

“One of the Most Satisfying Parts of the Job”: The Perceived Mattering and Role Satisfaction of NCAA Faculty Athletic Representatives

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The increase in research related to intercollegiate athletic coaching, athletes, and leadership continues to be of note within the sport management field. However, less is known about the position of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) despite their important role to serve as a liaison between the academic and athletic units on their campuses. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine NCAA FARs perceived mattering, role satisfaction, relationship between the two variables, and the experiences and interactions that affected their perceptions of mattering. Three hundred and two NCAA FARs participated in the survey and results demonstrated that overall FARs perceived they mattered and had high satisfaction in their role. Open-ended responses expanded this sense of mattering by situating it within recognition for service, contributions to decision-making, and communication with leadership, and aiding student-athlete success. However, when mattering was not felt, it was due to exclusion from leadership, lack of power, and a lack of compensation. Thus, practical and managerial implications are provided to ensure the role of the FAR is furthering the goals of both academic and athletic communities alike on their campuses.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) bylaws direct all member institutions to appoint a faculty athletics representative (FAR). The chief academic officer at each institution is responsible for the selection of the FAR, and the representative must hold a faculty rank and not be an athletics administrator or coach. The FAR is the primary point of contact for student-athletes to report “any action, activity



or behavior by anyone associated with the athletics program inconsistent with this constitution's principle of student-athlete health and well-being" (NCAA Division I Manual, 2022, p. 7).

The NCAA nor its bylaws provide any specific duties or responsibilities of the position as those are determined by the institution. The FAR is mentioned several times within the NCAA bylaws regarding the governance structure of the organization as well as being able to be a representative of the university in matters involving the NCAA and the member institution's conference. FARs are in a unique situation having responsibilities within both academics and athletics. This means they answer to two distinct forces or bosses which is becoming more and more common in today's workforce (Feemster & Mattingly, 2016; Wigert & Sutton, 2023). FARs are often responsible for certifying student-athlete academic eligibility as well as working as a liaison between the academic components of the university and the athletic department (Cooper 1992; Leary, 2014; Munger, 2014).

Although the NCAA conducted an extensive study on FARs in 2011 and published the results in 2013, other scholarly attention devoted to the FAR role has been limited (Martyn et al., 2019; Miranda & Paskus, 2013). The survey results provided demographic data that illustrated the role of FAR is predominantly held by White men holding tenured associate or full professor faculty ranks. The survey also investigated perceptions on their working environment, time commitment, general thoughts on academic issues, the role of athletics in higher education, and satisfaction and efficacy. The FARs reported the position gave them the ability to be involved in ensuring academic integrity, rules compliance, and student-athlete well-being. The FARs reported they believed their position did matter, and they play a role in the governance and management of the athletic department and their conferences (Miranda & Paskus, 2013). Martyn et al. (2019) examined FARs through a social identity lens, as they recognized the challenges FARs face regarding their dual roles at a university. Their qualitative study involving nine FARs found challenges associated with competing social identities. The FARs acknowledged they must fully be immersed in the identity of each group so they can fully understand each group. Academics and athletics have their own separate identities and the FAR can play a vital role assisting in bridging the gap between the two entities and helping to reduce their disconnect with one another (Martyn et al., 2019). Lastly, the NCAA FARs report highlighted the challenge of compensation and benefits that accompany the role of the FAR, particularly, "many FARs (especially in Divisions I and II) receive monetary compensation or release time. However, about 30% of Division I and II FARs and over 70% of Division III FARs reported that they receive no direct compensation for their role" (Miranda & Paskus, 2013, p. 8).

There has been other research that has included FARs as part of the sampling for examining issues in collegiate athletics but a specific examination of the FARs' satisfaction with their role and whether they believe their role actually matters is lacking (Christy et al., 2008; Crawley & Bruzina, 2023; Zvosec & Baer, 2022). Examining the experiences of college athletic employees in general has been a focus of recent research (i.e., Bravo, 2019; Siegele et al., 2020; Smith et al, 2019; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Weight et al., 2021), but FARs have been an understudied group. It is

important to examine FARs because they find themselves in a challenging situation balancing their dual role between academics and athletics, which often have competing interests. The interests of both entities are important, and the FAR needs to be supportive of both. The FAR needs to be performing at a high level due to the demands of the position, thus it is critical to understand their satisfaction with the role. A dimension of understanding satisfaction is if the FARs believe their role actually matters and if stakeholders value their role in the organizational setting. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine NCAA FARs' perceived mattering, role satisfaction, relationship between the two variables, and the experiences and interactions that affected their perceptions of mattering.

Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization is the process by which individuals are taught and learn the culture and protocol of an organizational role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Particularly, organizational socialization is concerned with the transition process from being an outsider to an insider within an organization and how the organization disseminates information about roles, tactics, relationships, and the social environment of the workplace (Bauer et al., 2007). Furthermore, Richards (2015) and co-authors (2013) explained that organizations and their members socially construct roles of new employees within the organization that are specifically contextually bound. This is particularly relevant to the role of the FAR, as the NCAA mandates the role, but the institution determines the onboarding/socialization of the FAR, the duties and responsibilities of the position, as well as how to select the FAR. The institution is also imperative in establishing the process on how to prepare the selected individual to fulfill the duties of the FAR as well introducing them into nuances and requirements of the position.

Faculty most likely experience organizational socialization when they initially begin working for the institution, but they may experience a new organizational socialization as they enter into the role of FAR because of the new personnel interactions, role expectations, and responsibilities of the position. Faculty are socialized into the role of FAR in usually one of two ways: either through athletic department personnel (usually the athletic director) or through the chancellor or president. Previous research in the organizational research literature suggests role ambiguity and role conflict are the leading predictors of job dissatisfaction (Adkins, 1995; Brumels et al., 2008; Koustelious, 2004; Rogalaky et al., 2016). This is particularly relevant to FARs as they are representing both the academic and athletic interests of the institution, and there may be times when those interests are in conflict. FARs may be socialized into the role by the athletic department, the academic side of the institution, or both, and therefore feel role conflict and/or role ambiguity (i.e., lack of role clarity) as they try to balance academic and athletic interests. This role ambiguity may be further magnified by the vague guidance from the NCAA. Effective organizational socialization is associated with greater role clarity, which could moderate role conflict and role ambiguity leading to improved job satisfaction (Gardner et al., 2022; Kowtha, 2018).

