

Combating unseen struggles: The African American male football player

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Although the population of African American male college football players is relatively small at institutions of higher education, student affairs professionals need to be aware of their developmental needs. There exists a scarcity in the amount of research discussing the identity development of this population. This article will provide a model illustrating the identity progression of African American male college football athletes at Bowl Subdivision institutions while examining the factors that may affect their identity development.

Some young African American men are influenced to believe that sports such as football are where their future potential lies (Taylor, 1999). The concept that athletics is incomparable to academics for African American males to succeed, places constraints on the available options for their futures. Reports of low graduation rates of minority college athletes have produced concern and embarrassment for higher education institutions across the nation (Snyder, 1996). The reports of low graduation rates are just one example of the consequences of stereotypes about the academic capabilities of African American males entering higher education.

Black student-athletes stand in a gap while attending college. First, they are students who share some struggles and expectations to succeed academically as their peers (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). Secondly, they are high caliber athletes who are supported by and strive to meet the expectations of their fellow students, alumni and other supporters. Thirdly, African American male college athletes face negative beliefs about their academic abilities due to their race (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (JBHE), 2002). African American male college football players comprise 45.4% of the total number of Division I football players (NCAA, 2007a). Although this may not appear to be a significant number in consideration of an institution's total population, Black student-athletes' experiences, successes, and failures are watched by the nation via television and other forms of media. This population is integral not only for the institutions' national visibility, but also for their recruitment of future students.

In such a popular sport as football, expectations are raised higher for these students to maintain a balance and resist destructive behaviors while meeting superior athletic standards. Prior to the arrival of Black student-athletes to campus, social influences and the recruiting visit play a large role in how the prospective student-athlete envisions their role on campus. This

paper will examine external influences that shape the preconceived notions of some African American male collegiate athletes, demonstrate the dichotomy of two identities as a student and as an athlete, and investigate the effects of their identity progression with respect to their psychosocial development.

Literature Review

The following topics discussed are pertinent to understand the Identity Progression Model (fig. 1). The importance and visibility of college football serves as a catalyst for benefits and consequences for both the African American male football player and the institution they attend. Cross' (1978) Black identity development model provides a basis of understanding the racial development of the Black student-athlete. Erikson's (1950) eight stages of psychosocial development were based on the growth of individuals from birth throughout their lives. Only stages four, industry versus inferiority, and five, identity versus role confusion, will be integrated as the last two stages of the Identity Progression Model.

College Football

Successful college football teams generate benefits to a university. Benefits to the university can include: television and radio contracts, ticket sales, corporate sponsorship for advertisements, and increases in alumni donations and student enrollment (Donnor, 2005). Attracting the attention of supporters is essential to maintain a successful and popular team. This may include financial investments on behalf of the institution to recruit and retain high ability athletes. An example of a major financial investment by institutions to recruit high ability athletes was made by the Big Ten athletic conference by investing an average of \$500,000 into recruiting student-athletes in one year (Langelett, 2003). The institutions in the Big Ten athletic conference demonstrated their commitment and desire to create successful athletic teams. This model will focus on Division I Bowl Sub-Division institutions. Division I Bowl Sub-Division institutions, formerly Division I-A institutions, have the following characteristics: sponsor a minimum of 16 varsity intercollegiate sports, average at least 15,000 attendance for home football contests, annually offer a minimum of 200 athletics grants-in-aid or spend at least four million dollars on grants-in-aid to student-athletes in athletics programs, and schedule and play at least 60 percent of its football games against other members of the Football Bowl Subdivision (NCAA, 2007b).

The graduation rates of African American football athletes show a disparity in comparison to their peers. The six-year graduation rate for African American football student-athletes is 49 percent, yet they fall behind their White football players at 61 percent (Donner, 2005). This is one reason

that this population is addressed in this model. One cause of this graduation disparity could be how the athletic interests of the university take precedence over the student-athlete's academic interests. Opportunities to achieve overwhelming success in their sport influences the decisions made by the student-athlete (Harrison, Harrison & Moore, 2002; JBHE, 2002). College football then becomes the main focus of the African American football athlete in their pursuit of success by excluding the importance of academics in their role as student-athletes. The racial identity development of the Black football player is impacted as the student-athlete has a clash between his academic and athletic interests.

