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Academic Responsibility Among College Football Players

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Eastern Illinois University

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Academic Responsibility Among College Football Players

(TITLE)

BY

Terry J. Coleman, Jr.

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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YEAR

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Academic Responsibility among Male College Football Players

Terry J. Coleman Jr.

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Counseling and Student Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in College Student

Affairs

Eastern Illinois University

Charleston, Illinois

June 2010

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Academic Responsibility among Male College Football Players

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study was to examine the academic integrity of student athletes. It is a common perception that student athletes are not capable of being committed to their own academic success. From the results, there seemed to be a relationship between being accepted and supported by faculty and advisors, and a positive experience in the classroom. However, the results of the data showed that the junior class football players had a less positive academic experience compared to the freshman, sophomore, and senior football players.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Terry Sr. and Wanda Coleman, and my sister, Natasha Coleman, for always supporting me and pushing me to accomplish things that I never thought I could.

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I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Charles Eberly, and my committee members, Dr. Heather Webb, Mr. Louis “Lou” V. Hencken, and Coach Rocco “Roc” Bellantoni. I am also grateful to Dr. Catherine Polydore for assisting me in navigating my data analysis.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Introduction to Research Problem

The academic integrity of college student athletes is constantly being scrutinized by the public (Maloney & McCormick, 1992). Student athletes are frequently perceived to be good at sport only and are rarely considered college material academically. They are labeled (Cortes, 2010) each day they attend class by their fellow students and faculty who generalize according to the “dumb jock” stereotype. They are also faced with the incredible task of balancing their sport with their academic commitments as well as any other commitments they may have. The student athletes’ need for assistance is a high priority of the NCAA, which governs college athletics (Bailey 1993). One of the goals of the NCAA is to ensure academic integrity in its athletic programs. As a result of this goal, regulations have been set in place in order to hold student athletes to a standard of excellence.

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of the current study is to examine the academic integrity of student athletes. It is a common perception that student athletes are not capable of being committed to their own academic success. Investigating this topic will hopefully raise the awareness of the issue of college athletes and their academic ability.

Significance of the Study

The study of academic responsibility in college athletes is important, given the fact that it is something that needs to be continually addressed in our culture. In the case of the current study, it was crucial to address the issue of academic responsibility among

the football players at the institution, since they presented one of the lowest academic progress rates for the institution. However, their APR was high in comparison to other teams at institutions in the same conference.

There are few studies that take the issue of academic integrity among college athletes and investigate the tension between being a student and being an athlete. With this study, it is hoped that awareness will be raised to investigate this dynamic in other institutions as well in an effort to develop strategies that will help student affairs professionals support student athletes in the most effective way.

Research Questions

Four research questions were posed for the current study. The first question was geared towards an athlete's attitude toward his sport and his academic work. Is the sport more important than academics? The second was geared towards time commitment. Does the amount of practice time have an effect on academic performance? The third question was geared towards perception. Does the student athlete's view of how others perceive them affect their academic performance? The last question was geared towards the on-campus support resources provided for student athletes. Do student athletes feel like their resources are adequate to be successful in the classroom?

It was hypothesized that student athletes with higher commitment levels to their respective sport experience a greater challenge with academics than athletes with lower commitment levels. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that athletes who feel like they are welcomed in the classroom and supported by faculty will experience less of a challenge with academics than student athletes who feel unsupported and not welcomed.

Site

Eastern Illinois University is a Midwestern mid-sized comprehensive university that serves over 12,000 students and has approximately 2,000 faculty and staff. Tuition is approximately \$7,000 per year for residents of Illinois and \$17,500 for non-residents. The College of Education and Professional Studies is the largest of the four undergraduate colleges.

Sample Population

The study participants were all varsity football players on the Eastern Illinois University Panthers team. The team is a part of the NCAA Division I (AA) in the Ohio Valley Conference. The football team has been lead by the same Head Coach for 24 years. The coaching staff also includes two Associate Head Coaches (one in his tenth year and the other in his sixteenth year at the institution) and 10 Assistant Coaches. Notable alums of the team are Sean Payton of the New Orleans Saints and Tony Romo, who is the starting quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys.

