Conceptualizing a New Title IX Athletics Education Model in the Age of Athlete Activism

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How do people assert their rights when they do not know what those rights are, do not know how a particular law applies to their circumstance, and/or do not know who to go to for help when they feel something is unfair? This is a question that has plagued the campus athletic community when it comes to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 nearly from the time of its passage. Multiple research studies have found significant deficits in knowledge of what the law requires when applied to athletics among athletes, athletic administrators, and coaches (Druckman, Gilli, Klor, & Robison, 2014; Staurowsky & Weight, 2011; Staurowsky & Weight, 2013; Staurowsky, Zonder, & Riemer, 2017) as well as journalists (Hardin, Simpson, Whiteside, & Garris, 2007) and athletic department staff (Rodkey, Kelly, Sonderfeld, & Staurowsky, 2019). In a recent study of Title IX athletics coordinators working in NCAA Division I athletic departments (Staurowsky & Rhoads, pending), less than 20% reported efforts to educate athletes and coaches about Title IX requirements as they pertain to athletics. Only 2-3 percent indicated that efforts were made to educate athletes and coaches about how to read an Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act Report, a federally mandated public disclosure report that is intended to show how resources are distributed within a college or university athletic department between men’s and women’s teams. At the same time, there is strong evidence that most college and university athletic departments are not in compliance with the law despite federal requirements to annually attest to such compliance in order to retain federal funding (Hogshead-Makar, 2020; Staurowsky, Watanabe, Cooky, Lough, Paule, Pharr, J Williams & Cummings, 2020). And as Druckman and Sharrow (2020) note, during times of crisis such as COVID-19 there is a tendency for institutions to revert to old practices and weaken their commitment to policies pertaining to equality and fair treatment. The purpose of this presentation is to explore the conceptual framework behind the Title IX compliance structure that vested responsibility for educating athletes about the law with Title IX compliance officers (Matthews & McCune, 1977; 1987). The rationale situated the Title IX education function within a fully operating system of assessment and monitoring along with a grievance procedure designed in theory to facilitate the identification of sex discriminatory treatment leading to timely responses that remedied impediments to students accessing the full benefit of their education, a system that is largely dysfunctional within athletic departments (Libit & Cyphers, 2020; Staurowsky & Rhoads, pending). The dimensions of that dysfunction will be examined as well as policy recommendations to strengthen Title IX athletics compliance efforts on campus. A particular focus will be directed toward developing a new model of Title IX athletics education for athletes that recognizes the potential of the athlete activism movement and structures emerging from that (Moradi, 2020).