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The Discourse Community of an Athletic Director

A discourse community, as defined in the UWP 1, is essentially a group of individual who share the same goals, interests, genres, and ways of communicating with each other in respects to their community. Within every occupational field, there is a prevalent discourse community that exists. In these communities, there are certain ways of communicating within the group, and to be successful one must adapt to the discourse. According to John Swales, a discourse community typically features the following: a common interest in public goals, the members within it are able to receive information and feed it back to another, and there are experts in the community (Pigg). It was best stated that understanding your discourse community can be compared to coming into a conversation late, many voices have already been there before you, and understanding your community can help allocate the void of coming in late (Pigg). Understanding the discourse community one is in, is vital for comprehension of what is taking place. Lucille McCarthy writes “Successful students are those who can, in their interactions with teachers during the semester, determine what constitutes appropriate texts in each classroom: the content, structures, language, ways of thinking, and types of evidence required in that discipline” (McCarthy). If someone is to be successful, whether it is in school or their profession, being able to navigate their discourse is essential. The position of Athletic Director displays a discourse community that ranges across a large spectrum of communication due to the various amounts of responsibilities an Athletic Director has. An Athletic Director interacts with student-athletes, coaches, donors, fellow Athletic

Directors, and many others. In order to understand, and satisfy the needs of everyone, the Athletic Director must communicate with each of these groups in different ways.

According to the job description on study.com, Athletic Directors "...direct athletic activities, supervise the coordination of athletic events and manage athletic department budgets at secondary and postsecondary schools. Outside of these requirements, athletic directors may also participate in revenue development planning and fundraising. Additionally, these professionals serve as liaisons with sports conference or division administrators, such as those from the National Collegiate Athletic Association" (Study.com). From this definition, one can infer that in order for an individual to be a successful Athletic Director, he or she must be able to communicate with a large variety of individuals, which can be a very daunting task. The ability to comprehend new rules and regulations set forth by various policy makers, including the NCAA, and in return relaying that information to coaches and athletes requires an enormous amount of communication skills. McCarthy writes that "Community members share characteristic "ways of speaking," that is, accepted linguistic, intellectual, and social conventions which have developed over time and govern spoken interaction." Once the "ways of speaking" are mastered, the said above skills are realized, but only first by understanding the discourse community and how to express information in a way that all will understand.

Kevin Blue, the newly hired "Acting Athletic Director ," at the University of California, Davis, sent an email addressing student athletes at the University. Blue wrote that it was his "responsibility to lead our organization in a manner that creates the best possible environment for you to prepare for an impactful life after graduation. We want

you to develop intellectually, competitively, and interpersonally while strengthening the confidence and skills you'll need to pursue your dreams" (Blue). Often times in this community, Athletic Directors express to their student athletes the importance of not only being great in their respective sports, but also to be great in the classroom and in the community. Blue also wrote the following: "I was a student-athlete at Stanford during my undergraduate years, and can thus identify with the experience that you're having – the highlights, challenges, and everything in between" (Blue). In human nature when one can connect with others on a level that is not understood by all, they are typically more inclined to respond positively and follow them. When communicating with athletes, Athletic Directors typically try to apply a personal connection that will gain an athlete's trust. The tone of Blue's e-mail was very lighthearted and optimistic towards the direction he wants to take the athletic program at Davis. Blue used appropriate professional jargon throughout the email, which one would expect. However, everyone, including those outside of the discourse community, would be able to understand the intent of his message.

Teresa Gould, the current acting "Interim" Director of Athletics at the University of California, Davis, was asked these four questions in an interview: How do you communicate with colleagues, How do you communicate with Athletes, How do you communicate with donors, and What are the main difference in communicating with the previously asked questions? With respect to the first question, Gould responded: "Most of my communication with colleagues is conducted through in-person/face-to-face meetings, via electronic communication (e-mail and text message), and over the phone" (Gould). As previously stated, an Athletic Director must have exceptional communication

skills to be able to get their point across. A large part of this community is relaying new changes in legislation or other areas with colleagues. There are not many words in the vocabulary of an Athletic Director that other discourses would not understand; however, like all professions, there is a certain way to communicate with each other. Being that the majority of the meetings are face-to-face an Athletic Director has to be able to communicate in a manner that is appropriate for the workplace. However, when it comes to emails and text messages a multitude of situations could cause the message to be skewed. For example, the messages could be interpreted the wrong way or the tone could be assumed causing confusion, making it pivotal to be able to express your message as clear and concise as possible.