Definition of Terms

1. NCAA- The National College Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing body of college athletics.
2. Eligibility- This term refers to the student athlete's ability to play, due to compliance of NCAA regulations.
3. Athletic Scholarship- A reward granted to student athletes when they perform to the academic standard of the NCAA.
4. APR- Annual Progress Rate is a measure instituted by the NCAA that tracks the academic progress of each team of an institution.

5. GSR- Graduation Success Rate is a measure instituted by the NCAA that tracks the graduation rate of student athletes belonging to the association.
6. Recruitment- The process of bringing in new athletes for a sporting program at an institution of higher education.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

The focus of the present literature review is student athletes and their experiences on a college campus. One topic of interest is the challenge that students face by having to balance both their sport and academic responsibilities (Maloney & McCormick, 1992). The purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences college student athletes face in the realm of academics. The following review of literature explores the role college student athletes play on a college campus and any stereotypes that may be directed towards this particular group of students.

Student Athletes Defined

Harmon (2009) stated that for student athletes to be studied, one must know the manner in which a student athlete is defined. Student athletes are usually granted financial aid by the university according to their athletic ability. However, there are some who are not awarded aid, until they have shown that they are a fit for their respective team. Student athletes should be considered as non-traditional students, due to their unique culture. Student athletes are different from their non-athlete peers, in that they have little free time, they are often unfamiliar with the campus as a whole, and they are limited in career development.

The Transition from High School to College

Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji (2004) found that most college athletes entered college without the skills necessary to be successful in the classroom. Male college athletes come to college with limitations due to previous academic challenges,

such as lower ACT/SAT scores, lower GPAs and classroom skills. The transition from high school to college is not made any easier for college athletes, especially when they are being recruited as a *player* rather than as a *student* (Dowling, 2001). The recruiting techniques that some recruiters use are sometimes deceitful in order to get top recruits. Recruiters may give false details about the school's curricula in order to attract the best players.

Duderstadt (2000) insisted that the common recruiting and admitting practices (for football and basketball players) play a negative role in the development of the student athlete. There are some instances where recruiters are allowed a certain number of "special admits" that allow them to access players who do not meet the criteria for admission to the institution. This happens because there is a common perception that there is not nearly enough *top notch* student athletes who also happen to be stellar students. As long as the special admit category exists, there will always be the perception that football and basketball players are at the university for athletic competition and not for academics.

"Dumb-Jock Stereotype"

Pierce (2007) asserted that student athletes are often categorized as a group of students who are athletes only, lacking the learning skills to be successful students. This perception of academic deficiency often impedes the academic achievement of student athletes. When student athletes enter the classroom, they have to be concerned with negative stereotypes that other students and even faculty members may associate with them (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen 2007). The stereotype that faculty members may perceive is that student athletes lack the intellectual ability needed to keep up with

the pace of class. Students who are non-athletes may be envious of student athletes, due to the belief that student athletes did not have to work as hard as they did to obtain acceptance and/or scholarship to the college/university. Student athletes may buy into the stereotype and begin self-destructive behavior which handicaps their academic performance. Some athletes may go as far as to hide the fact that they *are* an athlete in order to avoid being a victim of the stereotype. A more positive reaction that some athletes resort to is to challenge the stereotype by being the best student that they can be, without having to hide their identity as a student athlete. Harrison & Stone and colleagues (2009) conducted a study that tested the theory of student athletes being affected by having to be labeled as an athlete within the classroom. In their study, the student athletes were given a test and were required to identify their athletic identity next to their name. The researchers concluded that college athletes actually performed better on difficult tests when they are primed with their athletic identity. These findings can reinforce the notion that student athletes can rise to the challenge when they feel like they are being targeted or labeled as underachievers based on their athletic status.

Balancing Academics and Sport

Student athletes are constantly being challenged by having to meet the expectation to be a stellar student, while continuing to be an outstanding athlete, which is something that the general student does not have to deal with (Simons, et al. 2007). Student athletes in high profile sports such as football and basketball experience a greater challenge in maintaining balance than those who participate in lower profile sports such as swimming or tennis. According to Aries, et al (2004), male football and basketball players report reading fewer assigned readings than non-athlete male students.

