes against what she calls the grand narrative of writing centers: "writing centers as *comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing*" (p. 5).[9] Through altering this grand narrative and suggesting how it privileges certain activities while ignoring others, Grutsch McKinney expands the vision of writing centers and provides a foundation through which writing centers and scholarship can adapt to the ever-evolving landscape of American higher education. Not only do campus writing centers need to push against this grand narrative, so do athletics writing centers.

In her penultimate chapter, Grutsch McKinney turns to the portion of the grand narrative which states writing centers should only focus on tutoring. Conversely, she argues writing center scholarship has "hardly started recognizing the scope of what is already done in the writing center" (p. 80). In other words, we already do that something else; we already, say, advocate for all students and establish vital intra-institutional connections, which allow for quality instruction in writing-intensive courses. But since the grand narrative we so often spin doesn't include this something else, we fail to talk and write about it, fail to make it a part of who we are. As Grutsch McKinney writes, the grand narrative "does not fully represent the possibility, promise, or actuality of our work" (p. 80). We can represent this possibility, promise, and actuality of our work by heeding Grutsch McKinney's call and recognizing the scope of what we are already doing.

Through turning our attention to our student-athletes, writing center studies can counter the grand narrative by advocating for more: more than adjusting prose, more than filling out forms, more than the quotidian tasks of a writing center. When we begin doing more and changing the conversation about writing—how writing works and how writing is taught—we have the potential to change the conversation about writing at the departmental and institutional level. And, returning to NCAA Principle 2.5, when the conversation changes, when theory turns to praxis, then the athletics department must also

9 Grutsch McKinney's frustration with this grand narrative is akin to the critique leveled by Anne Geller, Michele Eodice, Frankie Condon, Meg Carroll, & Elizabeth H. Boquet in *The Everyday Writing Center* (2007). The co-authors worry about the "neatly-packaged representations of our rich, multi-layered, everyday writing center lives" (p. 8).

change. Through this change, athletics departments may begin seeing writing tutoring as more than that which helps a student-athlete remain academically eligible. We need to form intra-institutional alliances to work in their best interest of the 463,202 student-athletes who are in our classrooms, in our writing centers, labs, and studios.

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