

# **Heart of a Tiger: Balancing academics and athletics: the evolving role of Faculty Athletics Representatives**

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HAYS, Kan. - College athletics foster school spirit, community pride, and a sense of belonging among students, alums, and fans. Beyond camaraderie, participating in college sports promotes physical activity, wellness, discipline, and teamwork skills, enhancing the overall collegiate experience.

Athletic scholarships often make higher education accessible for talented student-athletes who excel in their respective sports. Additionally, successful athletic programs generate revenue and elevate a school's visibility, attracting prospective students and strengthening alum engagement.

Amid the multifaceted landscape of college athletics, the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) plays a pivotal yet often overlooked role. Appointed by and reporting to the president, the FAR is a crucial link between the institution, athletic department, and the NCAA, ensuring compliance, academic integrity, and student-athlete welfare.

Carrie Hielman, FAR at UVA, observed that two things are true: Most people don't know what the faculty athletics representative does, and every NCAA school has one. Only one person from each of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's more than 1,100 colleges and universities serves as the faculty athletics representative for their school, making it a unique role at each institution.

At Fort Hays State University (FHSU), the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) position has a rich history of esteemed individuals who have significantly impacted the university's athletic journey within the NCAA.

Keith Faulkner held the role before 1989 when FHSU was a member of the NAIA, transitioning seamlessly into the NCAA era. Following Faulkner, Gary Cox served as the FAR for the RMAC Conference from 1989 to 1995, paving the way for the impactful tenure of Glen McNeil as FAR for the RMAC Conference from 1995 to 2006 and subsequently for the MIAA Conference until 2021. In 2021, Kenton Olliff took over as the FAR for the MIAA Conference, continuing FHSU's tradition of dedicated service to student-athletes and upholding the legacy of his predecessors.

FARs play a crucial role at NCAA member institutions like FHSU, ensuring the delicate balance between academics and intercollegiate athletics. As liaisons between the institution, the athletics department, and the NCAA, FARs like Glen McNeil and Kenton Olliff uphold compliance with regulations and promote academic integrity within athletics programs.

Their responsibilities include monitoring student-athlete academic performance, overseeing academic services, and providing senior advice on athletics. Engaging in institutional athletics committees, reporting to the faculty senate, and representing their institutions at NCAA conventions are among the duties fulfilled by FARs.

Beyond administrative tasks, FARs actively safeguard student-athletes' well-being, engage with advisory committees, and conduct exit interviews to assess athletes' experiences. They also ensure institutional compliance with NCAA and conference regulations, swiftly addressing potential violations to maintain integrity in collegiate athletics programs.

The effectiveness of FARs like Kenton Olliff at FHSU is bolstered by institutional support, underscoring their vital role in upholding academic standards and student welfare within collegiate athletics.

Emphasizing holistic student-athlete development, Kenton stresses the fulfillment of witnessing student-athletes excel in both athletic and academic realms. This focus underscores the essential role of the FAR in shaping the well-rounded success of individual student-athletes within the FHSU athletic community.

Kenton works closely with Senior Women's Administrator and Assistant Athletic Director Dixie Balman in certifying student-athlete eligibility and overseeing essential tasks to ensure their overall well-being. In the ever-evolving landscape of college athletics, challenges such as regulatory changes, as well as facilitating student-athlete transfer, demand expertise to navigate effectively.

"It is rewarding to see student-athletes do well not only in their sport but also in the classroom," shared Kenton.

With a spirit of collaboration and innovation reminiscent of initiatives seen at other institutions, the FAR's role at FHSU remains crucial in supporting the delicate balance between academics and athletics. The dedication and commitment of individuals like Kenton Olliff exemplify ongoing efforts to foster success and well-being among Fort Hays State University student-athletes, ensuring a thriving academic and athletic growth environment that honors the rich history of FARs who have paved the way before him.