



## INSIDE AND OUTSIDE (CONTACT) ZONE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A WRITING PROGRAM AND COLLEGE ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATOR

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### ABSTRACT



Drawing from the social movement rhetorical theory of Harold Cruse and the ethnographic theory of Clifford Geertz, Mary Louise Pratt, and Kevin Michael Foster, this article is a historiographical construction of past and a consideration of the future involvement of college writing programs and Writing Program Administrators (WPA) as potent agents of student-athlete advocacy. Through engagement in social movement and educational reform on the campus of an NCAA host institution, the author uses autoethnography to develop a fuller understanding of the successful rhetorical practices he employed (and failed to employ) in his work as a writing program administrator, educator, and advocate on the behalf of student-athletes. In addition, drawing from the scholarship of Barbara Walvoord, the author defines writing program administration through the lens of social movement theory in analyzing the efforts of a writing program founded at the University of Arizona. The author completes an evaluation of the program's impact on the social and intellectual development of student-athlete at the University of Arizona as well as its viability as a social movement on the campus.

**Keywords:** Autoethnography, Social Movement Theory, Athletics, Athletics Administration

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Tonight is as any other. An inordinate number of students have walked through the double doors down here, Room 109F, in the McKale Athletic Center, home of the University of Arizona Athletic Department. The students walking through those doors are student-athletes: football players, gymnasts, golfers, tracksters. Instead of carrying balls and shoes, they are toting textbooks and classnotes. Instead of inquiring about snap counts and court presses, they raise questions about Plato, the Big Bang, and social construction. Other than the occasional jog to the computer lab, or the adroit catch of a pencil as it falls from the table, this space does not require these students to be particularly athletic, though its construction instills the identity. And I can be quite sure that athletics is a part of their identity that is never far from their minds, tackling Descartes, Dante, and Dadaism along the way.

I run a writing center satellite for student-athletes, under the aegis of the English Department and the Writing Program, and under the sponsorship of the Athletics Department. Four days a week, from 5:00 to 9:30 pm, we (two writing tutors and myself, the coordinator of the program) work with the student-athletes on their writing assignments—from invention to revision. Though that's not particularly interesting or out of the ordinary, the space in which we do this work certainly is interesting.

Our writing center satellite is in the basement of the McKale Sports Arena. To get there, I walk by the football team's locker room, then the training room, and all the while, my walk encircles the basketball arena that is often packed with nearly 15,000 for our nationally ranked team's home games. My room is directly across from the football team's "ready room," and I've occasionally been displaced by the media for post-game interviews. In fact, at least a half a dozen times this semester, we've cancelled hours completely because of home basketball games. It wouldn't matter if we didn't cancel hours...finding a parking space would be impossible on those nights anyway.

I have a meeting with a young man, a member of the varsity football team, in a position meeting room. Probably the offensive line's. Eight tables and twenty four chairs evenly spaced throughout. Just over my student's head I see the outlines of football players ... a mural on the wall in red, white, and blue. The mural is nearly seven feet high and depicts a football player making a block while the running back cuts judiciously against the grain to make an extra yard. His number is 26.

As I diagram sentences on the Dry Erase board, I clearly observe outlines of the X's and O's one regularly associates with football plays being drawn up. I erase them and begin to explain the receiver of action in a sentence with passive voice. In the front of the room, there is a VCR and a box full of tapes. The labels on the tapes say things like "Cutups: NMSU v. UNLV." And protruding from the ceiling is a film projector. "Ok, I get it ... 'the ball was kicked,' but we don't know who kicked it." I vaguely remember difficult concepts setting in as I sat in my offensive line's meeting room, several years before and nearly 1,500 miles away.

It's late and I understand why my student is having trouble concentrating—conference opener, an All-American nose guard to contend with, and because he had to come straight to study hall after practice, he hasn't eaten in nearly 8 hours. After mentioning this to me, he commented "That's big time college football!" I responded "And this is the student-athlete in all his glory! Parsing sentences on a dry-erase board in the football team's meeting room!" I can forgive him for not finding that funny at all.

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A number of non-profit organizations, including the Knight Commission, The Drake Group, The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, and the Black Coaches Association (which is now rebranded as Advocates for Athletic Equity), used social movement strategies to challenge the NCAA to amend its best practices and progress toward degree legislation to reflect a mission that advocates the academic success of student-athletes. The success of their efforts has historically been limited by the lack of well-defined academic support and attendant student leadership programs that resonate on host campuses, leading to inconsistent successes of these non-profit organizations to effect long-term change in college athletics. However, on individual campuses, the heroic acts of brave educators and administrators using social movement strategies to challenge the status quo of 'big-time' athletic programs has yielded the kind of transformational change that the aforementioned non-profit organizations sought, and that the NCAA has responded to in kind. In this chapter, I aim to analyze my own involvement in founding and coordinating a writing center satellite in an athletics department setting, attempting to effect change at one NCAA



institution (rather than globally) and reflect on the differences between social movements that work from outside the margins of NCAA athletics departments and those that operate within them.

Admittedly, the great complexities involved with any form of ethnographic analysis, especially analysis based off of reflections, recollections, musings, and asides is quite complicated. As I attempt to analyze my own actions and inactions through a particular theoretical or philosophical lens, difficulties arise because of my desire to defend my actions as a protagonist in the text while accurately recalling the most salient and significant events-- events in which the author acts judiciously as often as he acts in folly. Reflecting on my own administrative and instructional theory and practice, particularly with an aim to interpret the cultural significance of those experiences, has been plagued with difficulty, dead-ends, and diminished returns. However, believing such interpretations can lead to the discovery of much more that needs to be interpreted, or as Weber has labeled them, the "webs of significance in which we ourselves are woven" (qtd. in Geertz 5) I am confident that I will be able to interpret my administrative work and potentially reveal solutions that I was not able to discover while suspended in moments that can be interpreted, in retrospect, more accurately. To do so, I go beyond the offering of "practitioner lore," Stephen North's term for traditions of teaching and research that rarely become formalized in published writing, and yet not rely heavily, either, upon data-collection methods that can reveal an overly narrow scope. To achieve a balance between these two poles, I have chosen autoethnography as the mode of cultural analysis I apply to interpret my administrative work through the lenses of what I have labeled elsewhere as "student-athlete advocacy" social movement<sup>1</sup>.

Throughout the chapter, I offer accounts (as digressive *excurses*, in *italics*) of my own experiences as a student-athlete, instructor, and administrator in hopes of providing the reader snapshots of life within the often unexposed walls of college athletics. Those

<sup>1</sup> In my dissertation, "One Foot In: Social Movement Rhetoric and Student-Athlete Advocacy in the Margins of American College Athletics."

fragments, personal stories of import that substantiate claims as well as contextualize my analytical approach, are also products of autoethnographic reflection. My ethos, then, is not only generated by research and the offering of perspectives that can be duly substantiated, but also by my willingness to delve deeply into the workings of my own psyche (exposing my initial errors in analysis as well as my successes), and by my willingness to dive further into explicating the webs of significance that constitute the culture of college athletics.

Because these narratives reveal a bias toward 'big-time' college athletics – namely, a belief that it is driven primarily by profit motives, institutions which have abandoned an emphasis on quality undergraduate instruction and chosen to focus on athletic branding as a means of promoting recruitment – they are likely to come off as myopic and incomplete, or worse, as snarky editorializing. However, autoethnography often emerges from narratives of opposition and struggle, revealing the very moments in time and rhetorical spaces in which cultures clash and oppose one another and exposing them for analyses. Of autoethnography, Susan Bennett says that it is not simply the recounting of simple personal stories, but "analytical/objective personal account(s) about the self/writer as part of a group or culture," "a description of a conflict of cultures," and "often an analysis of being different or an outsider written to an audience not a part of the group ...(and/or an) an explanation of how one is "othered"" ("Susan Bennett on Autoethnography" 1). In the particular case I am recounting, I count myself as an outsider, given the fact that I was viewed by athletics administrators as a writing program administrator rather than as fully recognized member of athletics administration staff. The insiders, then, are the athletics administrators with whom I attempted to collaborate during my time working there. However, throughout I imagine myself writing for both audiences.