Role/Job Satisfaction

In concern with organizational socialization, sport organizations and their workplaces have long been explored in relation to employee job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is defined as the employees' perceptions and reactions to their workplace experiences and job duties (Locke, 1969). Research specifically centered on collegiate athletic employees has found the environment of collegiate athletics is demanding and has high-performance expectations (Weight et al., 2021) and requires substantial sacrifice or personal adaptations to remain in the profession (Taylor et al., 2021). Thus, given this environment, research has focused on exploring the environment and perception of collegiate athletic employees.

Kim et al. (2019) surveyed NCAA Division I athletic department employees, finding a positive relationship between employees' psychological capital (i.e., development of self) and job satisfaction. Dilts (2016) found sports information directors were satisfied with their overall job in relation to work duties, co-workers and supervisors, but dissatisfied with pay and promotion. In relation to athletic trainers, a particular job duty within athletic departments known for demand in hours and travel resulting in high turnover and burnout, job satisfaction has a significant impact on career commitment and longevity (Eason et al., 2020, 2021; Singe et al., 2020). Additionally, research has explored the relationship between job satisfaction and burnout in NCAA coaches and found job satisfaction has a positive influence on commitment and a negative influence on turnover intention (Bravo et al., 2019; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Hardin et al., 2015). Finally, centering this study's population, the NCAA FAR report (2013) found that FARs were satisfied with their institutional support in terms of release time, support staff, and financial support. However, there were divisional differences, as numbers were slightly lower in all three categories for Division II and III FARs compared to Division I FARs.

Job satisfaction among collegiate athletic employees has been widely explored, especially in relation to organizational support, burnout, and turnover (e.g., Gellock & Dwyer, 2023; Taylor et al., 2019), but this concept has not been explored with FARs. There is also limited research regarding how employees perceive their mattering in their jobs or roles and its effect on job satisfaction, particularly within the role of FARs.

Perceived Mattering

One aspect of organizational socialization is the perceived mattering of employees. Perceived mattering is conceptualized as feelings of importance, significance, or value to others within a social group (Richards et al., 2017). Perceived mattering, derived from the work of Rosenberg and McCullough (1981), consists of four elements: attention, importance, dependence, and ego-extension. First, attention is described as a feeling that others are interested in the individual. Similarly, importance describes a sense that peers value the individual's opinions and feedback. Dependence describes when the individual feels that others rely on them to be successful. Finally, ego-extension is the feeling that the individual's success (and failure) is of interest to others.

Research has explored the mattering of physical educators and the subject of physical education (Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2017, 2018, 2019). There are two subcategories within the perceived mattering literature: first, *teacher matters* describe the individual's sense of personal importance to others in their social world (i.e., teaching peers, administrators, parents, and school community; Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2017). *Subject matters*, specific to physical education teachers, describes a feeling that the teacher's subject area is valued by others in the social world (Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2017). Physical education teachers have reported discrepancies between the two areas of teacher and subject mattering, particularly that their sense of teacher mattering is often higher than their sense of subject mattering (Gaudreault et al., 2018). In relation to organizational socialization theory, researchers have found that perceptions of mattering and supportive workplace cultures reduce negative experiences, decrease emotional exhaustion, and increase job satisfaction (Richards et al., 2019, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Furthermore, Richards and co-authors (2017) found that perceived organizational support, where organizations valued the contributions of their physical education teachers and cared about their well-being was predictive of higher perceived mattering. Perceived mattering is a fruitful way to examine the experiences of FARs as the concept allows us to examine both the way in which FARs perceive their role matters to the athletics community as well as the larger university community. Lastly, it is important to recognize that these theoretical concepts cannot be studied in isolation as they are interconnected, thus, this importance of exploring the interconnectedness and relationship among these concepts is emphasized in this study.

Current Study

Research on FARs is relatively underdeveloped, particularly related to their organizational socialization, perceived mattering, and satisfaction within their role. Particularly, this study used the term role satisfaction instead of job satisfaction as the FAR role is a designation, not a distinct job within athletic departments. Echoing the work of previous scholars (Smith et al., 2019, 2020) which found the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) designation to be problematic as it lacked actual power and decision-making, this study used the term role to discuss FARs as many serve in this designation as volunteers, for service, or with or without limited compensation and benefits. Given the role of the FAR to "to ensure the academic integrity of the athletics program, to serve as an advocate for student-athlete well-being and to play a part in maintaining institutional control of the athletics program" (Miranda & Paskus, 2013, p. 15), mattering in this study needed to be explored in two facets (i.e., FARs' perceptions of their mattering in their role to the people at their institution and people within their athletic department) related to the four components: attention, importance, dependence, and ego-extension. In relation to the work of Gaudreault et al. (2018), this study sought to understand if the perceived mattering of FARs differed based on their academic or athletic environment and peers. Similar to the works of Richards et al. (2019, 2020), this study assessed if perceived mattering affects the role satisfaction of FARs.

This study builds on current organizational management studies in sport in several ways. First, it extends the understanding of organizational socialization by focusing on the perceived mattering and role satisfaction within a population that is highly underexplored. Second, this study explores factors that have many times been examined in isolation of one another. Instead, this study seeks to understand how perceived mattering influences role satisfaction of FARs. Lastly, given the dichotomy at the core of the FAR role (serving within athletics and academics), this study extends the understanding of larger institutional culture and where FARs perceive they fit, matter, and contribute to decision-making, particularly surrounding the impact of institutional control and student-athlete development and well-being.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine NCAA FARs perceived mattering, role satisfaction, relationship between the two variables, and the experiences and interactions that affected their perceptions of mattering. Particularly, establishing this study from the direction of examining perceived mattering in relation to role satisfaction was warranted as previous scholars have found a positive relationship and impact from the perceived mattering of teachers to their job satisfaction both directly and indirectly (Richards et al., 2019, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Thus, following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What is the perceived role satisfaction of FARs?

