

## **JUCOS, JOCKS, AND TITLE IX: THE COACH AS THE DEAR COLLEAGUE GUIDING COMMUNITY COLLEGE ATHLETES**

**Francis Jones**

Heald College

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**ABSTRACT:** *The “Dear Colleague Letter” distributed guidance to educational programs regarding Title IX in 2011. In 2014, the Department of Education released the names of 55 schools that are under investigation for sexual violence. In turn, the fire storm around athletes and violence against women has brought new attention to the urgency to educate the college campus. As community colleges craft their training programs and interventions, the athletic coach is an integral part in truly reaching community college student-athletes. This article reviews the Title IX policy, athletics’ unfortunate association with sexual violence, and the primary role an athletic coach can play in guiding players to compliant social justice within the framework on Title IX.*

**KEYWORDS:** Community College Coach, Title IX, Culture, Sexual violence

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2011, the United States government distributed the “Dear Colleague Letter” regarding Title IX (USDCR, 2011). Since its inception in 1972, Title IX was typically mentioned to create equitable athletic opportunities for women. More recent applications look at equitable opportunities for women in the STEM fields (Walters, 2010). However, while the language from 1972 has not changed, the more recent focus is on the existing language about sexual violence on campus and the educational program’s responsibility to educate the campus community. In the aftermath of the Sandusky/Penn State scandal, colleges received a harsh wake-up call not only to review their policies, but the actual unspoken practices applied when dealing with sexual assault allegations.

The United States Department strengthened its resolve on sexual violence and Title IX by readdressing the language and publically listing 55 schools with open sexual violence investigations in 2011. As of June 2015, a total of 111 colleges and universities were under investigation for potential Title IX violations inclusive of three community colleges. In June 2016, 315 colleges and universities were the subject of federal Title IX investigations (Kingkade, 2016a). The 2016 complete list included ten community colleges under investigation for Title IX infractions, including San Jose- Evergreen Community College District with two different investigations and SUNY Broome Community Colleges with three different investigations (Kingkade, 2016). In regard to education, specifically,

a school should provide training to all employees likely to witness or receive reports of sexual violence, including teachers, professors, school law enforcement unit employees, school administrators, school counselors, general counsels, athletic coaches, health personnel, and resident advisors (USDCR, 2011, p. 38).

## **Sports and Sexual Assault**

Sports programs have an unfortunate history involving athletes and sexual assault. The 2006 scandal with the nationally ranked Duke lacrosse team ended their season and the coaches' employment. Though after a year-long legal battle, all charges were dropped; the presence of drinking, sexual behavior and at a team party made the damaging allegation plausible and tarnished the reputations for all involved. The Steubenville High School sex scandal in 2013 involved young men and women, alcohol, and the opportunity for sexual misconduct. A similar story unfolded again in the 2014 James Madison's issue with a young lady on spring break, drinking, with the opportunity for all involved to make bad sexual decisions. Unfortunately, these decisions and the sexual assault were captured on videotape. In the last 40 years over 100 cases of athletes and sexual assault have been reported (Luther, 2014). While these numbers are shocking, note that one in five women on any campus will be raped and 90% of the cases go unreported (Luther, 2014, para. 3).

In 2016, Baylor University and its football players gained national attention for sexual assaults from 2012 through 2016; as part of the disciplinary action, head coach Art Briles was fired. The coaching staff had allowed players indicted for sexual assault to continue with the team activities (Ellis, 2016). Further in 2016, Stanford swimmer, Brock Turner, was convicted and served six months in jail for sexually assaulting an unconscious co-ed behind a dumpster on campus after a fraternity party (Associated Press, 2016).

Community colleges are not immune from these problems. In the fall of 2014, Massasoit Community College reported sexual assault involving one of its students. The Louisiana Community and Technical College system reported two sexual assault incidents from 2009 to 2013 (O'Donoghue, 2014). Butte-Glenn Community College District was one of 55 schools placed on the government's initial list (USDOE, 2014). With the tide shifting in American culture to support women who are the target of sexual assault, potentially more women will feel empowered to report sexual assault.

Within this historical and legislative context, the signs are ever present that while community college athletic programs do not typically attract the media attention and revenue dollars, they still attract young male players and young women fans. If alcohol, drugs, or any activity that yields poor judgment is added to this recipe, the same sexual violence scenarios can unfold at the two-year campus. Consider the following real time scenario retold by a colleague teaching in the community college system:

The instructor, who typically is assigned the basketball team in his sector, overhears the young ladies banter about their sexual conquests. Despite his attempt to ignore them, the instructor can still hear the explicit and braggadocious discussion on sexual exploits, what they did, how they did it, and who else was left to conquer. The ladies named names, positions, times, and dates of their sexual exploits. But they didn't brag alone. The men's team also compared notes about who attended the games and who gave stellar performances "between the sheets." Neither group exhibited modesty or discretion in their story telling (Davis, personal communication, 2015).