Recollections of experiences, set under the lens of cultural analysis in which individuals attempt to interpret action and symbolic action in their context, constitute autoethnography. And in my analysis, which will often cite discordant exchanges



with writing program administrators and athletics administrators as well as internal conflicts over job responsibilities and ethical commitments, I am not only defining points of resistance that Bennett and Pratt identify as areas from which autoethnographies often emerge, but defining points of conflict that emerge between agitation groups and establishments during the course of social movement.

In order to analyze my own engagement in student-athlete advocacy, I have chosen the methodologies of autoethnography and social movement rhetorical analysis so that I can characterize my work and scholarship in the areas of writing center theory and pedagogy, both chronologically and theoretically, in terms of a social movement. Later in the chapter, this will enable me to analyze, using Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen's social movement theory and Cruse's Triple Front theory<sup>2</sup>, the successes and set backs of the program as social movement in order to identify challenges and potential solutions for the continued viability of the writing program I founded.

Additionally, during the course of this chapter, my goal is to identify a theory of autoethnography, drawing from the scholarship of Clifford Geertz, Mary Louise Pratt, and Kevin Michael Foster, that will guide my reflections on my own engagement in social movement and student-athlete advocacy while working in a university writing program and athletics department. In addition, I draw from the scholarship of Barbara Walvoord, who in "The Future of WAC" defines writing program administration through the lens of social movement theory. In closing, I offer an analysis of my own engagement in a social movement and apply Cruse's Triple Front theory to analyze the efforts of my own program, The CAT Satellite Learning Center for Learning and Writing (CATS CLAW<sup>3</sup>), evaluating the

program's impact on the social and intellectual development of student-athlete at the University of Arizona as well as its viability as a social movement.

### **CRUSE, GEERTZ, PRATT, FOSTER, AND AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF COLLEGE ATHLETICS**

In this chapter, as with the narrative *excurses* between each chapter, I am attempting not only to recollect significant moments of interaction that are relevant, but also reveal the structures and politics of the culture of college athletics, and particularly athletics administration. In doing so, I hope to explicate the ways in which traditional approaches to athletics administration minimize (and in some cases marginalize) black male student-athlete advocacy and social movement in ways comparable to the marginalization of agitation groups achieved by rigid establishments in wider political and commercial contexts.

In his pivotal Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, Harold Cruse speaks of the responsibility of the intellectual revolutionary to employ the "triple front" assessment, referring specifically to the theory that any effective and sustainable movement which focuses on the uplift of black people must thoughtfully assess economic, political, and cultural matters. Cruse instructs individuals or coalitions engaged in revolution or reform-minded activity that their ability to motivate masses to engage in political action is a prerequisite if they wish to inspire those whose rights they fight for to learn to value and understand their own culture. From this inspiration, the energy and impetus to examine their political and economic potential will spring forth. In turn, this will help advocates and the constituencies they serve develop the desire to compel establishments to reconsider the ways they impose themselves upon those less powerful than they and force them to reconsider how they fail to value their lives because of cultural, ethnic, or sexual discrimination. It stands to reason that they may also consider the political and economic potential of developing alliances with said people or the consequences of

<sup>2</sup> In The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, Harold Cruse predicts that a social movement acting on behalf of the interests of black people must be culturally relevant, politically independent, and economically autonomous. Lose any of those factors, and the movement is doomed to fail.

<sup>3</sup> Part of the CATS (Caring About the Total Success of student-athletes) Program, an NCAA designated

"Program of Excellence" established in 1991 at the University of Arizona. The innovative design emerged from the scholarship of Jeff Jansen, a world-renowned motivational speaker and sports psychologist.



continuing to disregard their humanity. Cruse's theory, though originally directed towards black intellectuals, serves as an effective tool for evaluating all social movements.

In "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," Clifford Geertz, celebrated Princeton anthropologist, notes that culture is a "semiotic" concept, involving a search for meaning through interpretation of symbols (1). Geertz borrows the term "Thick Description" from Gilbert Ryle and applies it to his own anthropological approach, moving beyond "textbook" definitions of ethnography and extending ethnography to include explication, interpretation, sorting "structures of signification," and "reading manuscript(s) of [...] transient examples of shaped behavior" (2). In other words, Geertz extends the responsibilities of the ethnographer beyond the careful collection of data to include the dutiful interpretation of how actions and behaviours constitute culture, and what those actions and behaviors mean as symbolic cultural behavior.

Mary Louise Pratt applies Geertz's approach to ethnography in an analysis of the cultural significance of her own pedagogy, particularly in settings where narratives of the colonized and the colonial engage one another. In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Pratt defines the contact zone as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (2).

Along with "critique," "collaboration," "imaginary dialogue," and "vernacular expression," Pratt lists autoethnography as a "literate art of the contact zone" (6). For Pratt, arts of the contact zone represent methods of challenging and resisting the colonial translation and recoding of the narratives and experiences of the oppressed, thus revealing autoethnography (among other approaches) as effective tools for representing marginalized and disfranchised voices – which are often oppositional forms of discourse. In this chapter, my personal narratives represent challenges to the hegemonic practices and discourses of traditional athletics administration that, at their worst, reveal models of student advocacy which focus on keeping student-athletes eligible for participation rather than on

ensuring that their athletic participation rounds out, or otherwise substantially contributes to their whole education.

Theories of ethnography, according to Geertz and Pratt, must be extrapolated and applied to the analyses of different cultures--in this case, the well-guarded world of big time college athletics, so difficult to perform detailed analyses of because student voices are silenced by compliance and outside researchers and media are often either denied access, or, given only access to student-athlete representatives whose well-crafted oration best represents the department's image. A potential means around the limited access to student-athletes for research purposes is the philosophical and ethnographic analyses and reflections of former student-athletes and athletics administrators. In "Panopticonics: The Control and Surveillance of Black Female Athletes in a Collegiate Athletics Program," Kevin Michael Foster offers a model of literary and ethnographic analysis in an athletics department setting based on his experiences as and interactions with collegiate athletes. Going beyond the analyses of graduation rate data and comparable empirical figures, Foster focuses on survey methodologies and revealing personal reflections to tell a story of domination, control, and surveillance as experienced by female collegiate athletes – a narrative oft not expressed even by the notable athletics reform scholarship, and when so, certainly not as compellingly as Foster's ethnography.

Foster's claim is as complex as it is compelling. Foster's central metaphor in the text is the "panopticon," a facility initially theorized by social reformer Jeremy Bentham. The facility would be used for the purposes of imprisonment and would increase both the ability of prisons to surveil prisoners and modify prisoner behavior by subjecting them to the belief that they were either under, or could be subject to perpetual surveillance. The circular building structure, combined with a bombardment of bright light shone into prisoners' quarters who were isolated from other prisoners and unable to see them because of walls separating them, would serve to modify prisoner behavior by leading them to believe that they were constantly being observed. The theory, explored further by





philosopher Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, is part of a wider emergence of the importance of “discipline” in society. For Foucault, discipline is central to the growth of the Western prison industrial complex. It is not the discipline which is highly regarded as a character trait, particularly among student-athletes, but rather, the discipline which creates “docile bodies,” or, individuals whose actions, decisions, and choices are easily controlled by governments. The docility is not an independent or organic function of individuals, however, as in a panopticon, the docility is a by-product of feeling constantly surveilled, spied upon, and your behavior controlled by perceived external threat.