RQ2: What is the perceived mattering of FARs?

RQ3: What is the relationship of perceived mattering from their academic and athletics communities on perceived role satisfaction of FARs?

RQ4: How have the experiences and interactions of FARs influenced their perceptions of mattering?

Method

Data Collection

The participants for this study were FARs at NCAA member institutions. They were identified through publicly available athletic department websites or the online NCAA Directory. E-mail addresses were obtained from the athletic department staff listing or publicly available email addresses within university websites. The NCAA is composed of three divisions with a total of 1,077 institutions as of Fall 2022, and each institution is required to have a FAR (NCAA, n.d.). E-mail addresses were obtained for 1,061 potential respondents, and a message was sent explaining the purpose of the study as well as an invitation to participate in the study. The message was received by 964 potential respondents. Returned and failed email addresses were reconciled, and the invitation was received by an additional 27 potential respondents. Thus, the final population was 991 FARs. A reminder email was sent to anyone who had not completed the survey one week after the initial invitation, and another reminder email was sent two weeks after the initial invitation to participate to anyone who had not completed the survey. This resulted in 302 usable responses for a response rate of 30.5%.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire consisted of five parts: role satisfaction, perceived mattering, information about being FAR, respondent demographics related to their role as FAR, and opportunity to provide further open-ended responses.

Role satisfaction was measured with a modified version of Spector's (1994) Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS). The original JSS contains nine subscales that comprise an overall total satisfaction. The modified version used in this study contained six subscales: (a) compensation, (b) contingent rewards, (c) operating conditions, (d) co-workers, (e) nature of the work, and (f) communication. The dimensions not used in this study were pay, promotion, and supervision. The dimensions were not applicable to the group under study because of the unique nature of the FAR position. The JSS has been used numerous times in the collegiate athletic setting and has shown to be valid and reliable. The JSS has been used in studies with athletic trainers (Gaffney et al., 2012), academic counselors (Hardin et al., 2020), and coaches (Hardin, et al., 2015).

The modified version used in this study contained the aforementioned subscales with each being measured by four items. The items were measured on a 6-point rating scale anchored from 1 (disagree very much) to 6 (agree very much). Fifteen of the statements were negatively worded. Those scores were reversed scored prior to data analysis. The Cronbach's alpha scores for the six dimensions ranged from .649 to .834, which provides acceptable reliability for all dimensions (Cho & Kim, 2015; Hair et al., 2010).

A satisfaction score was calculated for each of the six dimensions by summing the four items for each dimension and dividing by four. An overall satisfaction score was calculated by summing the 24 items and dividing by 24. The questionnaire is intended to assess job or, in the case of the current study, role satisfaction on a continuum from low (dissatisfied) to high (satisfied). The scores were interpreted based on recommendations from the original JSS with the 6-point scale on a basis of interpretation: mean scores of 4.0 or more represent satisfaction, mean score of 3.0 or less represents dissatisfaction, and mean scores between 3.0 and 4.0 indicated ambivalence.

Perceived mattering was measured by using a modified version of the Perceived Mattering Questionnaire - Physical Education developed by Richards et al. (2017). This questionnaire was developed to examine if physical education teachers perceived other teachers believed physical education and physical education teachers were as equally important as other content areas and teachers.

The original questionnaire consisted of two dimensions with one measuring if other teachers perceived physical education mattered, and the other dimension examining if physical education teachers mattered. The scale was modified for the current study to measure if Faculty Athletic Representatives (FARs) perceived if they mattered in the FAR role and if academic integrity mattered. This was examined using two groups: athletic department staff and members of the academic community. Four questions were used to measure each of the four total dimensions on a 1 to 5 scale with a higher mean score indicating higher perceived mattering for both their role and academic integrity. The Cronbach's alpha scores for the four dimensions

ranged from .722 to .894 which provides acceptable reliability for all dimensions (Cho & Kim, 2015; Hair et al., 2010). Demographic questions were adapted from the Miranda and Paskus (2013) study. FARs from all three divisions of the NCAA were included in the study.

Quantitative Data Analysis

To examine research questions one, descriptive statistics were conducted to examine scale and subscale means. To examine research question two, paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare FARs perceived mattering and the perceived mattering of academic integrity between the academic and athletics communities. To examine the relationship between perceived mattering and role satisfaction (research question three) a multivariate multiple regression was utilized. Two separate multivariate multiple regressions were conducted. The first, examined the relationship between FARs' perceptions of their role mattering in their institution's academic community with each of the subscales of the role satisfaction survey (i.e., compensation, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, nature of the work, and communication) and the second examined the relationship between FARs' perceptions of their role mattering in the athletic department with each of the subscales of the role satisfaction survey. Further, to test the relationship between perceived mattering and overall role satisfaction two linear regressions were conducted to explore these relationships within the dimensions of the FARs academic and athletic community.

Qualitative Data Analysis

To examine the open-ended comments survey questions "Please provide a brief description of your role as FAR", "If you feel as though your role matters to your institution, what specific behaviors, communication, and cues have given you that impression?", "If you feel as though your role does not matter to your institution, what specific behaviors, communication, and cues have given you that impression?" and "Is there anything else you would like to add about your role as FAR?", approximately, 57 pages and 497 comments were collected and analyzed. The open-ended comments were coded as a group; therefore, comments cannot be linked to a specific respondent. However, each comment used in the findings section is from an individual respondent. Two members of the research team read and re-read the data to become familiar with the comments from participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Then both researchers coded all 57 pages separately using an inductive and deductive approach wherein by researchers coded using open and axial coding to allow the text from the participants and their choice of words to be examined for meaning, and apriori coding based on the theoretical framework of perceived mattering and its four core components (i.e., ego-extension, attention, importance, and dependence; Saldaña, 2021). The two members created codebooks and then discussed their initial codebooks together and the most appropriate codes were agreed upon by the researchers (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). This approach is widely seen as beneficial in qualitative research as "a research team builds codes and coding builds a team through the creation of shared interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Weston et al., 2001, p. 382). Lastly, responses were pulled to reflect and represent

the participants' further discussion and description of their role as FARs and their sense of perceived mattering (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