Black Identity Development Model

Cross' (1978) Black identity development model is applicable to the discussion of the identity progression of African American college football athletes. The Black Identity Development Model is a psychological process whereby African Americans undergo the process to become "Black" (Harrison, et al., 2002). The identity progression model presented in this argument does not impede upon the Black identity development of this population, rather it becomes integrated into Cross' model in stages one and three. The integration of the Identity Progression Model and Cross' Black identity development model will be illustrated later in this discussion. The following is a brief description of the five stages in Cross' Black identity development model.

Pre-encounter. In the pre-encounter stage, Blacks experience hatred towards their race in the form of severe dislike with physical and social characteristics about the race, such as facial features and culture. Negative expressions towards the Black race can result in feelings of inferiority, lack of self-acceptance, low self-esteem, and low personal autonomy (Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross & Worrell, 2001). Exposure to damaging depictions of the Black race creates moments of difficulty in this stage. When Blacks internalize negative stereotypes they question their own self-worth as a Black person (Vandiver, et al., 2001). Therefore, positive representations opposite the Black race are appealing and sought after.

Encounter. This stage is precipitated or identified by events or incidents that strongly influence the individual's outlook (Cross, 1978). The individual acknowledges the impact of racism in their life. The result of this acknowledgement is two-fold: first, there is an appreciation and embracement of Blackness and second, there is resistance to situations in contrast to their previous identity conceptions (Cross, 1978; Vandiver et al., 2001). There must be a change in the manner the individual understands the world around them and a search for validation in this process. Outcomes from this stage can be anti-White views or harmful reactions towards Whites with

their emotions such as anger or guilt.

Immersion-Emersion. In this stage, the individual will have the desire to surround themselves with visual images and/or symbols of the Black race. This is the process of seeking out opportunities to explore their racial identity. Harrison, Harrison & Moore (2002) state that "participating in sports or physical activities that identify the individuals' 'Blackness' [is] likely sought out" (p. 124). Therefore, media portrayals of popular sports deemed appropriate for African Americans would be the suitable activity for an individual to participate in. In this period of transition there is "an intense sense of intimacy" with Blackness (Cross, 1978, p. 17). The individual undergoes a reflective period and becomes more self-aware of their racial identity.

Internalization. The individual associates himself with the acceptance of his Blackness. This declaration demonstrates congruency between the newly formed racial identity and the previous understanding of his racial identity (Vandiver et al., 2002). The individual is able to have familiarity with experiences outside of his old understanding of his Black identity and gains assurance of self through knowledge of other racial identities. This stage allows the person to link other identities to his Black identity and establish meaningful relationships with Whites and other oppressed groups (Harrison, Harrison & Moore., 2002).

Internalization-Commitment. In this stage, the individual has come to terms with their Blackness in respect to the roles of others. There is comfort in this stage that allows the person to interact with activities that may not serve the Black community (Vandiver et al., 2001). There is a positive sense of racial identity.

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erikson (1950) developed the eight stages of psychosocial development without specifying a particular population. The Identity Progression Model will use stages four and five and apply them to the development of African American male college football athletes. The application of these two stages will not consider the age constraints used by Erikson in his original model because these stages are revisited at a later age than previously indicated by Erikson. The integration of the stages will consider the results of Erikson's inferiority versus industry and identity versus role confusion stages and associate them with the identity development of Black male football players in the Identity Progression Model. Included in the identity development process of African American college football players is an experience of revisiting regression to stages four and five of Erikson's (1950) stages of psychosocial development.

Erikson (1950) described how people develop from birth to adolescence in eight stages with the first six ending at young adulthood. Stage one is basic trust versus basic mistrust. In this stage, the baby acquires an understanding of trustworthiness. A certain confidence is developed as the child understands to rely on caregivers for their needs. In the second stage, autonomy versus shame and doubt, the child gains independence and personal control over their physical dexterity. If the child fails to gain autonomy, they will experience feelings of shame and doubt in their physical competency. A search for responsibility and feelings of expectations are part of stage three, initiative versus guilt. In this stage, the child seeks out purpose and asserts authority in their life and will experience guilt if there is too much power exerted. Also, the child will observe surrounding role models to identify suitable behaviors for themselves.

