

National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics  
Model Practice Award submission: Target Population Category  
University of Washington's Summer Learn Experience Achieve Program (Summer LEAP)

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

LEAP was created to address the academic preparedness gap between specially admitted student-athletes and regular admitted students. Our plan was to do this by focusing on college-level writing and critical thinking skills while addressing expectations of college life. During the four-week program we are able to assess students' preparedness levels through writing samples, reading together in small groups and staff observations of students in class. This is particularly helpful at the University of Washington because we do not have placement exams to use as indicators of skill levels.

The overall program has two main goals: increase the understanding of expectations of how to be a successful student at the University of Washington and to increase college-level writing skills. Please refer to the syllabus for English 108/writing outcomes. We worked with the English Department to ensure that the format and wording were consistent with writing outcomes on campus.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

Summer LEAP is a month-long academic and life skills course and residential learning community created to transition new and incoming student athletes to the University of Washington, to prepare students for the reading, writing, and learning rigors of college, and to introduce them to the diversity and interests of the city of Seattle. Several teams participate each year but the numbers vary from year to year. We strive to have a diverse group of students – men and women; special admits and regular admits; revenue sports and Olympic sports. There are 30 to 40 student-athletes in the program each year. Teams that have participated are baseball, men's basketball, women's basketball, women's crew, football men's soccer, women's soccer, softball, women's tennis, men's track, women's track and women's volleyball.

Summer LEAP consists of four interlocked parts, offering a dynamic and holistic approach to school and university life, treating the student as more than just a sum of "student" + "athlete" + "freshman":

- "[Living-Learning Community](#)" -- all of the program participants not only take classes together, study together and work together, but they also are housed in the same dorm for the duration of Summer LEAP; students often come from different parts of the country, represent different sports, and pursue different academic interests, which provides ample opportunity to share, support, and collaborate socially and intellectually; the program also introduces students to online collaboration and interaction.
- [English 108: Writing Ready](#) is a five-credit intensive preparatory and immersion course on college-level writing, reading and research. It builds writing confidence through frequent formal and informal writing exercises and introduces key learning strategies including user-friendly orientation to library and research documents, revision skills, and peer review work central to 100- and 200-level college writing courses. During this course the instructors will address expectations for college especially pointing out differences between college and high school.

- [General Studies 105](#) is a one-credit course designed to increase the academic proficiencies, study skills, and understanding of campus culture of new freshmen entering the university as well as issues specific to student-athletes; this course complements and supplements ENGL 108. We have guest speakers including a sport nutritionist, sport psychologist, and former athletes. We also deal with “teachable moments” as they arise; for example, one year we had record heat so a trainer came in to speak about hydration issues. We also discuss stereotypes of athletes and how to avoid those pitfalls.

- "Fridays on Foot," a part of the course requirements of both ENGL 108 and GEN ST 105 where students are introduced to three different Seattle neighborhoods including Downtown/Pike's Place Market, the International District, and Capitol Hill; these "field trips" require students to navigate the Seattle bus system, to explore the neighborhood, and to record their experiences through activities and reflective writing.

We used Claude Steele's "wise schooling practices" to reduce stereotype threat as a foundation when developing the program. During staff training, Steele's "A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance" (*American Psychologist*, v52, n6, Jun 1997) is reviewed with all Academic staff, instructors and tutors and we discuss stereotype threat and other model practices in undergraduate education.

The summer of 2006 was the first year of the 4-week program held in July and August. Prior to 2006 there was another version of a summer program that was held during football camp in September. This program had three days of class in four different disciplines like sociology, geology, psychology, film studies and anthropology along with a small writing component. While it was a good introduction to different majors and professors it wasn't an accurate representation of what a university class load would be like. When the NCAA rule changed allowing for freshmen to take classes before autumn we decided to take advantage of the situation and reach out to other departments on campus. Student-Athlete Academic Services (SAAS) partnered with the Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA), Intercollegiate Athletics (ICA) and the English Department to create and finance the program. SAAS and the English Department partnered in staffing the program. Students are housed and fed through University of Washington's Housing and Food Services, Summer Conference Housing.

The Compliance office worked very closely during the development to help make sure all NCAA and campus rules were strictly followed. There were a lot of complications because this program takes place between normal summer school sessions and while the NCAA considers it a summer course the University of Washington considers it an autumn course. Compliance continues to work with the program in sharing which student-athletes will be required to take the class, approving the amount of money that can be included on the meal cards and making interpretations on or clearing issues that arise like aid for student-athletes who are not on full scholarships or who are walk-ons. At this time we are able to provide aid for students not on full scholarships.

The program is financed through 3 different budgets: Undergraduate Academic Affairs (UAA), Student-Athlete Academic Services (SAAS) and the Student-Athlete Opportunity Fund (SAOF). The class is listed as an autumn quarter course so tuition is paid through scholarships. UAA funds the Teaching Assistant Positions which avoids the athletic department paying salaries of instructors. SAAS does have dual reporting lines to Intercollegiate Athletics (ICA) and UAA. We are very lucky to have such a strong relationship. Housing, meal cards and salaries of the

teaching assistance make up a little over 75% of the budget. The rest of the funding is broken down below.