In an effort to establish trustworthiness and credibility within our qualitative analysis, the research team used "investigator triangulation, or the use of multiple researchers to complete comparative analyses of individual findings" (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). The analysis process was also completed using "theoretical triangulation, or the use of multiple theoretical orientations to understand findings or to direct the research" (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27). Particularly, to answer research question four pertaining to the open-ended responses from participants detailing their experiences and interactions that affected their perceptions of mattering, theoretical triangulation focused on the four components of perceived mattering: attention, importance, dependence, and ego-extension (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

Results

Respondent Demographic Profile

The majority of the respondents identified as male (60.8%) and White (86.4%). The majority of respondents were also tenured (80.9%), holding the rank of full professor (53.0%) or associate professor (33.4%) and had been at their current institution for 11 or more years (82.6%). The academic discipline of the respondents varied with the highest percentage being in fields related to social science, humanities, and communications (30.9%). Less than 40% participated in NCAA collegiate athletics or conducted research focused on collegiate sport. See Table 1 for complete demographics.

More than 75% of the respondents indicated they reported to the campus chief executive officer (i.e., president, chancellor) with 57.6% indicating they were appointed FAR by the campus CEO without a formal application process. Majority of respondents (66.6%) had been FAR for nine years or less. NCAA institutional division was well-distributed among the respondents as well with the majority being from NCAA Division I. See Table 2 for complete descriptive information related to the role of FAR.

Role Satisfaction

The resulting questionnaire was the six subscales with each containing four items. To answer research question one, descriptive results indicate the respondents are generally satisfied with their role as FAR with 77.9% in the range of satisfied for the overall score. The areas which show the highest levels of satisfaction are co-workers (94.2%) and nature of the work (95.0%). Thus, demonstrating the FARs like the people who they interact in their role as FAR as well as the actual job functions of being the FAR. The area of the lowest level of satisfaction is compensation with 40.1% satisfied and 15.3% dissatisfied. Related to compensation, 57.8% of the respondents were satisfied with contingent rewards and 13.9% were dissatisfied. Communication also was an area of dissatisfaction as 14.9% of the respondents were dissatisfied and only 58.3% satisfied. See Table 3 below for complete scoring of the dimensions and interpretation.

Table 1
Demographic Profile

Variable	Percentage
Gender Identify	
Male	60.8
Female	39.2
Ethnic Identity	
Asian	1.0
Black	5.3
Hispanic	1.7
Two or More Races	0.7
White	86.4
Other Ethnic Identity	1.7
Academic Rank	
Full Professor	53.0
Associate Professor	33.4
Assistant Professor	9.8
Other Rank	3.7
Academic Status	
Tenured	80.9
Tenure Track	4.7
Non-Tenure Track	10.4
Other Status	4.0
Years at Current Institution	
10 or less	17.4
11 to 23	49.1
24 or more	33.6
Academic Discipline	
Business	13.7
STEM	23.9
Social Science/Humanities/Communication	30.9
Health Professions	12.6
Recreation & Sport Management	13.0
Education	6.0
Participate in NCAA Athletics	
Yes	38.9
No	61.1
Conduct Sport-Related Research	
Yes	37.9
No	62.1

Table 2

FAR Descriptives

Variable	Percentage
Institutional Classification	
Division I	38.5
FBS - Autonomous	6.7
FBS - Non-Autonomous	8.4
FCS	9.7
No Football	13.7
Division II	31.1
Division III	30.4
Years as FAR	
1 to 4 years	36.8
5 to 9 years	29.8
10 to 14 years	18.3
15 years or more	13.6
How Selected to FAR	
Faculty Governance Board	6.6
Faculty Governance Board/Campus CEO	3.3
Campus CEO/Formal Process	14.9
Campus CEO/No Formal Process	57.6
Other	16.6
Report to as FAR	
Chancellor, President, or Campus CEO	75.3
Director of Athletics	9.0
Faculty Governance Body	4.0
Other	11.7

Table 3

Role Satisfaction

Dimension	Mean Score	Dissatisfied	Ambivalent	Satisfied
Benefits	3.70	15.3%	44.6%	40.1%
Contingent Rewards	4.16	13.9%	28.4%	57.8%
Operating Conditions	4.30	5.7%	28.4%	65.9%
Coworkers	5.42	0.7%	5.1%	94.2%
Nature of Work	5.21	1.3%	3.7%	95.0%
Communication	4.14	14.9%	26.8%	58.3%
Overall	4.49	1.1%	21.0%	77.9%

Perceived Mattering

To answer research question two, the results indicate the respondents do perceive their role matters and that academic integrity matters. The FARs were more positive regarding their mattering with athletic department staff as the mean scores for both categories were higher than the mean scores for the academic faculty and staff. Paired sample t-test results show that perceived mattering for their role as FAR was significantly higher among athletic department staff vs. academic department faculty and staff ($t = 14.644, p \leq .001$). This was also the case for the perceived mattering for student-athlete academic integrity as athletic department staff had a significantly higher mean score than academic faculty and staff ($t = 6.783, p \leq .001$). See Table 4 for the items and scoring of the dimensions.