According to Erikson (1950), stage four, industry versus inferiority, the child develops a sense of pride in their accomplishments and can acquire confidence in their abilities to reach their potential. This confidence is a result of successfully completing certain tasks in collaboration with others. In stage five, identity versus role confusion the child develops a personal identity. It is necessary that the youth connects how they appear to others and what they feel for themselves with previous skills that they have obtained. Intimacy versus isolation is the sixth stage of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. In this stage, the young adult desires "the capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments" (Erikson, 1950, p. 263). It is necessary to have nurturing personal relationships in order to avoid self-isolation.

Identity Progression Model

From here, the Identity Progression Model will be discussed in more detail. There are three major stages of this model: Pre-Encounter, Salient Encounter, and Identity Congruence. In the Pre-Encounter stage, there are two experiences that the African American male college football player encounters: social influences and the recruiting visit. Both of these experiences are the foundation for the remainder of the model and occur prior to the Black student-athlete enrolling as a full-time student. The second stage, Salient Encounter, represents the struggle between the Black football player's student and athlete identities. During this struggle, there is competition between the student and athlete identities and experiences with negative stereotypes from the Black student-athlete's environment. In the final stage of the Identity Progression Model, the Identity Congruence stage incorporates stages four and five of Erikson's (1950) stages of psychosocial development.

Pre-Encounter Stage

Social Influences

African American males, prior to enrolling into college, are aware of the racial differences that exist in society. Howard-Hamilton (1997) contends that "the issue of loss is one usually associated with African American men" (p. 17). Social dilemmas within and outside of the Black male's community can distort what options appear to be obtainable for their futures. For instance, when young African American males are celebrated "not for how well they can run with an idea, but for how well they can run with a ball," factors that promise success and fame are more appealing (Taylor, 1999, p. 75).

The Black male experiences the Immersion-Emersion stage of Cross' (1978) model as he questions his racial identity in contrast to his athletic abilities. Harrison, Harrison & Moore (2002) argue that as African American youth strive for identity definitions they substantiate their personal identities with their group associations. Therefore, media depictions of physical abilities over intellectual abilities encourage these young men to focus on athletic ability rather than academic ability and can affect the aspirations and goals that these young men set for their future. Rada & Wulfemeyer (2005) argue that television coverage of collegiate football games is an arena that perpetuates negative stereotypes of African Americans via the use of advertisements, references by White announcers and sportscasters, and the lack of Black sports reporters. Overemphasis on sports conditions these young Black males to focus on success in sports rather than academics.

The Recruiting Visit

The recruiting visit is not only an introduction of the athlete to the institution, but the formation of a relationship between the two (Cross, 1973). As the student takes a risk of choosing a particular institution based on information received from the recruiting visit, information that the student-athlete receives shapes their impression or belief of what type of academic experience they will have. Thus, the recruiting visit is not a negative experience, but serves as a basis for an idea of how a prospective student-athlete envisions their collegiate experience.

From the Black student-athlete's point of reference, the recruiting visit is a time for coaches to entice them to attend their particular institution. The visit can alter the recruit's observation of the institution. An education becomes secondary in comparison to the athletic success and possible wins and championships that may or may not be available as an athlete at that institution (Cross, 1973; Donner, 2005; Langelett, 2003). This creates a problem with the prospective student-athlete's understanding of their poten-

tial future at that institution. He "may mistakenly assess the importance of the academic responsibilities he will have as a student, and he may acquire an exaggerated appraisal of his promise" (Cross, p. 154). A distorted view of his academic and athletic future can negatively impact the prospective student-athlete's concept of his future.

In this stage, social influences and the recruiting visit influence the opinions that African American student-athletes have prior to coming to college. Black student-athletes consider college as a viable option due to the need for the collegiate experience for professional sports rather than for the importance of an education. The institution can show a lack of support for the Black football player with "perceived implicit and/or explicit messages that school [is] not important, that they [are] not intellectually capable students, [are] not expected to do well in school, and [are] not cared about as individual student learners" (Benson, 2000, p. 229). The influences that come from the media and other sources do not support or challenge these potential student-athletes to acquire a healthy balance between athletics and academics. Without an adequate balance of positive influences and support, the prospective student-athlete can receive negative concepts that will impact their collegiate experience.

The process of being recruited is the period that institutions deliver messages about the importance or lack of importance of academics. Benson (2000) describes the first impression of a prospective collegiate football athlete on his recruiting visit:

Malik, a [high school] senior, comes to campus for his recruiting visit and is both depressed and relieved to hear from the team members who entertain him for the weekend that the school will be "no problem" because he will have "easy" teachers who are "handpicked" in advance, and that all of his educational choices and requirements will be "taken care of" for him by advisors (p. 223).