Citing Foucault’s theory of the panopticon, Foster characterizes the way many elite student-athletes perceive the infrastructure of college athletics. The training and preparation as well as the near constant surveillance achieved through class checks<sup>4</sup>, curfews, supervised study hours, and self-contained facilities--as one that “ensures the transformation of elite athletes into successful women, with success defined in terms of their athletic achievement, degree attainment, and preparation for life after graduation”(301). Success, however, is ensured at the expense of these young women’s independence, autonomy, and agency, even though the ultimate result is often their empowerment. This, of course, runs counter to the prevailing characterization as a time for individuals to explore themselves and their interests freely, by taking elective courses, participating in sanctioned and unsanctioned activities, and building productive relationships with fellow students. Whereas Foucault’s metaphor of the panopticon, and the discipline it creates via coercion, connotes negatively, Foster also considers Durkheim’s optimistic views on the benefits of discipline and “moral education,” leading to “self-mastery,” though this, too, implies an inorganic, enforced discipline(302). Foster, himself a former student-athlete, understands that the benefits of participating in organized athletics are numerous; however, he also understands (perhaps

<sup>4</sup> A practice where student-athletes’ attendance in their classes is checked by monitors to ensure their regular attendance, with disciplinary actions taken when student-athletes miss class.

contrasting theirs with his own experiences) that administrators’ “racialized expectations of behavior” led them to exercise greater surveillance<sup>5</sup> over their black student-athletes, which would suggest that their autonomy in decision-making is hindered considerably and a wide scale streamlining of behaviors targeted at a group of students whose streaks of independent thought could translate into protestations that could harm the institution’s brand, reputation, and ability to generate income (302). Foster understands this world innately and via his experience as a fellow student-athlete peer, tutor, mentor, and eventually researcher among the female student-athletes whom he writes about, and yet, as a social scientist, only obliquely acknowledges this fact lest he compromise his objectivity as a researcher. His arrival story, as a result, insufficiently exposes readers to the lenses he applies to his analysis, and the account reads much more like a literary and philosophical analysis while Foster leaves the ethos he could generate by front loading his experience and perspective on the table.

Where Foster’s account leaves off is where I hope to begin my analysis. Foster is an educational anthropologist who competed in a non-revenue generating sport (men’s wrestling), and thus, his own experiences and perspectives are of limited importance to the analysis he offers in “Panopticonics” because he shares only one meaningful cultural trait with the student-athletes he writes about: the fact he was a student-athlete. By contrast, as a black male, former student-athlete in a revenue generating sport (football)-turned writing program administrator-turned athletics administrator, I not only share additional meaningful cultural traits with the students about whom I am writing, but I continue to work with those students in a professional capacity--hence my move towards autoethnography as the most effective means to

<sup>5</sup> Foster notes that these forms of surveillance are often informal and not necessarily department-approved, including checking in on some athletes at curfew while trusting others to meet the deadline, issuing academic progress reports on some players while trusting the testimony of others, and requiring more study hall hours for some players than others.



employ Cruse's Triple Front analysis of my own experiences as a writing program administrator in a college athletics department.

### WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AS SOCIAL MOVEMENT – "THE FUTURE OF WAC"

In "The Future of WAC," Barbara Walvoord identifies social movement theory as a means by which composition historians and writing program administration theorists can frame the long-range planning of WAC programs at American institutions of higher learning. Walvoord, operating from the assertion that a social movement is any "collective attempt to promote or resist change in a society or group" (60) and that social movements spawn social movement organizations, rewrites the history of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) as a collective of writing program professionals that identified Mina Shaughnessy's assertion that writing be taught across college curricula (articulated in *Errors and Expectations*) and mobilized resources to achieve institutional change. For Walvoord, reconsidering WAC as a social movement reveals its "characteristics, strengths, and problems in ways that may help us think creatively about them," namely, how WAC as a movement has enabled writing program professionals to address questions about "the meaning of education [...] literacy [...] knowledge, power, and liberation" in their respective institutional settings and across the nation (60). According to Walvoord's analysis, WAC has thrived in many institutional settings because once the movement decentralized, "goals and philosophies that arose meant that each campus" could exercise ownership and decide which societal changes were most important (61). This meant that individual organizations could determine their own cultural programs according to the different cultures and needs of their institutions (62). Re-interpreting the history of WAC in this manner allows Walvoord to aptly describe WAC as a social movement and apply the rhetoric of social movement theory to an analysis of what the movement has and has not been able to achieve.

Though Walvoord identifies the potential strength of WAC's cultural program on individual campuses, she also identifies the political and economic difficulties related to establishing and

maintaining viable WAC programs--a potential pitfall according to Cruse's Triple Front analysis. For example, Walvoord first identifies the difficulty associated with recruiting faculty to join their workshops--a primary means by which the organization disseminates its message. Recruiting primarily through "word of mouth" and "arm-twisting," and finding that many faculty failed to return after initial workshops, Walvoord claims that many WAC programs fail to proliferate and maintain validity because the programs are optional, and many colleges and departments do not require their faculty and instructors to participate. Furthermore, WAC budgets are often funded through "discretionary budgets" by sympathetic administrators or grants, which retire and expire, respectively (64). Either can result in the suspension or discontinuance of WAC programs, contributing further to their potential dissolution. Both the political and financial difficulties associated with establishing and maintaining WAC programs are considerable; however, identifying the problems can lead to solution generation that may allow WAC programs to avoid the damning fates of insolvency, co-option, or other ends without achieving movement. Walvoord's analysis of WAC programs, then, is instructive in that analyses of writing program administration from the lens of social movement can help the analyst identify important political, economic, and cultural problems that confront their long-term viability and understand, ultimately, what progressive writing programs can accomplish in diverse and challenging institutional settings.

My autoethnographic reflections about my experiences as a student-athlete, writing program administrator and athletics administrator will often reflect the ways that land the students with whom I worked resisted the stereo typing of college athletes as uninterested/incapable students in our actions and in our engagement with athletics department personnel. Because these discourses are not sanctioned by coaches and athletics department staff, the resistance to them was significant and created great risk for those who engaged in it. However, autoethnography gives me an opportunity to, in a manner *a propos* to this project, cast my engagement in practices that I believe challenge



unjust institutional and individual practices as social movement rhetoric, and those institutions as establishments engaging in control rhetoric to counteract the alliances I established and resources I was able to mobilize. Furthermore, by interpreting my administrative work as the founder of a writing center for student-athletes as social movement, I can then more seamlessly apply social movement rhetorical analysis and Triple Front analysis to my own social movement efforts. As the analyses in previous chapters instructs, engaging in social movement analysis reveals the challenges these movements face, the resources they must mobilize and the strategies they must incorporate to achieve social change, and leaves analysts with a concurrent sense of the daunting trials of impacting social practices and beliefs and hope that those challenges can be surmounted.

**STUDENT-ATHLETE ADVOCACY AND WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AS SOCIALMOVEMENT: A HISTORY OF THE CAT SATELLITE CENTER FOR LEARNING AND WRITING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA**

In August, 2000, after completing my B.A. with distinction in English and Professional Writing at Northwestern State University, where I was also a two-time All-American offensive lineman and captain of the varsity football team, I headed west to the University of Arizona to attend graduate school. I began my first year with a seven hour graduate course load in Rhetoric and Composition and 2-2 First Year Composition (FYC) teaching load and felt confident about my adjustment to the rigors of teaching and researching even though I was only twenty-one years old at the time. Midway through the course of my first semester, a professor in my graduate program who assumed I might be interested in pursuing research or work to supplement my pay at the athletics department introduced me to the university's head football coach, a personal friend of his.

After a friendly chat, I offered the head coach my resume, and after reading my credentials, he put me in touch with staff members in CATS Academics – a department in Intercollegiate Athletics (ICA) charged with overseeing academic counseling and tutorial services for all student-athletes. After a

brief meeting with the Associate Athletics Director of Academics and the academics counselor who oversaw the tutorials program, I was offered a position as a writing tutor in their study hall program. Eager to work with student-athletes and professionalize myself as a writing specialist, I accepted the position and began working twelve hours a week during study hall hours. Though this series of events transpired with preternatural speed, I'd had no designs on pursuing anything more than part-time work and perhaps exercising some altruism and giving back to student-athlete, considering myself quite fortunate to have had a significant support system at my previous institution.