NCAA Regulations

College athletics are governed by the National College Athletic Association (NCAA). It is the goal of the NCAA to ensure the academic integrity of student athletes belonging to the organization. In an effort to support its athletes in the academic realm, some guidelines have been developed to help institutions keep their student athletes in line with their academic goals (NCAA Academics and Athletes).

Each institution that is a member of the NCAA is mandated to keep records of academic statistics, which help show trends of academic performance from semester to semester. One such statistic is the academic progress rate (APR) (Division I APR Data). The APR is designed to measure the progress (or lack thereof) of college sporting team members toward their degree attainment. It is calculated by designating points in respect to eligibility and retention. Each member of an athletic team is given a point for being academically eligible and a point for staying at their current institution, which is a total of two points maximum. To calculate a team's APR, the total points received by the team is divided by the total points possible for that team. That number is then multiplied by 1,000 to cancel out the decimal.

Another statistic that is used by the NCAA to measure academic success is the graduation success rate (GSR) (Division I Graduation Success Rate). The GSR measures graduation rates, which includes students transferring into the institution being measured. Student athletes who leave the institution before graduation are not included in the calculation of the GSR, so long as they were still eligible at their departure from the institution.

Brainstorming How to Be Supportive to Student Athletes

It is important to think of ways in which different areas on campus can pull together in an effort to be a good support for student athletes. Harmon (2009) stated that support from every resource on campus is critical to the success of student athletes. There is a need of support from coaches and fellow student athletes. Along with that, there is a need of support from residence life staff, faculty, and resource offices on campus that will help student athletes develop as a student, and help with career planning.

Summary

The examination of the experiences of college student athletes on campus is a very important topic. This population is faced with the daunting task of balancing both school work and their sport along with anything else they have going on in their lives (Maloney & McCormick, 1992).

Student athletes are a special group that needs the appropriate attention and support to help satisfy their needs as a student athlete (Harmon, 2009). Some student athletes enter the realm of college with a misinformed assumption of what the college experience will be like. With that, some athletes are recruited as athletes, rather than as *student* athletes (Duderstadt, 2000).

Once these student athletes arrive on campus, they have to face negative stereotypes concerning their identity as student athletes. In addition to that, they are faced with having to balance being a student and being an athlete (Pierce, 2007). To help with this, the NCAA has developed some regulations to help alleviate some of the issues that student athletes have to face on campus. However, there are further things that can be done to help student athletes and to support them with their experiences on campus.

Faculty and other college professionals should take advantage of becoming more educated about the student athlete population (Harmon, 2009).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Survey Methodology

The researcher conducted a quantitative study using a locally constructed questionnaire based on the Review of Literature in Chapter II for research participants to complete. The questionnaire consisted of 16 likert-scale questions and 5 additional response questions designed to gather categorical data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Due to the limited number of available research participants, no attempt was made to pre-test the instrument. However, the instrument was approved for use in the study by the researcher's thesis committee acting as a panel of experts.

Instrument

The instrument designed for use in the present study was a local survey created to investigate four research questions as described below (Appendix A). The items created were likert-scale, with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), where the participants were asked to rate their responses to the survey items. According to the literature reviewed for this study, a total of 16 items were created, with four items per research question. In addition to the 16 items, five items were created to gather categorical data for purposes of data analysis.

Research Question One

1. Is the sport more important than academics?
 - a. My academics are important to me.
 - b. My sport takes priority over my academics.

- c. I am concerned when I have to miss class because of my football obligations.
- d. My commitment to my sport is higher than my commitment to my academic performance.

Research Question One was geared towards an athlete's attitude toward his sport and his academic work. With football being a revenue sport, it is likely that student athletes participating in the football program will encounter some pressure to put their sport ahead of their academics (Maloney & McCormick, 1992). When this mentality is developed, it is very easy for student athletes to fall into the trap of developing the perception that they are more important as an athlete than as a student. With that, it is reasonable to ask such questions about what is more important: sport or academics.

