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San Bernardino Valley College Athletic Success Center (The Huddle) Helps Students Get Through Academic Maze

Not quite a year old, the Athletic Success Center (The Huddle) at San Bernardino Valley College is already seeing positive results for sports-minded students that get easy access to extra help in math and English, priority registration, and financial resources. And, at times, a little tough love.



SBVC Athletics Counselor Andre Wooten first came to campus in 2004, concerned at how little academic support was available for athletes. Today, he said the learning center has

grown to provide guidance to over 200 athletes.

As one example of how the program strengthens academic commitment, he points to the women's soccer team where students are required to register and keep up with their study schedule. If they don't meet three to four hours study per week, they run extra laps. He'd like to see all coaches apply similar positive pressure.

"The girls' soccer team graduation rate is over 80%. She (Coach Kristin Hauge) has 18 sophomores this year and all are graduating," he said. Students can access computers, online research, and print papers at the center. They learn how to meet their requirements for graduation, education and life planning, and academic goals. They understand eligibility and transfer rules of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association).

He said it's important to reach athletes at risk of slipping into territory where they value -- or others value -- running a ball more than making the grade. Typically, the academic hurdle facing incoming athletes is that many are non-qualifiers, meaning they did not go through the NCAA clearinghouse to become eligible to play college sports. Students are usually unaware of minimum requirements of 16 core classes or 2.5 GPA to transfer to a four-year college on athletic scholarship.

Some students are academically ready, but most face hard challenges and need remedial math and reading. He shows them how to finish up and transfer in four semesters. He also drives home the importance of personal responsibility, that the victory goes to those who grind it out and study. "It's up to them. The whole point is that if you can get an athletic scholarship to pay for your education, that means you have no debt," he said.

It also doesn't help that financial aid is still not understood by the students that need it most. Many have not heard of the BOG fee waivers, FAFSA or assessment tests. "They're like, I just came here because my friends are coming," he said. "You get a lot of that."

When Wooten first came on board at SBVC, there was no study hall for

athletes, and support was bare bones. He pushed the Huddle idea to Dr. Ricky Shabazz, then Vice President of Student Services, who was very supportive. In San Bernardino, he said the extra help is really needed because so many are first-generation college students.

"Their parents are working, and they don't understand the academic part," he said. "We can guide them and matriculate them and show them what you need to do."

Most of the support is just getting students to square one. He holds orientations to keep them in the loop about what's needed to graduate, but it's not easy. Many students struggle with not having received the right academic guidance in those crucial early years.

At other times, it's the healthy competition that spurs them on. Each semester, athletes receive grade checks. Freshmen watch their sophomore peers jetting out on Fridays, flying back Mondays from exciting SBVC recruiting trips to faraway places.

"They come back from Washington or LSU, and the freshmen ask, 'Why is that person getting a scholarship? Why are they going? Because they're studying,'" Wooten tells them. "That's the carrot. That wakes a lot of students up."

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