On week nights, Mondays-Thursdays, I typically spent three hours an evening working with student-athletes who were logging their mandatory study hall hours and could choose to either study quietly in designated commons areas or work one-on-one with tutors who were hired by the athletics department. I quickly developed rapport with a number of the students with whom I worked, partly because as a former student-athlete and young black male, I shared certain cultural proclivities with many of the students, and also, I imagine, because of the fact that as an undergraduate writing instructor, that their academics advisors recommended that they seek me out. Unfortunately, because I was only one of two writing tutors the first semester I worked in athletics, I often turned away many more students than I was ever able to work with, often referring them to either our main university writing center, or, to our University Learning Center, which provided tutorial services and academic advising.

Though I enjoyed working with the student-athletes and continued to ingratiate myself with their advisors and coaches, I quickly discovered that the majority of student-athletes with whom I worked were Black men, and primarily football players. When I shared this information with academics advisors, they revealed to me that they often suggested that these young men contact me if they needed help, and I eventually discovered that virtually all of the young men who consulted with me were directed to do so. Even though we accomplished much during our sessions, their lack of skill and time management often led to unproductive sessions that required





them to set up follow-up consultations. Seeing this as an opportunity to recommend that students integrate themselves more fully and avail themselves of resources available to them on campus, I recommended that many of them visit the main Writing Center and even set up the appointments for them.

Unfortunately, they rarely took advantage of many of the university resources made available to them, from supplementary tutoring to visiting their instructors during office hours. As a result, a handful of the students whom I tutored regularly (at least once a week) were still struggling mightily to pass their writing courses and also wrestled to keep pace in their general education courses that required substantial amounts of writing. To make things worse, because of the limited number of writing tutors available at the athletics department, many student-athletes were left unable to take advantage of academic resources that were supposed to be provided for them by the athletics department. For student-athletes who needed to keep their GPAs up to maintain their scholarships, the availability of such academic support was absolutely critical. After a semester of frustration related to turning away students who sought my help progressed, I approached administrators in the Academics Department at ICA about developing an on-site writing program. The academics counselor who oversaw the tutorials program repeatedly responded to my frustration with a refrain of "there's no money in the budget for more support" and refused to consider creative solutions to the problem. Given his disproportionate workload and lack of credentials for the position (a bachelors degree with no advanced studies, and no background in counseling or education), it often appeared to me that his unwillingness to approach his supervisor for increased funding was directly related to his oft-expressed, though seemingly irrational fear that he could be fired at any time. Once I determined this to be the root of his hesitation, I acquired his permission to speak to his supervisor, having much less to risk personally if the idea was shot down.

The Associate Athletics Director was thrilled with the idea of increasing academic support available for student-athletes in an area where so

many of them struggled. However, he was also concerned about how to accomplish this without increasing expenditures. My concerns at this point, however, were not strictly fiduciary. Early attempts on my part to characterize the satellite as a learning community, for example, were deferred and thwarted as I was told, alternately, that the writing lab<sup>6</sup> would fold into one of the two remedial programs for student-athletes on probation, which would confine the student-athlete body with whom I worked to students on provisional or academic probation. Whereas the Director believed that academically capable student-athletes were resourceful enough to access the resources when they needed to and he sought remediation for those who remained, I envisioned a center that revolved around the idea of educational equality for all student-athletes regardless of their race, gender, or sport, and that all of them would be allowed to pursue intellectual and social development in a learning community consisting of their peers across the department.

Though the Director of Academics was familiar with my characterization of the program as a learning community, his parry was that in the context of the academics program, the center would serve as a writing lab/clinic for remedial students, and that this was the only way to justify the expense. Considering that so many of the students whom he intended for me to work with were black male football and basketball players who were either provisional qualifiers or on academic probation, it became clear to me that he had no intention of supporting my push to establish a learning community for student-athletes, but rather, offer tutorials and skill-building sessions to underperforming students. Naively, I accepted the offer to pilot the program, intending the entire time to push forward the agenda of the writing center as learning community model and as an alternative to programs that I thought served altogether different needs (such as the needs of student-athletes with

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<sup>6</sup>A characterization I resisted from the onset, given its medical connotation and the idea that the metaphor of a "lab" suggests that we are analyzing students problems and diagnosing them rather than working with students collaboratively in a learning community.



documented learning disabilities or low-qualifying students, who were not necessarily the target audience for a progressive writing center).

Though I'd hoped that the center would integrate easily into the CATS Program, I met resistance in many forms. Program coordinators from other areas were rarely encouraging of my ideas, claiming that at the end of the day that coaches and administrators would only care if I kept these black male student-athletes eligible for competition, and if I ever lost sight of that fact, it would likely be my demise. They added that administrators would not stand up for me if I challenged coaches, and that program coordinators who challenged athletics department hegemony would be radicalized, isolated, and removed if necessary. Virtually every staff member shared these notions, having had encounters with upper-level administrators and coaches which suggested to them that, at the end of the day, keeping student-athletes eligible for competition was the most important aspect of our jobs. Warnings that I received ranged from cautionary tales from mentors-to-be to the desultory rants of frustrated employees.

The environment was as anti-intellectual as it was paranoid, and I was determined to challenge both. Fortunately, a handful of graduate assistants in the athletics department, two academics advisors, the Associate Athletics Director, and several football coaches to whom I pitched the idea were willing to support it initially, and the citation of their support enabled to me to enlist further support from writing program professionals. To secure the funding and time necessary to pilot a writing program, I discussed funding opportunities with writing program and Rhetoric and Composition professors and administrators and secured a quarter-time course release in order to spend more time working with student-athletes in a writing center setting and have more time to collect and analyze data about those sessions. The course release was offered with many caveats, however, and I quickly discovered that there was as much resistance to my efforts on the English Department side as there was in Athletics. Professors mentioned to me that such work was better left for post-tenure, which might be the only thing to save me, politically, if I were ever on the outs with ICA.

They also remarked, often, about problems they'd encountered with students of their own who were athletes, who were often disinterested and unwilling learners, and their coaches, who demanded institutional forgiveness when their players cheated in or did not pass their classes. Fortunately, I was able to generate support from the Director of the Writing Program and the Director of the Writing Center, who believed that the project had great promise, both theoretically and as a means of financially and professionally supporting graduate students in the future.

They were also pleased with the fact that I was able to take advantage of renovations to the academics center and negotiate a new space for the center, which meant that we would no longer have to negotiate space with other tutors, or be kicked out by media on evenings when there were basketball games. Having made these arrangements, my next step was to begin searching for precedent for such programs and also grounding my work in the center in writing center and writing program administration research.