In retelling this story to the author, the instructor noted, "Coach must not advise his guys. I hear these stories all the time... way too much information." The instructor also commented that while these community college ladies and players engaged in this constant cycle of sexual pursuit, the community college also hosted gateway programs and other bridge programs which

brought young girls under 18 to class with the players who were clearly uneducated about their risky behavior related to loose sexual activity. The conversation left the instructor wondering if the coach ever talked to his players about sexual assault (Davis personal communication, October, 2015).

### **Coaches as Title IX Educators**

The appointment and training of a Title IX coordinator would not only establish institutional responsibility; such appointments would convey an explicit commitment to educate the community regarding sexual assault and Title IX. Nonetheless, educating student-athletes should include other considerations. Student-athletes who attend community colleges typically do such because their Division-I dreams did not materialize (Holmes, 2013). Perhaps they experienced academic problems or behavioral problems in high school that brought them to an alternative sports route through community college athletics and presumably on to their professional career dream. Student-athletes in many ways are at-risk students. Though the scholarship and presumably glitch life may seem appealing to those outside of athletic circles, the competing interests of academics and athletics compromises career opportunities (Hollis, 1998). Many times, poor academic performance brought them to community college remedial education and a long academic pathway to college level courses (Hollis, 2016b). In 2011, “Over 87000 student-athletes competed in 626 two-year colleges... “ With over 13600 playing football at two-year schools in hopes of earning a four-year scholarship (Holmes, 2013, p. 29). In this alternative pathway, community college student-athletes look to the coach within the philosophy of *parentis loco*. The coach as local parent, advises student-athletes on living arrangements, academic course selection, and athletic development. Coaches often serve as an intermediary, resolving team conflict (Hollis, 2016). Therefore, a coach would be the optimal staff member to educate student-athletes regarding Title IX.

A recent qualitative study captured the voices of junior college football players, with one of three emerging themes pointing to the coach as the guiding individual in the players’ lives. All of the participants played junior college, and then successfully transitioned to college or professional careers, with the guidance of their coach:

- “I’ve got to give a shout out to my coach who helped me... if it wasn’t for my coach I wouldn’t be here
- My coach helped me develop all aspects of my life
- Coach helped me to focus (Holmes, 2013, p. 111)

Coaches are consistently powerful figures in the lives of their players and the communities around their team. In this context, coaches can play an integral role in social change and shift the culture. To name a few examples, Bill Elder was a powerful figure in desegregation that carried a gun to protect his black players (Martin, 2008). Coach Duffy Daugherty of Michigan State recruited the first black quarterback from the south to win the 1966 national championship (Shanahan, 2014); legendary University of North Carolina basketball coach, Dean Smith recruited the first black player to the ACC (Lapchick, 2011). College coaches historically influence social change and continue with such influence regarding Title IX at both the four-year and two-year level.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Community colleges should train coaches to be Title IX advocates. Just as two-year student-athletes turn to the coach for academic assistance, and life skills advice, two-year student-athletes also listen to the coach about proper behavior to avoid sexual assault. The coach should be a vital advocate for maintaining Title IX compliance.
- 2) Title IX coordinators at two-year schools should be involved in student athlete orientation. Men and women student – athletes should be trained about Title IX, avoiding excessive alcohol, and risky behavior. While the national focus might be on male student athletes, all student-athletes and their respective coaches should be trained about Title IX and avoiding sexual assault.

## CONCLUSION

As confirmed through this study (Holmes, 2013) and others (Steinfeldt, et al. 2011; Jowett, & Chaundy, 2004), coaches are in a prime position to guide players to success or failure. They hold the mentor-protégé space that guides adult development by coaching young people to a dream or lofty goal (Alderfer, 2014). Therefore, coaches have assisted student-athletes through coming of age issues (Hollis & McCalla, 2013), academic problems, and adjustment problems. Even in the bizarre 2013 cyber hoax involving Notre Dame's Manti Teo's, coaches were among the first contacted in support of their student-athletes.

The training programs informing the community campus personnel and students about sexual violence provide a solid response to educate the campus. Athletics staff may even have a designee to create training and confirm staff participation. However, to truly reach student-athletes, the coaches must not only be trained, they must be the central figure advising the student-athletes regarding sexual violence. A coach is the figure in the unique position to reinforce daily critical messages to avoid sexual violence. Further, coaches often suggest classes and arrange tutoring for student athletes' developmental education (Hollis, 2016b). Such relationships for academically underprepared student-athletes can strengthen their academic performance. As the primary person in a community college student-athlete's life, the coach controls playing time can facilitate transfer to four-year schools. Given the influence over the lives of JUCO athletes, coaches are critical in providing Title IX education to community college student-athletes.

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