

Librarian Faculty Athletics Representative: Positives and Negatives

By Emmett Lombard

Abstract

NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) affiliate schools are required to designate a tenured faculty member as Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR). Few librarians are ever appointed. This article considers if such appointment is good for institution, library, and/or librarian. Although literature does not specifically address this topic, it is important for several reasons, including library image, higher education integrity, educational leadership, and student well-being.

Skills described in ACRL's (Association of College & Research Libraries) "Status of Academic Librarians" are aligned with FARA's (Faculty Athletic Representative Association) "Statement of the Role of the Faculty Athletics Representative" to help determine compatibility; additionally, three librarian FARs are interviewed.

Keywords: library image, librarian role, college athletics, ACRL Standards, faculty status

Introduction

NCAA affiliate schools are required to designate one tenured faculty member as FAR (Faculty 2012). While no particular department dominates appointments (many different department faculty represented among the more than 1,000 NCAA schools), librarians rarely serve. Of 658 FARs who responded to a FARA survey, five identified themselves as librarians (M. Miranda, NCAA Associate Director of Research, personal communication, August 7, 2012). This paper considers whether or not librarian FAR appointment is good for the school, library, and librarian. To help determine compatibility between librarian skills and FAR duties, ACRL's "Status of Academic Librarians" is aligned with FARA's "Statement of the Role of the Faculty Athletics Representative." Additionally, three librarians (LFAR1, LFAR2, LFAR3) who serve, or have served, share insights and experiences on the matter (LFAR1 currently serves; LFAR2, LFAR3 formerly served).

The topic is important for academic library outreach initiatives, perceptions regarding librarian faculty status, and increasing college athletics scrutiny. Unfortunately, it is limited since so few FARs are librarians and so little work is published on topic.

Literature Review

There are two types of literature related to the topic: academic librarian support of student-athletes and FAR governance.

The librarian literature is mostly student-athlete outreach case

study. Davidson and Peyton collaborated with tutors to help football players meet academic requirements (2007). Forsys, Forsys, and Ford worked with incoming athletes and correlated library use with academic success (2000). Jesudason provided outreach within context of Proposition 48 (1989); shared experiences using library e-mail service for athletes, and importance of working with their academic advisors (2000). O'English and McCord developed "Athletics Resource Center laboratories" to provide library support to athletes in the sports complex (2006). Puffer-Rothenberg and Thomas worked with Challenging Athletes' Minds for Personal Success (CHAMPS) to improve research skills (1999). Ruscella described bibliographic instruction sessions for freshman athletes (1993). Gilbert focused on administrative collaboration between libraries and athletic departments (2000). All record at least some success, along with recommendations for continued outreach and collaboration.

Most FAR literature can be categorized as technical (i.e. NCAA manuals, FARA Handbook) or news (e.g. bulletins, FAR appointment announcements). Along with its handbook, FARA publishes *FARA Voice*, a monthly about FARs in all three NCAA divisions (mostly editorial or news item). The NCAA also accounts for FARs in its policy manuals (e.g. Division II Bylaw 6.1.3, institutional compliance responsibility) and *Champion Magazine* (mostly news item). Aside from FARA and the NCAA, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* sometimes considers FARs. The most prominent example is Wolverton's report on high profile NCAA violations at several universities (2010). He contended FARs are now more scrutinized due to scandal, and suggested ways they and Athletic Departments can improve image. This article prompted letters to the editor from NCAA President Mark Emmert (2010) and FARA President Alan Hauser (2010) protesting that Wolverton made unfair generalizations.

Although informative, the available literature does not address this paper's topic.

FARA Roles and ACRL Skills

FARA Handbook's Appendix C, "Statement of the Role of the Faculty Athletics Representative," states four things FARs must ensure or facilitate: *academic integrity, compliance, student-athlete experience, communication/administration*. Note: there is also a fifth, "Institutional Resources/Compensation," but it is actually university responsibility to FARs rather than FAR role (Faculty 2012).

ACRL's "Status of Academic Librarians" describes ways

librarians contribute at their schools. Six skills can be identified: collection development, resource access, resource instruction, source interpretation, information process, organizational participation (ACRL 2011).

The following sections align ACRL skills with FAR roles to help determine positives and negatives of librarian FAR appointment.

Librarian FAR Positives

FARA states:

“Of all of the major participants in the administration of the intercollegiate athletics program, those who represent the faculty are most likely to be independent of the financial and other pressures that create enormous incentives for competitive success in the revenue-producing sports”

(Faculty, 2012).

It can be argued that librarian faculty are most independent due to separation from and support role to other faculty departments. LFAR1 observes: “Certainly, many librarians are familiar with serving in a liaison capacity. Working within guidelines and expectations to bridge between departmental communications and wary of politics certainly is part of the librarian lifestyle. So that is an advantage.”