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### THE MCKALE CENTER ATHLETICS WRITING LAB PILOT

March 24, 2003

*One of my most treasured memories from my undergraduate experiences as a scholar-athlete was time spent in the locker room after tough practices, commiserating, shit-talking, and bonding with my teammates. During this time, as we iced our muscles and joints, dressed fresh "strawberry" wounds, and cooled down after difficult practices in the relentless humidity of the American South, we often learned much about the youngmen with whom we spent so much time, despite our sport's excessive demands on our time and energy. These moments were short, given that our practices generally ended around 6 pm and the school's cafeteria closed at 7 pm, but they were memorable moments, nonetheless.*

*Occasionally after practice, teammates would approach me and ask for advice on their essays and job and scholarship applications. Most of my teammates knew that I was an English major because the coaches found it quite interesting (and often*



*harmlessly made jest of the fact) that I, an all-American offensive lineman known for a cerebral and calculating approach to manhandling opposing defenders, was also an English major with a keen interest in poetics. Since I am generally an affable person, and that I wanted the opportunity to hone my skill as an English instructor, I almost always obliged teammates who sought my help. There we'd sit, often with ice bags strapped to our legs and arms, smelling of medicated analgesic rub, parsing sentences, explicating literature, and exploring invention and revising strategies. I imagined my success at reaching my peers in this setting was due to the setting in which the instruction took place as well as their feelings of kinship with me as a tutor; however, I took great pride and encouragement from the work I did with these student-athletes, and it is one of many experiences that led to my eventual decision to pursue a graduate degree in Rhetoric and Composition.*

*Exhausted, yet gratified, I would emerge from the Field House with a great sense of accomplishment and service, and often wondered if, as an athletics administrator or professor, I'd have such rich and meaningful opportunities to teach writing and work with student-athletes. I also imagined, sans the aches and pains from pummeling opposing defensive linemen for two hours during practice, how much better a teacher I would be and how much more energetic I'd be about the work.*

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As I piloted the program<sup>7</sup> in Spring 2001, I ensured that my administrative work as coordinator of the writing center satellite was informed by my collaboration with writing program and athletics administrators across the country at peer institutions. I first contacted athletics administrators at the University of California-Berkeley and Arizona State University (PAC-10 institutional peers), who had decided to increase their writing tutorial staffs by three to five employees, all of whom were writing specialists. They had not, however, established any formal relationship with their university writing programs, nor had any other of the PAC-10

institutions whom I contacted. Such a relationship was critical not only to the Director of Academics, but to the Athletics Director of Compliance, who cited the events that unfolded at the University of Minnesota half a decade before as a cautionary tale about writing tutorial programs in athletics departments that lacked sufficient oversight<sup>8</sup>.

I proposed to WPAs and Athletics Administrators that an effective way to appease the conflicts of interest associated with athletic department tutorials (with regards to the teaching of writing) is to have English department faculty and graduate assistants assist with writing center work within the athletic department's context. In doing so, the athletic departments can be sure that the tutorial program is closely aligned with the English Department's mission statement about academic writing, and that they are receiving quality assistance from writers and writing teachers at their university, within their own academic community. Creating this relationship will also provide the athletic department with the academic integrity and responsibility of the English Department (whereas in previous mishaps, writing tutors were privately sponsored by the athletic department and had no connection to the English Department). In addition, this relationship would also benefit English Departments/WPAs by providing another arena for the teaching of writing--which could offer opportunities for writing center and Writing Across the Curriculum research initiatives, as well as opportunities for course releases for graduate students, supplemental funding for non-funded graduate students, and opportunities for professionalization (teacher training and work outside of the English Department).

As I obtained further support for the program, my search for programs after which to model the center led to a program at Michigan State University, the SASS Writing Center Satellite. The SASS Writing Center Satellite, located in the Clara Bell

<sup>8</sup>A 1995 NCAA investigation revealed that Clem Haskins, former University of Minnesota head basketball coach, had arranged for athletics department academics counselor Jan Gangelhoff to write papers for and tutor his players. Gangelhoff became the primary whistleblower in this case, and sanctions were issued by the NCAA for academic fraud.

<sup>7</sup>The pilot program was called the McKale Center Athletics Writing Lab.



Smith Student Support Center, was established in 1997 for student-athletes at Michigan State University. Tutors at the center undergo the same training and preparation as all other tutors associated with Michigan State's main Writing Center and other satellites and work exclusively with student-athletes during their regularly assigned "study-table" times in the late afternoon and evening hours. The satellite center also has a graduate assistant coordinator who is appointed by the MSU writing program who supervises and evaluates tutors. The center, in addition to extending writing program services to students whomight not otherwise be able to because of their schedules, also allows for collaboration between the athletics department and an academic department (<http://writing.msu.edu/about/hours.php>). In my search to identify such programs, I didnot come across another program that merged inter-departmental goals so seamlessly. This was an impressive development considering the closely-guarded nature typical of athletics departments and the indifference with which most faculty and academic departments regard athletics and student-athletes. As I envisioned developing a writing program for student-athletes at the University of Arizona, I imagined that the program would closely mimic the program I'd discovered at Michigan State. Furthermore, the center's director and student workers would serve as important collaborators and as an important resource for information, strategies, and perspectives on running a writing center satellite in a Division I athletics department.

I ensured that my plans for the design of the program were informed by research on writing center theory and pedagogy. Rather than accept a role as remedial tutorial service in the context of the athletics department's academics unit, I pressed, with the support of the Writing Program and Writing Center, to establish a program that would revise traditional thinking about the function of the traditional study hall and tutorial services in athletics department settings, and rhetorically embody the establishment of a learning community for student-athletes. Drawing from North's ground breaking article "The Idea of a Writing Center," I built upon the potential of the writing center to become a

transformative learning community rather than a place where remedial teachers work with sub-standard writers (433). Referring to Peter Carino's analysis of the history of writing centers in "What Do We Talk about When We Talk about Our Metaphors?: A Cultural Critique of Clinic, Lab and Center," I also carefully described the program to the academics counselors who would primarily refer students to ensure that they would not only refer students who struggled in their writing classes, but all students who were interested in being members of a learning community. Further, heeding Kenneth Bruffee (in "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,") I developed a curriculum for writing tutors that focused on encouraging the development of a sense of community and collaboration among students with whom they worked, citing Bruffee's claim that individuals sharpen their skills as they converse and share their ideas (88). Finally, citing Andrea Lunsford in "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center," tutors were advised to privilege collaboration over instruction, encouraging students to work with (rather than be directed by) tutors, developing their own writing and critical thinking skills while working in teams to facilitate knowledge attainment(41).

Few obstacles stood in the way of the pilot program. I worked with the tutorials coordinator to recruit, hire, and train three undergraduate tutors and enlisted the support of athletic academics advisors in a general staff meeting and asked that they inform their students about the program. I also spoke with first-year, sophomore, and transfer student-athletes and introduced our services to students in a general assembly at the beginning of the semester. Writing program administrators continued to offer their support, feedback, and guidance. As the Spring 2001 semester began, we signed up students for one-on-one sessions and working with walk-ins, as well, and I was pleased that the population of students with whom we worked was as diverse as the student-athlete body. Throughout the semester, based on weekly memos that I circulated providing updates and reports on students who worked with our writing tutors, athletic academics advisors and the Associate Athletics Director of Academics learned



that many student-athletes accessed the new writing support services. Word of mouth feedback from students was generally positive, and coaches occasionally stopped by the center to inquire about their athletes' progress. Given the support that the program drew from faculty, athletics administrators, and the student-athletes, I secured an agreement from the Associate Athletics Director of Academics to establish a full writing center satellite, with a line item that included the allocation of a graduate assistantship/internship for a program coordinator, office space, and copy budget, and a designated area for the satellite in the newly redesigned Hillen brand Meeting Center. The plans for the center were announced to the University of Arizona Board of Regents in March, 2001, and in Fall, 2001, the CATS Satellite Center for Learning and Writing (CATS CLAW) was officially established.

#### THE CATS CLAW AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

In retrospect, much of the work I performed in designing and coordinating the satellite was akin to that of a social movement organizer, engaging me in the kinds of political debate, financial negotiations, and culture-shifting that Cruse designates as the "Triple Front." In order to accomplish the program's goals, I was required to determine problems, mobilize resources, establish strategic alliances with supporters of my program to address those issues while allowing others feedback and ideas to guide my problem solving approaches, and continually address coercive, counterpersuasive<sup>9</sup>, and reactionary practices within a rigid institutional establishment with non-violent discursive and non-discursive subversion. Engaging in these processes--which at the time I would have characterized as the typical administrative engagements of an underfunded and poorly understood though well-received pilot program coordinator, but now choose to interpret as social movement--allowed me and my collaborators to establish a writing center that progressively challenged misconceptions of writing centers in the academy while providing learning services to a group of students oft characterized as disinterested and unwilling by both the academy and

athletics departments. In my last days as program coordinator, as I sat in the center and observed organically-formed writing and discussion groups, lively conversations, and students teeming from one end of the classroom to the other with intellectual curiosity, I knew that the goal of providing a learning community for student-athletes had been accomplished.