The recruiting visit is a pivotal moment for the African American student-athlete who may lack academic support. The visit can be a form of coercion or inducement because the recruit "unwisely may choose an institution in which he will not realize adequate progress toward his educational or career goals" because of his fixation on athletic opportunity (Cross, 1973, p. 154).

Salient Encounter

Stereotypes and Competition between the Student and Athlete Identities

Stereotypes exist "when persons wrongly assess others by formulating opinions and drawing conclusions about individuals based on little or no factual understanding of the person" (Baucom, 2001, p. 1). Because of

their Black identity development, outside influences can distort the manner in which African American football players view themselves. Media attention has questioned and corrupted the academic credibility and capability of Black collegiate football players (JBHE, 2002; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Sailes, 1993). Therefore, negative encounters within the collegiate environment can also pose a threat to their overall Black identity development.

The belief of Black college football players having an academic deficiency produces negative attitudes and stereotypes. Yopyk & Prentice (2005) assert that college students are expected to have high academic ability and motivation however there is a belief that Black college football athletes lack these qualities. A problem that exists for African American student-athletes is the "risk of conforming to the stereotype of athletes when less engaged and competent academically than other students may hinder their performance on academic tasks" (Yopyk & Prentice, p. 329). Black football players must combat damaging perceptions about their intellectual capability in college environments. Faculty members with negative impressions of African American football players can perpetuate stereotypes by perceiving that they are academically unprepared for college (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991, Sailes, 1993). The existence of negative stereotypes creates an unhelpful environment for Black college football players.

The Salient Encounter stage is two-fold. First, there is an emergence and experience of stereotypes in interactions with faculty members and other students. Second, the two identities, student and athlete are in competition with one another. The "dumb jock" stereotype is that student-athletes are academically inferior and they require institutional support to overcome the damaging stereotype. Institutional academic structure that does not support the African American male athlete leaves them with a disparity in comparison to their White counterparts (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995). The results of this inconsistency is that faculty members reaffirm messages that they do not care about student-athletes' performance in class and become passive by not holding the students accountable for poor academic performance. Therefore, negative stereotyping of African American male student-athletes must be interrupted and prevented by members of the academic community.

Negative stereotyping of African American student-athletes has consequences. One consequence is student-athletes will accept "that they lack the academic skills and abilities to succeed and sense of feeling of alienation and belonging in the classroom" (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991, p. 191). The feelings of antagonism are harmful to the Black football player's identity development and can lead to rejection of any beneficial actions towards academic progression and success. Benson (2001) argues that student-athletes

become active participants in the existence of the dumb jock stereotype by “constructing attitudes and engaging in practices that [conform], largely, with the collective messages they [perceive]” (pp. 232-233). Black football players have to resist becoming enablers of negative stereotypes while experiencing competition between the athletic and student identities by refraining from actions that promote the dumb jock stereotype.

The competition between the student and athlete identities causes the student-athlete to grapple with the selection of the appropriate identity. The student identity is linked to a positive academic stereotype versus the negative athletic stereotype for the athletic identity (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). In an academic situation, the Black football player can struggle with which identity is appropriate if he is aware of negative opinions about his intellectual capabilities. Benson (2001) observed in her study that when African American male football athletes felt respected, challenged, and supported their academic behaviors improved and they progressed in their classes. In contrast, when student-athletes lack support in academic situations the athletic identity is the salient identity leading to an attitude of detachment and resisting academic performance expectations. Academic motivation is an integral component of student success (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). African American football athletes require support from the academic community to acquire a balance amidst the struggles between the student and athlete identities.

Identity Congruence

In the Identity Progression Model, Black football players experience a regression in their psychosocial development. The competition between the student and athlete identities requires an increase in stability in their character and personal autonomy. This autonomy requires independence and confidence in the African American student-athlete’s intellectual, as well as athletic capabilities. After the competition between the student and athlete identities, the Black football player revisits stages four and five of Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development. This discussion will examine the result of Erikson’s (1950) model and analyze how the Black college football player will re-interpret the stage in the Identity Progression Model.