Table 4
Perceived Mattering

Dimension	Mean Score
Academic Faculty and Staff	
FAR Role Matters	3.10
Student-Athlete Academic Integrity Matters	3.94
Athletic Department Staff	
FAR Role Matters	3.90
Student-Athlete Academic Integrity Matter	4.27

Regression Results

To answer research question three, a multivariate multiple regression was calculated to predict satisfaction as measured by the following dependent variables: compensation, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, nature of the work, and communication based on FARs' perceived mattering from their academic community (IV). The overall regression model was significant, $F(6, 268) = 12.02, p < .001$. Follow-up analysis revealed significance on five of the six subscales: compensation ($F(1, 273) = 5.30, p = .02, B = .129$), contingent rewards ($F(1, 273) = 27.29, p < .001, B = .408$), operating conditions ($F(1, 273) = 3.00, p = .084, B = .106$), coworkers ($F(1, 273) = 9.49, p = .002, B = .152$), nature of the work ($F(1, 273) = 55.26, p < .001, B = .347$), and communication ($F(1, 273) = 46.88, p < .001, B = .510$). A second multivariate multiple regression was calculated to predict satisfaction as measured by the following dependent variables: compensation, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, nature of the work, and communication based on FARs' perceived mattering from their athletic department (IV). The overall regression model was significant, $F(6, 268) = 28.39, p < .001$. Follow-up analysis revealed significance on all six subscales: compensation ($F(1, 273) = 15.78, p < .001, B = .223$), contingent rewards ($F(1, 273) = 72.98, p < .001, B = .636$), operating

conditions ($F(1, 273) = 17.44, p < .001, B = .255$), coworkers ($F(1, 273) = 93.07, p < .001, B = .429$), nature of the work ($F(1, 273) = 91.64, p < .001, B = .434$), and communication ($F(1, 273) = 76.00, p < .001, B = .637$).

A linear regression was calculated to predict role satisfaction (DV) based on FARs' perceived mattering from their academic community (IV). The first regression model was significant, $F(1, 273) = 43.44, p < .001, B = .275$, with an adjusted R^2 of .134. The second regression model, measuring perceived mattering in their athletic community was also significant, $F(1, 273) = 133.19, p < .001, B = .436$, with an adjusted R^2 of .325.

Qualitative Findings

The responses to the open-ended questions assisted in further understanding what the FARs role entails on their specific campuses and to answer research question four, their perceived mattering within athletics and academics for their institutions. A large amount of the comments (42.4%, $n = 210$) described the duties and responsibilities of the role of FAR, while the remaining comments detailed whether participants felt their role mattered to the greater organization (41.6%, $n = 207$), or did not matter to the greater organization (16%, $n = 80$). As the FAR, participants described their role as a liaison between athletics and academics at their institutions and noted the importance of promoting the well-being of student-athletes. In these roles FARs detailed they have a wide array of responsibilities (i.e., mediate issues between faculty, coaches, and student-athletes, assist in compliance and eligibility issues, advise, counsel and academic mentoring, etc.). The quotes below exemplify these themes as well as tie to the theoretical framework of perceived mattering and its four components of ego-extension, attention, importance, and dependence.

FAR Role Matters

Many of the participants described that overwhelmingly they enjoyed their role as FAR and many used language like "honor", "appreciation", "grateful", and "service" to describe this role. For example, one participant detailed, "I am humbled to serve in the role of FAR as it keeps me close to student-athletes. I have been honored to serve in the role and to also be able to give back to the NCAA and FARA." Other participants stated it simply as, "I greatly enjoy this role", "I LOVE being the FAR!!", "I really enjoy it. One of the most satisfying parts of the job [as a faculty athletic representative]", and "it is a blessing to serve in this capacity." Another FAR outlined,

It's one of the great highlights of my career. To get to work with these exceptional students and to watch them develop during their time on our campus is a joy. If I were not the FAR, my job would be much less interesting and less impactful with young people.

However, mattering moves beyond enjoyment and participants stated how they felt their job mattered to their institutions due to their recognition for service, inclusion and voice in decision-making, communication with upper-level leadership, and assisting with student-athlete success. In relation to recognition and service and in

alignment with the attention element of perceived mattering (a feeling that others are interested in the individual) participants detailed a wide array of ways that their institutions demonstrate their mattering, “Recognition at the annual Scholar-Athlete recognition breakfast. Recognition at the annual Honors Banquet”, “Sometimes I get swag from the athletic department”, “I receive an all access pass and a key card to athletics buildings to facilitate access”, “Recognition by the President at University-wide meetings, Letters of salutation from the President, AD [athletic director], Coaches, and Associate ADs [athletic directors]”, “Application of release time for athletic efforts”, and “I am compensated in a manner that suggests that the FAR position is valued”.

Most commonly, participants described they felt their role mattered due to the expressed appreciation from those around them in their role. This relates to the perceived mattering element of importance (a sense that peers value the individual’s opinions and input). Participants provided examples stating, “Everyone I work with in this capacity has told me they are glad I am in the position, and they appreciate the work I do for the student-athletes”, “Expressed appreciation from the Athletic Academic advisors. This is the staff I believe I matter most to”, “Student-athletes are always grateful for support”, and “The Athletic Director and the President tell me my work matters. The AD does so in front of coaches and student-athletes.”

Participants also noted (similar to their description of the FAR) their role as the liaison between athletics and academics matters and discussed the communication and regular meetings with upper administration as a signal of how and why the FAR role matters, particularly in the element of dependence (individual feels others rely on them to be successful). For example, participants wrote, “Have bi-weekly meetings with athletics to keep up to date on issues/concerns with student-athletes. Faculty have invited me to speak in my role as the FAR at college meetings”, “Frequent communication between faculty and the FAR. Lots of communication between coaches, student-athletes and the FAR”, “I am listened to in my meetings with the [university] Provost and President and have a terrific relationship with the AD [athletic director]” and “I am included in the executive staff meetings in the athletics department and in the group that oversees athletics in the university”. However, some participants included that their role mattered due to their work exclusively with athletics. Participants detailed, “I am included on all athletics-related communications and am invited to participate in athletics staff activities and events” and “I am fully integrated into the athletics department. I attend all head coaches’ meetings and all staff meetings. I am invited to every activity that takes place in athletics”. One participant shared the wide array of duties within athletics writing,

Invitations to attend monthly athletics department meetings and being asked to provide FAR-related updates at each. Being asked to review applicants for coaching vacancies. Being invited to on-campus athletics events (e.g., present awards for academic performance) and at NCAA Conventions (e.g., sit at the table for our student-athlete who was nominated for Female Student-Athlete of the Year). Messages from coaches about problems solved and about other FAR responsibilities (e.g., the faculty mentor(s) for their team).