The CATS CLAW represents the hope shared by many social movement leaders--that the airing of grievances, recommendations for change, and pursuit of equality in education has the potential to transform institutional practices, even if on the smallest of scales. In other words, a movement based on a theory of student-athlete advocacy motivated to provide services to student-athletes that contribute to their development as athletes, citizens, and learners. It also represents the manifestation of goals I developed through consultation with faculty, staff, graduate students, and athletics administrators after the acquisition of resources from and confrontation with athletics department personnel who frequently resisted the idea of the writing center I aimed to develop. The center continues to represent an important collaborative relationship between the University of Arizona Intercollegiate Athletics Department (ICA) and the Writing Program--a noteworthy mission convergence<sup>10</sup> between athletics and academe. The satellite center, one of only three in the Pacific-10 conference when it was founded in 2001, represented the most rare of synergies on a college campus--the kind of collaborative between athletics and academics unit that cynics would be hard-pressed to write off as subterfuge and that supporters would cite as an exemplar of a progressive athletics department and institution.

That is not to say that the work was not personally rewarding, as well. Running the center afforded me important opportunities as a writing program administrator, researcher, and scholar. For three semesters as the writing program coordinator,

<sup>9</sup>Put simply, this is when the establishment tries to convince agitators that they are wrong.

<sup>10</sup>A theory advanced by former University of Arizona baseball coach Dr. Jerry Stitt, in which he suggests that the missions of athletics departments and institutions of higher education should be aligned with one another in order to ensure student-athletes' success.





Managed to successfully administer the program's affairs, assess the program and its staff, articulate the program with the athletics department student services programming, integrate myself into the athletics department staff, and publish and disseminate research related to my administrative work in the center. In three full academic semesters and one summer session, my tutors and I conducted 627 one-on-one, peer review, and group tutorial sessions with 416 student-athletes representing every scholarship sport in the athletics department. I published a weekly memo that was issued to academics counselors and the Associate Athletics Director that kept them informed with regards to which student-athletes we met with and at what times. Collaborating with the tutorials coordinator, I evaluated tutors by observing them, having them submit self-evaluations, and helping them set goals for the following semester. I developed a web page to further advertise services offered through the program, and the program increasingly became associated with the permanent programs offered in the academics area--including LifeSkills, Academic Support, and the Integrated Learning Program. During that period, I also presented at three national conferences, a regional writing center conference, and a local conference on writing programs addressing writing program administration, program development, graduate student professionalization, and writing with student-athletes, culminating in three publications.

The commitment of ICA to fund the position and provide in-kind contributions to staff and support the center, coupled with the Writing Program's commitment to a professional development position for a graduate student to run the center speak to the movement's impact on the politics and economics of both the Writing Program and ICA. Rather than simply commit 'soft money' in the budget to developing the center, ICA's creation of a graduate assistantship for the writing center coordinator established the center's permanence. And the Writing Program's commitment to release graduate students from teaching responsibility to run the center was also evidence of their economic and political commitment to changing the culture of student-athlete services. The center also impacts campus culture,

particularly the culture associated with college athletics, significantly. The center addresses a gap in services that the university previously overlooked, considering that tutorial services and programs that are available to many university students are simply not practical options for student-athletes, whose rigorous and regimented schedules preclude their taking advantage of such resources.

The establishment of this satellite allowed ICA, which touts itself as a leader in "Academics, Athletics, and Community Service" to provide supplementary writing instruction and a writing-based learner-centered community for its student-athletes. In doing so, ICA holds itself accountable to its claims about the culture of college athletics at the University of Arizona -- the student-athletes are expected to excel in diverse endeavors beyond the field of play. At the same time, the program allows for the Writing Program to extend its influence on campus and further substantiate its importance to the university community and also gives credence to the athletics department's claims regarding the importance of supporting the development of the whole student through innovations in coaching, training, and psychological and instructional support. I continue to hope, as well, that the continued existence of the center will, in addition to promoting collaborative learning and offering a learning community to student-athletes, will continue to heal the rift between academic departments and ICA, promoting their cooperation and partnership well into the future.

However, achieving the mission of significantly augmenting the student-athlete support services offered to student-athletes at the University of Arizona did not come without great difficulty, and ultimately, the mission of the center is one that is on going and perpetually subject to co-option, distortion, and marginalization. According to Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen, social movements that have low actual membership and low potential membership combined with rhetorical sophistication generally encounter immense difficulty when they confront establishments. A common result of such a confrontation is "avoidance," wherein the establishment simply uses its bureaucratic infrastructure to prevent the movement from



achieving its mission (Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen 51). Examples of avoidance that I encountered as I sought to develop an athletics department writing program included evasive tactics, which include the use of “buck-passing” and deferment to other areas in order to discourage agitators from pursuing their ends (Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen 49). Examples included sitting in on numerous staff meetings to pitch the idea, being required to obtain buy-in from athletics and writing program administrators, having to convince Writing Program and ICA administrators to approve a ¾ assistantship so that I could run the center, and negotiations for space. Each of these assignments alone required hours of research and phone calls and dozens of walks across campus in between the classes I was teaching and the seminars I was attending as part of my graduate school course load. Even as I successfully recruited individuals to support the development of the program, it translated into more work for each of them as well as I increasingly consulted with all of them—amounting to a considerable commitment of their time.

Whereas many establishments successfully thwart social movements in this stage because the movements run out of resources and/or patience while completing these diversionary tasks, I pushed the program’s agenda forward, forcing the athletics administrators into another stage of control rhetoric called “adjustment”—accomplished by the incorporation of the dissident ideology and accepting some of the means of agitation (Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen 63). Though the center epitomized a learning community for student-athletes, in the context of the CATS program, it also served the needs of the academics unit. Student-athletes (again, primarily black male football players) with learning disabilities, provisional qualifiers, and students on academic probation were still assigned to meet with writing tutors for consultations. The sheer number of students assigned to meet with writing specialists violated two fundamental tenets of the CATS CLAW mission statement; namely, that the center was available to all student-athletes, and that the center was not to be reduced to exclusively providing writing clinics for remedial writers. However, because the athletics department funded my graduate assistantship and provided in-kind funding in the

form of office space, copy budget, and access to facilities, it was understood that they could determine the parameters and responsibilities of the assistantship. I continued to pursue the agenda that I sought from the onset, and was allowed to do so begrudgingly. However, in order to placate my supervisors, I was required to delegate tutors to fulfil the vision of the center that the Academics unit envisioned, and thus the unit was able to incorporate the center and determine its course.

In the final stages of my tenure as the center’s coordinator, administrators became desperate as other means of control rhetoric did not force the mainstreaming of my agenda for the center. At this point, their means became suppressive, or, their main goal was now to stop the spread of the ideology by any means (Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen 54-55). Quite often, this can include the removal of or cessation of funding, but there was no breach of contract or malfeasance that could be cited. In the final year of my tenure, athletics administrators began using strategies of harassment, which Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen define as a “rhetorical strategy of suppression,” to deter my work. This tactic proved to be the most successful. Their tactics of harassment included removing me from staff meetings so that I had no voice in the affairs of the office, restructuring of my schedule so that I was forced to work extremely early (7:30 a.m.) and late (until after 10:00 p.m.) hours, subjection to constant spying and supervision, denial of rights and privileges extended to other staff members (travel funds and copy budget) and, on occasion, confrontations with staff that led to shouting matches and nearly, a physical altercation. The most egregious instance involved an accusation that I assembled and led a coup involving football players who eventually mutinied and walked-out of football practice and demanded the Athletics Director and University President fire the coach, causing a national scandal.

