University of Kansas Faculty Mentor Program in Athletics
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Kansas Athletics formulated a five-year strategic plan (2006-2011) to achieve unparalleled excellence in the realms of academic and competitive achievement, ethical behavior, and fiscal integrity. Several tactics for increasing academic achievement have been initiated, including enhancement of the Faculty Mentor Program. This program has been present for over 20 years, and currently involves over 100 faculty members. Faculty mentors provide a positive link between the athletic and intellectual pursuits of student athletes, and can provide meaningful interactions that aid in the long-term success of these students.

The structure of the Faculty Mentor Program involves pairing faculty members with student athletes that share a common interest in a particular sport, allowing the student athlete and faculty mentor to have an immediate connection. Faculty mentors also advise student athletes when there is an overlap in their intellectual interests. Faculty mentors include a highly diverse group of individuals that represent a wide range of academic disciplines and sports interests. **The mission of the Faculty Mentor Program is to increase the graduation rate and retention of student athletes, while enhancing their academic experience at KU and preparing them for long-term success in their chosen professions.**

This mission is achieved through the efforts of faculty mentors that participate in the following activities:

1. By serving as mentors to student athletes on academic issues such as advising on study habits and test-taking skills, and providing guidance on time management for completion of coursework
2. By assisting student athletes with strategies for meeting the demands of both a rigorous academic and athletic schedule
3. By meeting with student athletes to discuss personal development in their major and future career options
4. By providing personal support to student athletes by attending games and by participating in meetings outside of the classroom through social activities (e.g. dinners, bowling, movies) and service projects (e.g. campus clean-up, Habitat for Humanity, fundraising for charity). Mentors may also help acclimate international students in athletics to the challenges of a new environment
5. By serving as an advocate for student athletes by communicating academic achievements made by athletes across campus and throughout the community

The student athlete benefits from interactions with faculty mentors in the following ways:

1. By learning to interact with faculty in a low pressure environment and to gain from their experiences and guidance
2. By acquiring strategies to succeed in the classroom at the highest level
3. By networking and gaining access to other professionals in order to become leaders in their chosen fields
4. By having a mentor and friend who genuinely cares about their personal growth and success as both a student and an athlete

The Faculty mentor program has been active in the past, with a consistent presence in the sports of basketball (men’s and women’s), football, rowing, softball, swimming/diving, and baseball. The
The highlights of the accomplishments of these mentor groups have included hosting a Career Interest Night, conducting a Habitat for Humanity project, contributing to a campus clean-up effort, and providing student athletes with an opportunity to interact with faculty at social events (e.g. dinners hosted by faculty members, bowling get-togethers, and cookie decorating parties). Furthermore, there have been many successful one-on-one relationships built between mentors and athletes, where mentors have assisted athletes on a variety of academic and career issues. These sessions have greatly contributed to the long-term success of KU athletes and are at the heart of what the mentor program is striving to achieve.

The long-term goal of the Faculty Mentor Program (by 2015) is to establish highly active mentor groups that support student athletes in all of the NCAA sports that are represented at KU. This will be achieved through support from the Athletic Department (particularly the academic support staff), coaches, and the KU division of Student Success (e.g. University Career Center, University Advising Center, Multicultural Affairs).

The Faculty Mentor Program will be enhanced during the 2013-2014 academic years through achievements in the following areas:

1. By having at least two events per academic year with both mentors and student athletes (recommended one event per semester)
2. By having a high representation of faculty mentors attend the annual Rock Chalk Choice awards event at the beginning of the academic year
3. By increasing interactions between faculty mentors and student-athletes that are involved in the Summer Bridge Program and to increase mentoring of freshman students
4. By actively involving sports coaches in the program
5. By identifying new faculty that will serve as excellent mentors to student athletes (e.g. identify faculty mentors who were athletes themselves and those faculty that have a strong interest in serving in this area)
6. By providing compliance education to faculty mentors
7. By hosting a recruitment dinner for both old and new faculty mentors to gain support and enthusiasm for meeting these goals
8. By better communicating the achievements of student athletes across campus and throughout the community at large
9. By forming a Faculty Mentor Steering Committee in Athletics that oversees the progress of the program and that compiles data documenting its achievements

As we address these goals, along with new goals in the future, we will continue to fulfill the mission of the Faculty Mentor Program to increase the graduation rate and retention of student athletes, while enhancing their academic experience at KU and preparing them for long-term success in their chosen professions. This program will also serve as a model for other universities that showcases the role that faculty mentors can play in enriching the lives of student athletes.

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