Industry versus inferiority is stage four of Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development. In this stage, the person must acquire the knowledge that he is capable of accomplishing tasks that he encounters and be confident in his aptitude to succeed (Erikson, 1950; Howard-Hamilton, 1997). He must develop a sense of industry or productiveness in both his student and athletic identities. As the Black student-athlete revisits this stage, he will interpret productiveness via recognition from others in the

form of being respected, challenged, supported, and held accountable for his actions (Benson, 2000). By achieving stability and accomplishing certain tasks, the African American football player has the opportunity to develop confidence in both his intellectual and athletic abilities.

Encounters with negative stereotypes affect the African American college football player’s identity development and require an understanding of meaningful social roles to resist the danger of feeling inadequate, mediocre, and inferior. To resist the feeling of inferiority the Black football player must gain awareness of his roles as both student and athlete. The student-athlete must not accept his sport as his only duty. For example, if a faculty member interacts with the student-athlete in an authoritative, forceful manner, he may retaliate by accepting and adhering to ineffective academic practices such as manipulation of the relationship he has with the faculty member (Benson, 2000). As the student-athlete experiences the industry versus inferiority stage, he must receive support and instruction on the best methods to succeed in order to have confidence in his abilities to succeed as both a student and as an athlete.

Identity versus role confusion is the final portion of this model. There is a struggle with previous experiences, such as racism and negative stereotyping, about their ability to excel academically. During this stage, a person becomes “concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are” (Erikson, 1950, p. 261). Being concerned about how they are viewed by others, as the student-athlete revisits this stage they may over-identify with a particular identity or demonstrate a loss of identity. For instance, student-athletes can construct their own attitude and practice an attitude of detachment from academics through actions such as skipping classes (Benson, 2000). To resist role confusion Black football players need to have affirmation of their identities.

The student-athlete is in search of affirmation of the appropriate identity to choose for himself according to interactions with his peers and authoritative figures (Howard-Hamilton, 1997). Black football athletes will search for affirmation of their identity in the college environment. During this stage, Erikson (1950) argues that a person will be “searching for the social values which guide [his] identity” (Erikson, 1950, p. 263). The social values that the student-athlete experiencing this stage is searching for will be found in the institution’s culture through interactions with students and faculty members as they either support or denounce the student-athletes. The experiences of these two stages challenge the student-athlete to develop identity congruence in the midst of cultural and social influences.