According to FARA, to ensure academic integrity FARs should review “admissions profiles of recruited student-athletes vs. all students who are admitted to the institution; courses and academic programs selected by student-athletes; the semester and cumulative records of academic performance of student-athletes and the rates at which they graduate.” Additionally, FARs “...ensure that the institution has in place effective mechanisms for evaluating whether student-athletes have met all of the academic eligibility requirements for practice, financial aid and intercollegiate competition established by the NCAA, the conference (if any) and the institution.” And “The FAR should assume an advisory and reporting role with respect to the academic preparation and performance of student-athletes” (Faculty 2012).

That FAR must be tenured (Faculty 2012) suggests need for scholarship and teaching talent. For ensuring Academic Integrity, though, administrative skills are more useful, such as those described in ACRL’s status statement, particularly information process, organizational participation, source interpretation, and resource instruction. LFAR3 reviewed academic transcripts for every student-athlete (>400) at his school each semester, and had to account for credit hours taken and grade point average (per term and cumulative), against school, conference, and NCAA requirements (all three differed). He applied the same source interpretation and information process skills he used to develop library Website policies and tutorials; it was this sort of skill application that helped the school avoid NCAA violations during tenure. These skills also helped with compliance duties: “rules education and staff training, rules

interpretations...periodic spot-checks of records...major institutional inquiry into violations and...preparation of infractions reports submitted to conference or NCAA” (Faculty 2012).

For the communication/administration role, FARA states “The FAR should play a central role in discussions of matters related to intercollegiate athletics at athletics board or committee meetings and at faculty or institutional senate meetings.” Additionally, “Faculty and other members of the institutional community should have an opportunity to learn about the work of the FAR and to raise relevant questions or concerns with the FAR” (Faculty 2012). NCAA jargon and standards can be overwhelming to those involved in athletics, let alone those not directly involved. Therefore, LFAR3 used organizational participation, resource access and instruction, and source interpretation skills to effectively advise stakeholders, notably the Financial Aid and Admissions Departments, about their NCAA compliance responsibilities.

Librarians are obviously not only faculty capable of developing and using such skills described by ACRL, but unlike other colleagues they must adapt to all subjects and students. For example, a librarian might teach about topic identification to a nursing class one day, then how to locate criminal justice information the next day. Therefore, when dealing with the multiple departments and subjects involved with collegiate athletics, adaptability associated with librarianship becomes useful.

A fifth role, *institutional resources/compensation*, is an administration role rather than FAR. “The CEO must ensure that the FAR and the faculty members who share the responsibilities identified above are allocated the time and institutional resources consistent with their duties” (Faculty 2012). Although FARA/ACRL compatibility is not a concern here, what is noteworthy is how librarians can operate as FARs. FARA lists as resource and compensation examples “clerical staff, release time from teaching or other duties, and additional compensation during the academic or fiscal year.” It is well documented librarians are often without such support, yet effective ones still meet ACRL ideals. Such resiliency well serves FARs, especially at smaller schools.

In addition to working without release time, the librarian schedule itself can be more conducive to FAR roles than traditional faculty flex schedules.

LFAR2:

“I have always believed that being accessible to the student-athletes is of great importance to successfully fulfilling the role of the FAR, particularly as it pertains to student-athlete well being. I was a reference librarian and thus was not only available, but also highly visible to the many student-athletes who used the library. I also had a bit more flexibility in scheduling if needs arose, it was easier to get a colleague to cover a desk shift than it is to get one to

cover a class. Since most librarians are on 12-month contracts I was also available during summer months when a great deal of work gets done in the athletic department, thus I was able to contribute there as well.”

He further contends his schedule provided NCAA participation opportunities:

“I would say that one real benefit of being a librarian came when I became more involved in NCAA activities...I eventually served as Chair of the DIII [NCAA Division III] Management Council which required a great deal of travel, meetings, etc. I don’t think I could have done that with a traditional classroom schedule.”

FAR appointment can also specifically benefit the library. While LFAR2 “...can’t really say there were any particular advantages to the department or the library from being in that role, except perhaps for the benefit of seeing a librarian in a role that is somewhat unexpected,” LFAR3 found his “unexpected” appointment advantageous, especially for outreach. Only well respected faculty are given institutional confidence to assume FAR title. When he earned appointment (several applied), he felt it improved campus perceptions of the library and its personnel (library director agreed; fully supported appointment). Additionally, exposure to broad university governance FAR affords cultivates better understanding of overall institutional administration, valuable for the librarian and, by extension, the entire library.