Another way that participants noted their mattering was due to their inclusion and voice in decision-making, again echoing the element of dependence in perceived mattering. One participant stated, "It [the FAR role] is valued by institutional administrators based on questions asked, and the requests for information and opinions that are solicited." Another participant detailed, "My input is sought continually when there are athletic matters that have institutional significance." Another participant described their mattering as, "Work with the Athletic Director, Admissions Director, Provost, and President show that it is a necessary part of recruitment and retention." Other participants listed their role matters due to their voices directly impacting policy and changes on campus stating, "Policy changes passing through faculty governance process", "My voice is not only heard, but I am listened too. Additionally, my ideas and initiatives have always been supported", and "University President named me to be on committees of DEI and coaches search".

Finally, FARs noted they matter due to their assistance with student-athlete issues and supporting student-athlete success emphasizing the ego-extension element of perceived mattering where an individual feels their efforts lead to successes and are of interest to their peers. Participants chronicled this work with student-athletes stating, "The coaches and the AD [Athletic Director] reach out to me to help the student-athletes", "It is a chance to have a leadership role where you can proactively enhance the student-athlete experience", "Academic metrics, from Team GPA to honor roll placement to individual academic and scholarly honors won, have increased throughout my time as the FAR", "I am the point person for things like student-athletes missing class or other student-athlete-related issues that arise" and "Faculty often reach out to me regarding SA when they miss class for their sport and how best to accommodate them within the NCAA rules and policies". One participant outlined,

Very often I mediate conflicts between student-athletes and faculty related to scheduling and missing class time for athletic events. I wrote a student-athlete absence policy which was adopted by the university and included in the academic catalog. I meet with each academic division to explain the policy and other athletically-related issues. The faculty and staff at my institution like this transparency and overall, feel confident in the job I do as FAR.

FAR Role Does Not Matter

Although more comments were left by participants explaining how they perceive the role of FAR mattered, many participants expressed their role did not matter at their institution due to misunderstanding/miscommunication of the role, exclusion from upper-level leadership, a lack of power, and a lack of compensation. Participants expressed one of the major issues with their lack of perceived mattering in the role was the lack of clarity on how they should serve their institution as FAR. In particular, the quotes below demonstrate the lack of attention related to perceived mattering as participants described a lack of clarity that could lead to feeling a lack of interest from their peers within their role. Participants wrote, "I am happy to do the job, but it is a job that is poorly defined centrally. I more or less had to write the job description and advocate for a release for my time", "I like the people I interact

within AD [athletic department] but I do sometimes feels like I am a thing that needs to be there but no one knows what to do with”, “I really think it is because they are unaware of the role and the responsibilities of the role” and “It can be very rewarding, but is nebulous and it’s not always clear how valuable the role is.” Another FAR explained the misunderstanding from the surrounding campus community stating,

I wish that the faculty/staff of the institution had a better understanding of the FAR role. I’ve heard people say that I “work for athletics;” this error leads to misunderstandings as to how I can be a resource for faculty. I have visited the [faculty] Senate from time to time to provide clarification, but the misunderstandings persist.

Beyond misunderstanding and misperception, FARs outlined the exclusion from upper-level leadership and the lack of power as substantial indicators that their role does not matter at their institutions. Participants outlined this lack of inclusion in their role highlighting the lack of perceived mattering, specifically the elements of importance and dependence where they felt a lack of ability to contribute meaningful opinions and feedback and contribute to the organization’s overall success. Participants stated, “My role only matters when someone needs something. Then I’m forgotten...”, “My Chancellor and AD [athletic director] are close and I am often left out of relevant decisions”, “FAR has no real power or say”, “I send emails as the FAR to faculty and athletics they are often times ignored”, “I am often kept out of the loop in matters, and usually consulted last”, and “Lack of inclusion in athletics outside of the occasional interaction between a student-athlete and a faculty member”. Further explaining this sense of exclusion, one participant described,

No one else at my university really cares about what I do. I have tried several times to reach out to our Faculty Senate and other bodies on campus, including the Provost, to provide them with information about the academics of our student-athletes and no one is interested in hearing what I have to say.

Echoing this sentiment of a lack of power to contribute and make change, two participants noted, “I do not have the authority to make a real difference. The FAR job seems very much like a “rubber stamp” on decisions that have already been made” while the other detailed how the position lacked authority and they felt the role would be obsolete if not for the NCAA bylaws, writing, “The role of FAR is mainly symbolic, without any real actual authority. If this role was not required by the NCAA I doubt there would be a single institution that would have an FAR.” In some cases, participants explained their decision-making and contributing abilities had been removed,

I have been removed from the chain of command in our compliance and eligibility procedure. I actually have very little to do on our campus as FAR. I am often the last to know about what is happening in our athletic department.

Similarly, another participant explained their duties had drastically changed due to the change in university leadership, leading to a loss in a time release needed to serve in the FAR role. They said,

We have a new administration this year (president and provost) who do not, in my opinion, believe the FAR position matters much at all. The new provost (without talking to me or the AD [athletic director]) recommended to the President that the release time given to the FAR in order to perform his/her duties be eliminated. The new President accepted that recommendation, again without speaking to me. I've only met with the President twice since he arrived last April. Unlike previous Presidents, he never takes notes of items we discuss. Administrations before this one were much more attentive and supportive of the work I did.

Lastly, participants noted the large issue of the lack of compensation for their role as FAR which led to perceiving that the role did not matter to their institution. This lack of mattering echoed the lack of ego-extension where individual successes (or even failures) were not of interest to others, primarily related to a lack of compensation. Participants detailed, "I receive no credit, stipend, class release, anything in my role as FAR that has been taking 40-50 hours a month", "It is also a major challenge to make the time to do it all, especially with no real compensation", "The administration appears to be actively trying to take away stipends for all positions. They took some steps to remove this stipend, but I was under contract - I am curious to see if they take it away when that contract is up", "I am not compensated for the work I do. This frustrates me because I know other FAR in the conference are compensated", "There is absolutely no compensation for doing the work", and "I am the only person in the conference without pay or release time for FAR." Further reiterating the lack of compensation as a sign of a lack of mattering, one participant noted,

The role is not compensated in any way, as I receive neither a stipend or a course release. The fact that I had to write my own job description as FAR also indicates that the role is insignificant at my university.