#### SAAS

- Friday on Foot expenses for instructors and staff
- Dorm monitor stipend, housing and food
- In-house printing
- tUTORS

#### SAOF

- Books, course reader printing and student supplies
- Housing and meal plans for students
- Friday on Foot expenses for students

### **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Several evaluation tools are used during LEAP. The classes are graded by the instructors (please refer to the syllabus for the grading criteria) and evaluated by the students (please refer to the 2009 summary of course evaluations). This year we have added requesting that students re-evaluate the course again after they complete autumn quarter and have more perspective on college expectations (please refer to LEAP follow up online survey). Student's complete pre- & post-writing samples that are graded using a rubric scale (see attached rubric scale). The names are removed from the writing samples and they are randomly assigned to the instructors. Two writing instructors grade each writing sample. There are improvements seen in most students' writing samples. We are working on improving the prompt to make the writing sample more valid. There is great improvement seen in the writing done throughout the course. The qualitative data collect from the students about their experiences is the strongest source of program data.

At the end of the first year of LEAP the average GPA for freshmen football players was slightly over a 3.0. Although this was an improvement over past years but there are too many variables to determine participation in LEAP was the cause for the improvement. The years following, football grades have been inconsistent. Our football program suffered through the worst loss record in the over 100 history of the program, the head coach being fired during the season and the hiring of a new coach with very different expectations. All these variables make it difficult to assess the academic performance of the football players.

### **PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

There are so many benefits to this program. Many were planned but some were happy unintended consequences. Key benefits reported from student evaluations (see attached student evaluation summaries):

- Increased understanding of college writing and overall expectations of college including behavior, workload, dorm life and academic standards.
- Academic staffers get to know students' before courses begin which aids advisors with helping students develop class schedules and the entire staff in creating the appropriate academic support.
- Students meet other students in a variety of sports as well as non-athletes before. Many student-athletes report that students they met during LEAP continue to be some of their closest friends throughout their college years.

- Students build confidence in their ability to be successful in class. They learn what it feels like to put their all into a course and see the rewards from doing all the work.
- Students become familiar with campus. The large campus can be very intimidating for incoming freshmen and LEAP students report feeling they know more about how to get around campus than most others and that is a confidence builder.
- Fridays on Foot trips allow the students to get to know different parts of the city and how to navigate the city on their own through using the public bus system.
- Students learn how to form their own study and reading groups in the dorms and in other courses thus creating learning communities.
- Students are allowed to begin working out with the rest of the team. They are able to deal with conditioning and adjusting to being away from home before intense athletic camp activities begin. Coaches and students see this as a benefit.

We are finding more of our at-risk student-athletes are able to take the one-quarter English composition course rather than the two-quarter course that is designed for at-risk students. The number varies from year to year but about 35% fewer student-athletes on average are taking the two-credit composition course directly due to participation in LEAP. Qualitative reports from students and comments from instructors indicate that LEAP students seem to be better prepared for English composition than many other students. One English composition instructor said, "The LEAP students have more knowledge of basic expectation from heading a paper to understanding the terms we use. They tend to have more confidence and participate more than the EOP (Equal Opportunity Program) students." Response on campus has been very positive and supportive. Admissions have made successfully completing the program a requirement of admissions for specially admitted student-athletes or admissions is revoked.

### **POTENTIAL FOR ADAPTION BY OTHER INSTITUTIONS**

The important thing to remember for institutions looking to add or change a summer bridge program is that it is essential to have a very strong understanding of your university's culture and your students' needs. Our program was developed after completing an informal needs assessment specific to the University of Washington and our student-athletes. I talked with academic staff, tutors, students, professors and teaching assistance to discuss what this cross section of people thought about skills and needs of incoming freshmen and student-athletes specifically. This can be done at no additional cost and surveys can be emailed to individuals to collect information as well.

To adopt a program focusing on writing skills, I recommend working with the English Department to ensure that the curriculum is a precursor to freshmen composition courses and teaching assistants or professors should be recruited from the English Department. Athletic Department academic staff should design the study skills course based on their knowledge and expertise to address the issues that they most encounter with the freshmen. If semester schools normally have 3 credit courses instead of 5 credits, they could increase the amount study skills course to 3 credits as well. The amount of clock hours that our study skills course puts in would allow for increasing the amount of credits but in our case we prefer not to go over 6 credits.

### **CHALLENGES/OBSTACLES**

We are very lucky to have support at all levels – university administration, ICA administration, coaches, the Faculty Athletic Representative, the English Department and academic staff. Not having that support could make the planning process and the implementation more challenging. We have only a few challenges:

- The budget for a comprehensive program like this can be an obstacle. We have also partnered with Undergraduate Academic Affairs who is funding the four teaching assistant positions which not only is a huge help in our budget but the Athletic Department does not have to worry about the perception or conflict of interest of paying teaching assistants who are grading student-athletes. Besides the cost of the TAs the main cost is campus housing and food service.
- Our program is held 4 weeks before football camp begins so it usually begins in early July. Getting all the student-athletes admitted in time can be a challenge. The timing can be a challenge for the non-autumn sports we are a quarter school and don't begin classes until the end of September. Many of those students are required to go back home for a month, which can create an extra expense.
- The University of Washington has two summer terms and this program starts in the middle of "A term" and ends in the middle of "B term". Some of the logistics of getting room assignments and the courses listed on the time schedule can be a bit of a challenge because of the timing.

The benefits greatly outweigh the obstacles and we are very happy with the outcomes from our summer LEAP program. Please visit our course website for more information on LEAP.

2009 Course Website: <http://depts.washington.edu/uwleap/>

Attachments:

- English 108 syllabus – on website
- General Studies 105 syllabus – on website
- Summary of course evaluations
- Pre-/post-writing sample grading rubric
- Writing sample prompt