In Gould's response to the second question, Gould stated: "I generally only communicate with Student-Athletes in person at SAAC (Student Athlete Advisory Committee) meetings or via email and social media." (Gould) The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee "is the leadership group within Intercollegiate Athletics, which provides feedback to the athletic director on issues of importance to student-athletes, works to promote the welfare of UCD intercollegiate student-athletes, and encourages participation in community outreach activities."(UC Davis Official Athletic Site) When Gould communicates with the student-athlete like communicating with her colleagues it is mostly in person communication. However, unlike with her colleagues, she can speak more personally with the student athletes. As stated previously by Kevin Blue, the Athletic Directors job when it comes to student-athletes is to help [..you to develop intellectually, competitively, and interpersonally] (Blue). Athletic Directors work as facilitators to the athletes to get things done where the athletes don't have a voice, and

can also act as counselors when the athletes need someone to confide in. Also, unlike communicating with their colleagues, an Athletics Directors communication with the student-athlete can be expanded to communicating over social media. This type of communication is usually less personal than the in-person communication, and more informational for upcoming events and changes happening in the University's Athletic Department.

The third question Teresa Gould answered by stating “ Donors communication is mostly done through in -person meetings, phone communication, E-mail communication, social media, and hard copy letters sent directly to them.” (Gould) Donors are typically alumni of the university, and most of the time were student-athletes themselves. The communication between an Athletic Director and the Donors is like a mixture of communication with colleagues and the student-athletes. On one hand there is a certain professionalism that must take place because these are business people trying to invest in the future of UC Davis Athletics. On the other hand, these are mostly ex-athletes and the Athletic Director is trying to sell the athletic departments cause to the Donors to get them to invest so the conversation is more personal than in a regular business setting. An Athletic Director also has to be a great sales person; they must make the Donors feel comfortable usually by talking about the Donors success in athletics, while at the same time expressing whatever the Athletic Directors need is. For example, in the in-person meetings, they are centered around reminiscing about glory days, and the vision of the furthering of the university. When using social media to get more donors the Athletic Director typically promotes all of the success the program has had but also shows the need for growth hopefully enticing someone to help promote that growth.

The answer to the final question of Gould's interview was "They are all very similar, the main difference is generally related to whether you are communicating with a group or an individual, and whether the subject matter is sensitive or not." (Gould) From her responses to the questions, one can see that the majority of the communication is in person communication, but also stems to other methods like phone calls, e-mails, and social media. The most important of the communication skills is the in-person communication; if one can not relay his or her message properly, while being either sensitive to the situation or guiding the conversation in the way they want it to go, it would be hard to be a successful Athletic Director.

The position of the Athletic Director is really the best of both worlds; this person is constantly supporting the athletics of their respective school both physically by enjoying and rooting for their teams to win, and also is able to help those athletes off the field whether it is through making changes to better benefit the student-athletes or simply being someone that is there for them. However, in order to be impactful in these phases, the Athletic Director must be the master of communication in their discourse community. They must effectively communicate with colleagues in order to better their efforts of making their schools athletics the best they can be. When it comes to the student-athletes Athletic Directors have to easily juggle being an administrator, a facilitator, and someone the athletes feel they can confide in comfortably. In talking to Donors the Athletic Director has to be able to sell the vision in order to get the funds needed to be able to give their student-athletes the best chance at success. Once an Athletic Director has a complete grasp on effectively communicating in his or her discourse community the livelihood of their school's success in athletics is a great one.

Works Cited

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