After a full year of encountering near persistent and inexplicable harassment, I left my post mid-year and established a deal that the center be maintained under new direction. Ultimately, the center failed to significantly alter the culture of college athletics, with few exceptions, for many of the



black male student-athletes with whom I worked, even though, superficially, the impact appeared far greater. The movement was easily overpowered and co-opted by a change-resistant ICA unit and because of an unfortunate lack of sophistication on my part as the movement's organizer, which led to an uneven and ultimately inadequate consideration of political, economic, and cultural considerations that pertained to the success of the movement. Granted, even with a sophisticated understanding of campus politics, economics, and culture, larger, better funded, and more politically adept organizations have failed to impact the culture of college athletics significantly on a long-term basis. In "One Foot In," my analysis of how non-profit organizations engaged the NCAA to attempt to negotiate stricter standards to ensure black male student-athlete graduation rates bears this assertion out.

The aforementioned rhetorical confrontations represent the struggles of social movement, and it could be argued, the demise of a social movement. Though the center continued to operate until I graduated (a fellow Rhetoric and Composition graduate student took over as coordinator and ran the center for several years after I vacated the position) and the infrastructure--physical and otherwise--of student-athlete services at the University of Arizona is permanently altered by the presence of the center, the center's ultimate impact on the culture of college athletics at the University of Arizona is worth speculation. Bowers, Ochs, and Jensen's rhetorical framework reveals the ways in which the movement was susceptible to the control rhetoric of ICA, and given the small size of the number of individuals involved with the movement, ICA easily co-opted the writing center for its own designs. In addition, eventual financial cut backs experienced across the State of Arizona in higher education only increased the likelihood graduate students within the Writing Program would seek an opportunity to earn a fully-funded professionalization position, and thus be unlikely to challenge ICA's hegemony as I once did. Once ICA successfully removed me from the equation, they were able to minimize the impact of a student-athlete advocacy driven social movement and, in turn, establish a

program that superficially evokes their student-support mission while fulfilling an ultimately utilitarian and capitalist role within the structure of the department -- i.e. keep remedial students eligible for competition by tutoring them through their writing classes. Though the center remains, its once social movement-driven mission is a shell of its former self, full of potential rather than kinetic social movement energy.

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February 11, 2005

*I was late for my graduate seminar one evening, and probably appeared so disconcerted that my professor decided to take a short walk with me during the break. "You ok, Will? You looked really stressed out lately." Over the coming weeks I would learn that I had every right to be.*

*A young man had just spent the last two hours in my office. He was the very avatar of what the student-athlete should be--a true ambassador for sport and an amazing representative of his university. This was a young man who came from a whole lot of nuthin' but just enough. First-generation college student. A walk-on who had earned a full scholarship. Set to graduate in several months' time. And for all of this, which should have been a source of joy and contentment, this young man entered my office on the verge of tears. One thing the reader should know about ballers--we ain't averse to yellin', tauntin', scream in', or any other 'motivational tactics' that our coaches are prone to using. So when a baller is shedding tears in my office, I know there's real drama unfolding.*

*This young man had grown increasingly concerned about his ability to continue matriculating at the university, because he feared he might lose his scholarship. Though he had earned a full scholarship, he watched younger players receive more playing opportunities than he had. And though he gladly participated on special teams and as a scout in practice, this did not satisfy his coaches--who of all things characterized this young man as an 'under achiever' and questioned his work ethic because he had not panned out into the star running back they hoped he would have several years ago when they signed him. He then shared with me that such assaults on character had become all too common as*



*the team slipped from mediocrity to debacle over the course of the year.*

*I remember him so vividly, though he wasn't the first young man to vent in my office, which many of the players felt was a safe haven. It was amazing that this young man still had the passion and intensity he had when he entered as a freshman, even though the team had not had a winning season or competed in the post-season since he had arrived. It was equally troubling that his mistreatment--far too often written off as part and parcel of the college football experience--was beginning to break his spirits to the point that he was beyond quitting football. He was considering quitting school.*

*Other players had registered similar complaints with me--only behind closed doors, and only to me, which I thought peculiar, given the brevity of my tenure and the lowliness of my position in the department. Turns out that students needed someone to listen to them, not someone to bang heads for them. I began to notice, and it was hard not to, that the players who most often complained about being mistreated--not yelled at, but mistreated, abused, and embarrassed by their coaches--were young men of color and players from low socio economic status.*

*Fearing reprisal, the young men dared not address the issue with their position coaches, who often play the role of mediator between player and head coach. And other than commiserating with one another, the players felt an overwhelming lack of recourse and power to change their situation. Clearly, a remarkably insensitive group of coaches believed that the best way to motivate poor, young men of color was to berate them into submission by insulting, of all things, who they are, where they were from (barrios and hoods) and ignoring how hard they had worked to get to this point. Blatant and unadulterated racism and cultural insensitivity, and worse, no recourse, politically or culturally, for standing up to it.*

*I was so stressed out because I had been notified that afternoon that the players planned to stage a walkout of practice and petition the athletics director to confront the head coach, and possibly push to relieve him of his duties. Of course, I never planted the idea, though I always told players that*

*they needed to discover solutions to their problems and not be afraid to pursue those solutions. If nothing else, as human beings, they were owed respect. I knew that over the next couple of weeks that speculation as to who helped these young men pull off such a coup would be directed at me. I had no idea.*

*I would find out weeks later that, after the athletics director failed to respond favorably, that those same players would walk across campus, forty some-odd strong, ride the elevator up to the seventh floor of the Administration building and present their argument to the President of the University. Within six months, the head coach would be removed, and the scandal would be replayed at the top of the hour on local and national news programs--a scar on the university's reputation for some time to come.*

*And I knew that when it all came down to it, my unwillingness to continue to ignore and/or defend the unethical practices of my colleagues would be my undoing. I didn't even last another full year working in athletics (I lasted slightly longer than the ousted coach), and that year was filled with tumult, distrust, and espionage. My meetings with students were restricted. I was even prevented from attending staff meetings. I resigned, under duress, and have not worked directly with student-athletes or in an athletics department since. I wonder sometimes if I ever will again.*

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I share with the members of the Drake Group, Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, Black Coaches Association, the Knight Commission, and many sympathetic educators and administrators across the country a desire to maximize all of the positive traits about college athletics and identify and excise those that cause or have the potential to cause the most harm. I believe, particularly, that minimizing the kinds of exploitation and abuse that big-time college athletics, as an institution, visits upon far too many disfranchised black men is the single most important issue that unifies and drives college athletics' most ardent critics and detractors. As a rhetorician, I believe it is important to direct my energy towards the analysis of institutional racism in collegiate sport. The ultimate question, then, is how institutional racism manifests itself in the



contemporary institution of higher education as the Athletics-Industry Complex continues to proliferate exponentially in economic, political, and cultural importance--at the expense of thousands of young black men.

Elsewhere<sup>11</sup>, I have analyzed social movements that endeavored to compel the NCAA and its host institutions to enact educational reforms that would, in a *de factosense*, enhance the educational and psychosocial development opportunities for young black male revenue sport athletes who graduate at disproportionately lower rates while their labor serves as the engine that drives their athletics departments' money-making machines. In my analysis I have discovered that it is the failure of each movement's application of social movement rhetoric that leads to their collective demise, suggesting that wide-scale reform measures, especially when suggested by entities outside of the institutions, may be impossible when those entities fail to account for the importance of a stable and proliferating sport culture in many American institutions of higher education. For on-campus movements as well as off-campus based movements, Bowers, Ochs and Jensen's and Cruse's dictums hold true--all non-violent social movements must consider, and ultimately impact, political, economic and cultural considerations in order to achieve their ends, and they must successfully use agitation rhetoric to combat the control rhetoric of establishments that will resist social change with all available resources. Though it appears intuitive that the advantages of being on a host campus and having inside knowledge about that campus' political and economic infrastructure may offer a unique advantage to campus-based social movements, at least in the case of the writing program I coordinated and the *de facto* social movement I spurred on my campus, those particular characteristics were minimally helpful. Movements from inside the

institution meet fates similar to that of off-campus social movements, suggesting that their knowledge of unique campus infrastructures offers them little in the way of advantage over external non-profit organizations, as members of on-campus contingencies are also quickly marginalized and radicalized even within the culture of the Academy.