Thus, although the majority of the qualitative findings detailed how and why FARs felt their role mattered, there is concern over the comments left by FARs that signal a lack of mattering.

Discussion

The results provide insight into the role satisfaction, perceived mattering, and perceptions of FARs. Overall, the respondents were satisfied with their role as FAR. The FARs enjoyed the work they do and who they do the work with. More than 90% of the respondents were satisfied with these aspects of the position. This is critical in that a positive work environment created by co-workers can enhance not only productivity but also job commitment (Hanaysha, 2016). The FARs are most likely performing their duties at a high-level as a result of the willingness to have a collaborative work environment created by their high level of satisfaction with their co-workers in their role as FAR. These findings support previous literature by scholars Miranda and Paskus (2013) and Richards et al. (2017). This particular finding of enjoyment found through research questions one and four is especially important as the FAR sometimes has a challenging role as the disciplinarian or has to police

situations between or situated within athletics (or academic departments), which is likely challenging. Despite these challenges, the FARs in this study noted that they still very much enjoyed their role.

In relation to research question one, the respondents were also generally satisfied with the work environment and their operating conditions associated with the role. It seems the duties and responsibilities are not burdensome to the respondents. However, it is important to note that FARs have high satisfaction with the duties of the position and their co-workers which may lead them to be willing to accept a higher workload because of their commitment to the position (Hardin et al., 2020; Saxe et al, 2023; Taylor et al. 2019). These findings are similar to previous research on sport employees, which suggest their passion for the industry leads to higher levels of engagement (Swanson & Kent, 2016), but may be problematic as work on sport industry employees has also illustrated a tipping point where positive work engagement shifts to work addiction, which has been found to lead to burnout (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019). This suggests that although FARs may be engaged in their work because of their passion for the duties they perform, it is also critical to ensure they are properly compensated and provided with the support necessary (e.g., access to leadership, decision making power) to be successful in the role. This particular finding echoes the work of The 2011 NCAA FAR report conducted by Miranda and Paskus (2013) which found that a large number of FARs received little to no compensation for their FAR role.

Importantly, as noted in the qualitative comments and the quantitative results related to research questions one and four, the level of compensation and benefits of performing the duties of the position were problematic for many of the respondents. It is imperative administrators, both academic and athletic, consider the most appropriate way to compensate FARs for performing the duties of the position (Miranda & Paskus, 2013). It is also important to consider that compensation and benefits do not have to be financial in nature. The benefits could be in terms of reduced teaching load, adjustment in research expectations, as well as a recognition of being the FAR as a service activity. There are several benefits that come with being the FAR which are a result of the relationship with athletics: tickets to athletic competitions, apparel, and ability to travel with athletic teams. It is important to consider how the FAR is being compensated for performing their duties, and fringe benefits from athletics should not be seen as inducements from athletics.

Not only are the FARs generally satisfied with their role but they also believed what they are doing is respected among their colleagues in both the academic community and athletic department. This is an important finding in that not only do the FARs believe the duties they perform are important, but believe others respect their position, demonstrating the attention, importance, and dependence dimensions of perceived mattering (i.e., others in the group are interested in us and others in the group value the contributions we make) (Gaudreault et al., 2018; Richards et al., 2017; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). The mean scores for both groups were high for perceived mattering of the position indicating a high-level of respect for FARs, and the duties they perform.

Addressing research question two and adding to the body of literature surrounding FARs and perceived mattering, the respondents had significantly higher perceived mattering regarding the athletic department staff than the academic community. This could be from a combination of factors. The FAR is most likely spending more time with athletic department staff as the role is primarily associated with athletics. This results in more interactions with athletic department staff, which could generate a more positive perception of how athletic department staff view them. The academic community is often detached from athletics especially at the highest levels of competition in the NCAA. Athletic department administrators have little interaction with the academic community, and the same could be true for the FAR. Thus, the FAR may not have as strong of a perceived mattering in the academic community. The FAR is also involved in athletic issues related to academics thus their role is more prevalent in the athletic department. Again, the primary function of the FAR role is to support the student-athletes, especially as they navigate any challenges associated with being a student-athlete and eligibility (e.g., missing classes, travel schedules, etc.; Cooper 1992; Leary, 2014; Munger, 2014). This may impact the way FARs are perceived by their academic community. For example, if the FAR is supporting student-athletes when they miss classes for competition, that might upset faculty/ the academic community, but would be a positive for athletics. Lastly, this finding could potentially echo the work of Martyn et al. (2019) who found FARs experience conflict over which of their social identities and context they must emphasize: athletics or academics and the landscape of working and answering to multiple bosses (Feemster & Mattingly, 2016; Wigert & Sutton, 2023).

The FARs also believed both the academic community and athletic department place a high priority on academic integrity as both groups had high means scores. However, once again, athletic department staff had a significantly higher mean score than those in the academic community. This perception could be the result of the interactions with the academic support personnel in athletics, and their desire to protect the academic integrity of student-athletes. Athletic academic support administrators are often battling stereotypes regarding the academic ability of student-athletes (Stokowski et al., 2020). These administrators are often overly cautious to ensure there are no academic integrity issues such as plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. This heightened awareness may lead FARs to perceive that academic integrity of student-athletes is of a higher priority with athletic department staff than with the academic community. FARs are often tasked with responsibilities related to academic eligibility and compliance and may also be more attentive to the emphasis placed on academic integrity by the athletic department due to the performing their duties as the FAR.