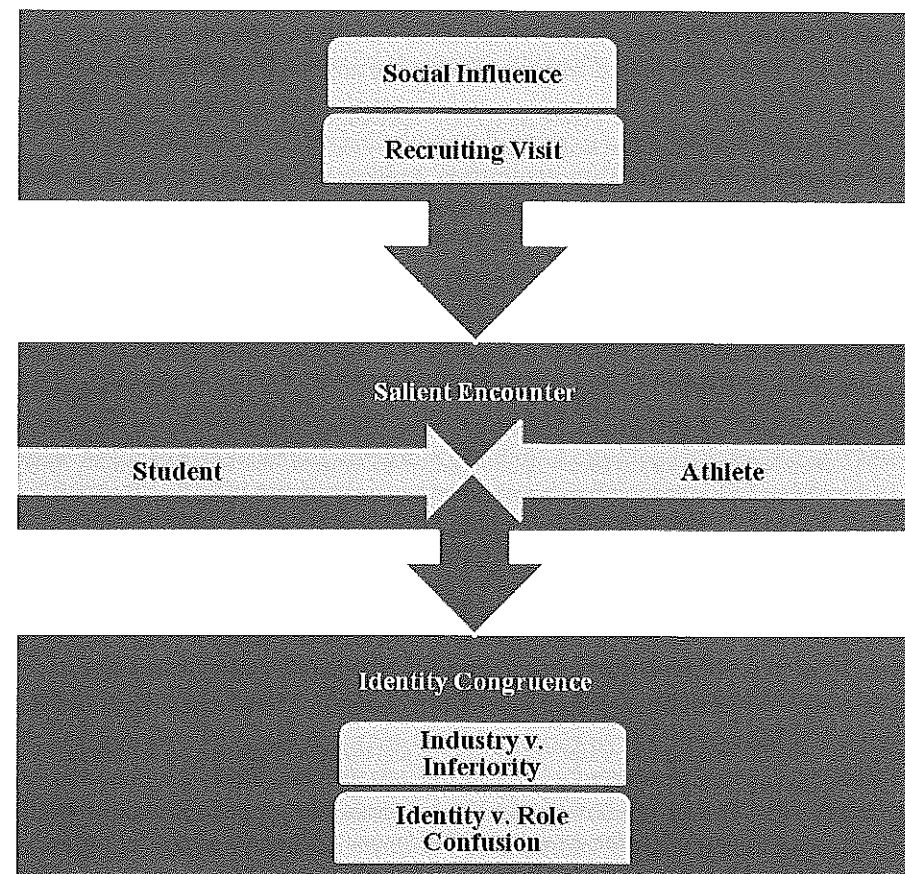
Implications for Higher Education

The Identity Progression Model provides a stable theoretical framework to further investigate African American racial identity using Cross' model and intersections of athletic identity. This model is appropriate for African American male football players at Football Bowl Sub-Division due to the experiences they have at that specific competition level and may not be applicable to the experiences of athletes at Division II or Division III institutions.

The purpose of this theory was to shed light on the intricacy of the identity development of African American college football players. These student-athletes are a distinct population whose influence is not only in the college environment; rather through their athletic ability they represent their institutions on a national level (Watkins, 2000). Struggles such as detachment away from academic responsibilities or identity struggles involving feelings of inferiority may not be visibly apparent to student affairs professionals (Benson, 2001). Yet, as college administrators there is a responsibility to identify populations that require special attention and provision of certain needs. Student affairs professionals must identify factors that will allow Black college football players to have the most success during their tenure at college. Higher education institutions must evaluate the goals of their athletic programs and student services to ensure that they are comparable to the mission of the institution and allow for "affirmation or reaffirmation of a sense of shared vision inclusive of mutual values" (Howard-Hamilton, 2001, p. 41). This assessment will afford the institution the opportunity to be certain that their program and initiatives are student and institution-centered to ensure program congruency with the institutional mission.

The challenge for student affairs professionals is to implement initiatives that are intentional in connecting African American male football players' zeal for athletics to the importance of a college education in a mutually beneficial relationship (Harrison et al., 2002). The academic community needs to be informed of the struggles that these student-athletes experience so that they are not isolated or continuously stereotyped due to social perceptions. By means of an intentional, holistic approach incorporating student development theories student affairs administrators will be able to meet the needs of Black college football players outside of their athletic needs.

Figure 1
Identity Progression of African American Male Collegiate Football Athletes at Division I Bowl Sub-division Institutions



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Richard N. McKaig: The Quintessential Dean

Autumn T. Harrell, Steve Veldkamp, and Danielle M. De Sawal

Dean Richard N. McKaig has served as an advocate for the advancement of the student experience at Indiana University (IU), Bloomington since joining the staff as the Student Government Advisor in 1971. During the 38 years since his arrival on campus, he has served as a shining example of student-centeredness.

Dick received his Bachelors of Science degree and Master's of Arts from Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana in 1966 and 1967 respectively. It was at Ball State that he would cultivate his passion for co-curricular involvement as a member of the Delta Chi Fraternity and as Student Body President. Dick began his career in student affairs as the Director of Student Activities at Wisconsin – Stevens Point, before arriving in Bloomington where he would serve in a number of capacities including: Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs, Bloomington, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Associate Dean of Students, Director of Student Activities, Assistant Director of Student Activities and of course, Dean of Students. While his administrative responsibilities have shifted throughout the years, his commitment to IU students has been unwavering.

Known by his contemporaries as the "fraternal Dean", Dick earned this reputation through his steadfast advocacy for fraternities and sororities and through his involvement with the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity. Serving as Executive Director from 1983 to 2005, and as Director of the Interfraternity Institute from 1984 to present, Dick is consistently called upon by colleagues across the nation to provide perspectives and answer questions about the fraternal experience on campus. Pete Smithhisler, President of the North American Interfraternity Conference shared, "Dick is the single most respected campus figure among fraternity and sorority professionals."

While Indiana University has benefitted from Dick's nearly four decades of service, he has also been recognized on a national level for his contributions to the profession. Dick has been recognized by students, peers, and senior leaders in the field. His list of accomplishments include the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Scott Goodnight Award for Outstanding Performance as a Dean, the NASPA Foundation Pillar of the Profession Award, The Association of Fraternity Advisors Robert H. Shaffer Award for Lifetime Contributions to Fraternities and Higher Education, the Theta Chi International Fraternity Chapman