In the end, I have discovered that the insidiously corporatized model of college athletics overseen by the NCAA has been, to date, largely impervious to social movement because of its inherent rhetorical and organization strength as an establishment and the failure of smaller, weaker agitators to win over widespread support for radical educational reform. As with all successful social movements, two elements may ultimately dictate the success of the movement to redefine the culture of college athletics in American culture -- the passage of time and the ability to seize kairotic moments in the future where such reform will seem more feasible and necessary. This does not mean that the aforementioned organizations will cease their efforts in the meantime, or that Writing Program faculty--as well as concerned faculty across the host campuses departments and divisions--will discontinue their own efforts to reform college athletics when their professional duties call for such intervention and advocacy of student-athletes. As Jackie Robinson, the first Black to break the color line in professional baseball once noted, "the right to first-class citizenship is the most important issue of our time" and it is not an issue that will allow those interested in pursuing it to wait for the right time. Furthermore, rhetorician Adam Banks asserts, in "Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground," that "questions of race and racism are the most important questions of our field" and calls for rhetoricians, compositionists, and all writing program professionals to reconsider the ways in which our professional obligations should also involve us in quests for social justice (42). For too many student-athletes, their membership on athletics teams guarantees them first-class treatment while they remain eligible for athletic competition but ensures their marginalization and potential minimalizing as students. Graduation Success Rate studies have shown that this particularly impacts

<sup>11</sup> In my dissertation, "One Foot In: Social Movement Rhetoric and Student-Athlete Advocacy in the

Margins of American College Athletics," and later, in "Moving the Chains," found here: <https://issuu.com/outofboundsmag/docs/issue-full>.





black male student-athletes in the revenue-generating sports who are academically and socially underprepared for the rigors of college, and many of whom are not even prepared for the rigors of the professional world and citizenship upon graduation. Because the same athletes who drive the engine of collegiate sport in America reap a disproportionately small benefit, it is an issue that should be redressed *post haste* by higher education administrators and faculty. And yet, the low graduation and retention rates of black male revenue sport athletes remains a central problem in collegiate sport--an 800 lb. gorilla seated next to an elephant on the "Front Porch" of the Academy<sup>12</sup>.

#### NEXT STEPS

Researchers across various fields in higher education have long examined the cultural, political, and economic issues surrounding the place of college athletics in the Academy. Various issues and questions remain to be investigated, and many pertain to NCAA governance and institutional responses to growing problems in major college athletics *vis-à-vis* graduation success rates of revenue-sport athletes, Title IX/Gender Equity policy interpretations, the unchecked proliferation of college athletics departments (otherwise known as the "Arms Race"), and the role that external agitation will play in shaping NCAA policy in American colleges and universities. Of particular interest to university writing program professionals and writing program administration theorists is the role, historically and in the future, that writing programs play in advocating for educational equality for student-athletes. Given the university writing program's role in the past as progenitor of social movement on college campuses (e.g. "Students' Right to their Own Language" movement, "Community Literacy" movement, "Writing Across the Curriculum," etc.), why doesn't rhetoric and composition scholarship acknowledge that role? Will writing program professionals

continue to engage in student-athlete advocacy<sup>13</sup> on college campuses, and if so, will the issue become a special interest within the field so that more scholarship and creative administrative responses follow suit? Finally, will more rhetoricians turn their analytical lenses toward the behemoth that is college athletics, attempting to gain a greater understanding of how the NCAA's intractability in American society is the result of rhetorical construction as much as it is financial, political, and cultural strategy?

I will continue to research and develop a theory of athletics administration that centers on notions of student-athlete advocacy rather than athletics proliferation and to employ means both traditional (scholarship, administrative work, pedagogy, consultation) and revolutionary (non-violent social movement) in order to redress the most pernicious elements of college athletics culture and advocate for those made most vulnerable by its embedded forms of institutional exploitation, exclusion, and disfranchisement. I know that in this endeavor I have much to draw from and am confident that I have much to contribute to the field of rhetoric and composition, to the critical study of American sport culture, and to the redress of American college athletics.

#### EPILOGUE

*I sit across the table from the Director of Academics in his office, behind a closed door. His large oak desk places a comfortable distance between the two of us; a distance that he attempts to bridge by leaning forward in earnest, lowering his voice as an august look comes over his face. I prepare to ask the question he knows I will ask. He prepares the answer I know he will issue. And the dance begins.*

*"What happened to Isaiah?"*

*Isaiah was a conscientious, friendly, and promising young black male student-athlete from Los Angeles. He was a first-generation college student*

<sup>12</sup> College Basketball Hall of Fame Head Coach Dean Smith, UNC-Chapel Hill, once famously quipped "Athletics is to the university like the front porch is to a home. It is the most visible part, yet certainly not the most important."

<sup>13</sup> As did English Department faculty Linda Bensch-Myers, who took on The University of Tennessee and exposed academic fraud in their football program; Jan Kemp, who blew the whistle on Georgia Athletics and exposed fraud across the department; and Jon Ericsson of Drake University, forebear of The Drake Group.



who earned an opportunity to play big time Division I-A football as a defensive tackle. At 6'3, 285 lbs., he was undersized, and it was expected that he would redshirt, put on a few pounds, and acclimate to a new city, a new university. However, as the defensive line became snakebitten by injuries, Isaiah filled in. And he acquitted himself quite well, leading the defensive line in hits for losses and recording two sacks. Yet, for someone as imposing in size as he was, Isaiah was courteous and always smiled and laughed heartily. And belying his jockish exterior, he was serious about his school work. We ended virtually every writing consultation over the course of his freshman year talking about how he was finally doing it – breaking the cycle, making his parents proud, earning a college degree.

He made a B in 101 and an A in 102. His instructor, a friend of mine, told me he was one of his favorite students in his 20+ years of teaching. The spring semester ended and Isaiah had survived—barely—but with a summer course or two, he would lift his GPA over 2.0 and remain eligible for competition. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts and reductions, tutorial services were cancelled for the summer, and I would not have opportunities to interact with Isaiah, but I remained confident that he would prevail and we'd catch up next fall.

*"What happened to Isaiah?"*

Isaiah struggled that summer, making C's in both of his courses and failing to bring his GPA up to the minimum he would need to remain eligible for competition. Disappointed by his performance, he returned to Los Angeles, and stopped returning phone calls from academic advisors and coaches alike. He was never heard from again. Coaches scurried to sign a junior college transfer to fill the void and academics advisors continued to prepare for the oncoming semester.

No one dropped the ball on Isaiah. Sure, there were budget cuts that led to the academics area's budget being cut, but there were campus resources available. Coaches and advisors offered constant encouragement. Advisors checked on his grades on a weekly basis. He just didn't make it. Not because of negligence or inattention. If it were explained to me that way, that day, in that office, I could have swallowed it.

*"What happened to Isaiah?"*

What I heard in the next two minutes forever changed the way I viewed and continue to view big-time college athletics and the way it manages, exploits, and disposes of the labor of young black men in the revenue generating sports. "William, only half of our student athletes graduate in a six year period, and we lose about one out of three during their first year of college. Think about that. I know that you and Isaiah were close, and it's unfortunate that he didn't make it, but you get used to it. A lot of these kids come into our lives for a short time and then you never see them again." What he neglected to mention was that an inordinately high percentage of those students who just so happened to fail to matriculate were black male football players. When he looked at the matrix, he saw numbers and slots to be filled. I saw and still continue to see Isaiah. From that day, I began counting down the number of days I'd work there, and imagining an approach to athletics administration that would characterize Isaiah's demise differently – and ultimately work toward reducing such attrition rather than writing it off as the cost of doing business.

*And that's what happened to Isaiah.*

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