Answering research question three, both overall regressions were significant, meaning that perceived mattering - from both in their academic community and their athletic community - impacts role satisfaction of FARs. Results showed within their academic community communication, contingent rewards, and the nature of their work were most impacted by their perceived mattering. Similarly, within their athletic community, communication, contingent rewards, nature of their work, and their

coworkers were most impacted by their perceived mattering. Contingent rewards and communication had the largest Beta weights in both communities, suggesting these two areas have the largest impact on role satisfaction. These findings echo the work found in the physical education and sport management literature from previous scholars indicating that perceived mattering and environments where employees feel supported can reduce negative experiences, decrease emotional exhaustion, and increase job satisfaction (Gellock & Dwyer, 2023; Hardin et al., 2015, 2020; Richards et al., 2019, 2020; Saxe et al., 2023; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Theoretical Implications

In the qualitative results answering research question four, participants detailed mattering based on their relationship and communication with upper-level leadership (within athletics and academic spaces) that enabled them to have influence in the decision-making processes affecting student-athlete issues and success. Additionally, mattering was felt by the participants when they were also recognized for service as FAR. This furthers our understanding of the dimensions of the perceived mattering framework, as participants expressed the dimensions attention and importance (others in the group are interested in us and others in the group value the contributions we make) in their provided quotes centering the appreciation and recognition from their athletic and academic peers. Interestingly, very few participants listed compensation and course releases for why their role matters. Again, the dimensions of attention and importance were much more focused on recognition, decision-making, and an active role within athletics and academics.

Additionally, participants presented the dimension of dependence (feeling that others can rely on us) through their quotes situating their feedback and expertise on critical problems (i.e., “My input is sought continually when there are athletic matters that have institutional significance.”). The dimension of ego-extension (or investment from others into your successes and failures) was discussed much less frequently than the other dimensions of perceived mattering, this could be due to the ways in which data was collected limiting the breadth and depth of the description (survey open-ended responses), or perhaps this is due to the nature of the role of the FAR being a service endeavor, not a full-time position.

Participants also answered research question four positioning their lack of mattering due to exclusion from upper-level leadership, a lack of power, and a lack of compensation. Therefore, all four dimensions of perceived mattering were missing for these participants due to their negative experiences within the role, further explaining the instances of lower role satisfaction scores in the quantitative results. Furthermore, what is concerning in relation to the lack of power and exclusion from upper-level leadership is the role is not being fulfilled in its intent to act as a proxy for the president to provide more oversight and institutional control of the athletic department which could create an environment ripe for coaching and recruiting violations and lack of student-athlete development. Lastly, this continued lack of perceived mattering could lead to eventual burnout, disengagement and turnover in a

crucial role that contributes to both the academic and athletic integrity of the institution (Gellock & Dwyer, 2023; Hardin et al., 2015, 2020; Saxe et al., 2023).

Additionally, participants situated that the FAR role did not matter due to the lack of understanding/miscommunication of the role. Similar to previous research from Smith et al. (2020), the position of FAR for some participants echoed that of the SWA designation where there is inconsistency and ambiguity in what the role and its duties should entail. Furthermore, the mattering and worth of FAR seems to be highly dependent on upper administration and if the FAR is actually allowed to contribute to decision-making, oversight, and participation in athletic and academic issues from the Athletic Director and University President.

Practical Implications

The FAR is often the bridge between the academic and athletic community and needs to be respected by members of both groups. This can be achieved by allowing the FARs opportunities to discuss their role and responsibilities with both groups of stakeholders to reduce the role ambiguity expressed through negative or lack of mattering comments left by respondents. This would allow for a better understanding of the role of the FAR as well as help bridge the gap between the athletic and the academic communities. Specifically, the FAR should be given the opportunity to discuss the work they do at university faculty governance meetings as well as meetings with individual departments aiding in reducing the perceptions of negative importance and dependence elements of perceived mattering discussed by participants. This would give the FAR the opportunity to discuss the role of academics in the athletic department as well as provide an overview of the student-athlete academic experience. This would include the overall academic performance of student-athletes as well as provide individual examples of academic excellence.

Special programming could also be highlighted to showcase cooperation between the athletic department and academics. This could possibly include leadership classes taught by faculty and classes on how to capitalize on Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) taught by business faculty. The FAR could also address direct questions from faculty as well as take concerns from faculty to athletic administrators. In turn, the FAR should also attend athletic department meetings and share any concerns from the academic community. The FAR should act as a liaison between athletics and academics and being involved in the governance of both entities will allow the FAR to do that. These actions would most likely demonstrate the role of the FAR and how the FAR provides value to both athletics and academics. This would increase perceived mattering and as a result lead to higher role satisfaction. The FAR role is meant to provide oversight and balance between academics and athletics which serves the initial greater mission of the NCAA to cultivate student-athletes. Thus, in the coming years, it will be imperative to monitor and study FARs as their role could be changing or become obsolete as the landscape of collegiate athletics is rapidly changing, especially at the Division I level with the adoption of NIL, pressure for pay for play, and the carousel of conference realignments.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations to the current study as well as an acknowledgement of future research. First, participants were mostly White, which is reflective of the overall population of NCAA athletic employees, as well as majority university faculty members. As such the results of the study might not consider the unique experiences of individuals from marginalized backgrounds as we know people with intersectional identities experience discrimination and workplace challenges their White men counterparts do not (Hardin et al., 2022; Welch et al., 2021). Additionally, although the study had a high response rate and willingness to participate in open-ended comments, the possibility of social desirability bias cannot be ruled out. In addition, due to the nature of the data collection, the open-ended comments were harvested from the anonymous survey making it difficult to create pseudonyms or participant numbers for the quotes used in the qualitative findings.

As future research looks to expand and extend this work, it should look to see if there are differences in perceived mattering and role satisfaction based on NCAA divisions, gender, and rank of faculty members. Additionally, future research could seek to understand factors not included in this study from the Job Satisfaction scale, particularly supervision as there could be tension and confusion over who oversees the FAR. Lastly, to understand the perceived mattering and role satisfaction of FARs on a deeper level, a qualitative follow-up study should be conducted.

Conclusion

The FAR designation was created by the NCAA to ensure those within athletics were upholding the health and well-being of student-athletes and serve as a liaison between the two important landscapes that student-athletes manage on college campuses: academics and athletics. This study's purpose was to examine NCAA FARs perceived mattering, role satisfaction, relationship between the two variables, and the experiences and interactions that affected their perceptions of mattering. The results revealed overall FARs believe their position matters and have high role satisfaction. Particularly, the work they do and who they do it with is meaningful. Thus, as intercollegiate athletics continues to rapidly change, FARs need to continue to engage with their academic and athletic stakeholders, particularly, those in leadership creating and affecting the experiences of the student-athletes they serve.

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