Librarian FAR Negatives

The FAR’s responsibilities (along with the colleague appointed) must be viewed with respect, or the institution is compromised. FARA states “Senior faculty members are able to provide significant leadership in the governance of athletics programs on their campuses if they are empowered by their CEOs and their faculty governance structures to do so” (Faculty, 2012). The “faculty” part of this scenario surprisingly can be more problematic than “CEO.”

LFAR2 related a FAR conference experience:

“Perhaps the only drawback was occasionally having some attitude thrown my way by other FARs since I wasn’t a traditional classroom instructor (although in my case I did teach throughout my tenure as FAR, both a research methods class and an information policy course through the Political Science dept.). This of course is a well-worn, and fairly tiresome issue in dealing with ‘real’ faculty.”

LFAR3 often received same treatment, not just from other FARs, but colleagues at his own institution. He once was told “You’re not even real faculty!” Challenges can also permeate amongst administrative personnel. LFAR1 stated, “There may be times where it’s challenging to be considered on the

same ‘level’ as other members of the athletics staff. Building relationships are a bit different...it seems.” Although not exclusive to librarians, the unique (and often misunderstood) academic librarian status can exacerbate already awkward situations.

Such awkwardness can also extend to students. Under Compliance, FARA states: “The FAR, together with the athletics administration, should ensure that appropriate standards of student-athlete conduct are established (for both on- and off-campus behavior), clearly communicated and consistently enforced” (Faculty 2012). Since most librarians do not decide grades nor mete career advice, they are not always viewed as authority figures. LFAR3 admitted this was sometimes a challenge when confronting inappropriately behaved students. Another issue can be student-athlete experience role. “The FAR should promote a balance between academics, athletics and the social lives of student-athlete...The FAR should encourage student-athletes to prepare for careers outside (or in some instances, associate with) their experiences as intercollegiate athletes” (Faculty 2012). ACRL’s status statement does not address this role, and unless student-athletes pursue librarianship, librarians are not best suited to provide specific career guidance.

While LFAR3’s library director positively viewed FAR appointment, LFAR1 received negative response: “There may be library administrators who do not see the value of athletics or librarians being involved with any area of sport. I had administrators challenge my research interests in tying much of it to librarianship.”

While a flexible library schedule can be advantage to the institution, it can be disadvantage to librarian. FARs are expected to attend athletic competitions, but athletes seldom compete during business hours; therefore, in addition to long administrative work week, librarian FARs need spend yet more time on campus. If unable, then “student-athlete experience” suffers because many athletes and coaches associate FAR interest with attendance.

Finally, since librarians are academic support faculty, they rely on collaboration with degree conferring colleagues -- FARA work can compromise relationships. Example: LFAR3 had to confront a peer who refused to grant student-athletes alternate test dates due to NCAA sanctioned competition (major compliance violation). He eventually had to appeal to her department chair for resolution; forced to relent, she vowed never to work again with him in any capacity.

Conclusion

To qualify for NCAA FAR, librarians must have faculty status and tenure. Once appointed, LFAR2 stated “I think there are considerable advantages to a librarian as a FAR and very few disadvantages.” However, he warned “to be successful it is critical that you have the support of your colleagues in the library and of the higher administration...Also, develop a clear

position description and have it approved and signed by both the President and the AD.”

LFAR3 agreed, especially regarding position description: to avoid misunderstandings, it is crucial to identify and commit to primary institutional FAR identity. FARA’s five roles are guidelines not rules. FARA has no authority over how schools administer athletic programs, and there are many different opinions regarding the FAR position. Is it more administrative watchdog? Faculty academic advocate? Student adviser? FARs assume these identities and more while working, but it is nearly impossible to equally accommodate them all. Each school needs to determine FAR expectations, develop a clear position description, and be true to it.

Skills described within ACRL’s status statement support the FARA roles. While not suggesting faculty without ALA accredited Master’s degree are incapable, librarian training and experience do provide FAR proclivity. Librarian faculty status is sometimes denigrated due to its more administrative nature; however, since FAR roles are overwhelmingly administrative, institutions that classify librarians as faculty would do well to appoint them. For example, LFAR2’s success as a FAR was recognized with recruitment for a full-time position at NCAA.

More important than theorized skills, though, are individuals: some faculty, librarians included, are simply more comfortable and competent in this role. Just because the ACRL has a “Status of Academic Librarians” statement does not mean all librarians effectively meet its expectations. FARs must be competent professionals, and appreciate student-athletes. According to LFAR1, sports passion also helps: “It always helps to have an interest in the area. In my case I have a second masters in the history of sport, my focus is on women’s intercollegiate sports in the US. In my previous position, I had been a member of an athletic committee focusing on female athlete issues.” In addition to competence, she brings sincerity and compassion to the FAR position.

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