Research Question Two

- 2. Does the amount of practice time have an effect on academic performance?
 - a. I have enough time in my day to focus on both academics and practice time.
 - b. My football practices cause me to get behind in classes.
 - c. I can balance practice time and academics during my day.
 - d. I am able to participate in football practices and still finish my schoolwork.

Research Question Two was geared towards the student athlete's time commitment with football and his ability to keep up with his studies. According to Duderstadt (2000), student athletes are required to participate in at least 30 hours per week of practice time, with those figures increased during seasonal play. In addition to

these hours devoted to football, these players are expected to maintain eligibility by keeping their grades up in classes. Due to these multiple competing academic and athletic performance expectations, student athletes are forced to sacrifice their academic performance in order to fulfill the requirements of the football program.

Research Question Three

3. Does the student athlete's view of how others perceive him affect his academic performance?
 - a. In the classroom, I am treated like a student rather than an athlete.
 - b. I am treated differently by fellow students, because I am an athlete.
 - c. I am treated differently by faculty, because I am an athlete.
 - d. When I am in the classroom, I am welcomed just like any other student.

Research Question Three was geared towards the athlete's perception of how others view him as a student. According to Simons et al. (2007), faculty and students make comments towards student athletes that are very reflective of the attitude they have towards student athletes in general. Faculty members are most likely to make these comments in class, which frequently are general in nature as to not directly insult the student athletes sitting in the class. The general student peers of the student athletes are more likely to insult student athletes directly than are faculty members. Furthermore, student athletes come into the classroom having to wonder if they are being viewed as an athlete or a student.

Research Question Four

4. Do student athletes feel like their resources are adequate to be successful in the classroom?

- a. My athletic academic advisor is receptive to my academic needs.
- b. I have a place on campus that allows me to focus on my studies.
- c. I receive adequate advising from my athletic academic advisor.
- d. I have adequate campus support to be successful in my academics.

Research Question Four was geared towards the on-campus support resources that are provided for student athletes and how the football players feel about the services provided for them. According to Pierce (2007), student athletes who have a sense of support from faculty and advisors are more likely to succeed in the realm of academics than student athletes who feel unsupported. Student athletes who feel unsupported by any faculty are prone to form a perception that all faculty members are unsupportive.

The five additional survey items were created to gather categorical data for data analysis purposes. The first question asked whether the student athlete had selected a major or not. The second question asked for the student-athletes' GPA. The third question asked whether the student athlete was on athletic scholarship or not. The fourth question asked about how important football was to whether or not they would attend college without the opportunity to play. The fifth question asked the student athlete to list his class rank.

Participants

The present study took place at Eastern Illinois University, a mid-sized comprehensive Midwestern institution. The participants in the study were male student athletes participating in the football program of the institution. The number of participants totaled 60 football players.

Limitations

The limitations of the current study included the fact that there was only one institution and team being investigated. A more comprehensive study would have investigated multiple teams and several other institutions in addition to the current study, which would have provided a broader understanding of the relationship between academics and college athletics among varsity football team members. Ideally, the locally constructed instrument should have been pre-tested on an independent sample of varsity athletes to make sure scales were reliable measures of the intended variables prior to use in the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006; Whiston, 2000).

Collection of Data

The researcher made contact with the Assistant Head Coach of the Eastern Illinois University football team. The research instrument was presented to the coach in an effort to familiarize him with the intent of the study. In cooperation with the coach as a gatekeeper to the football team, a meeting was arranged in the team meeting room for the student athletes to complete the survey. The Assistant Football Coach remained in the room along with several other coaching staff during the data collection.

At the beginning of the meeting, the researcher introduced himself to the participants and described the importance of the research in which they would be participating. The researcher explained the confidentiality of the survey and stated that participation was not mandatory and was totally optional. All participants signed an Informed Consent document (Appendix A) indicating they understood the purpose of the study, and that they could withdraw without penalty if they chose to do so. The participants were very cooperative and were quiet during the time it took to complete the

survey. As the participants finished their surveys, the researcher had them each place their surveys in a sealed envelope to be submitted for the study. The researcher thanked each participant for their time and participation.

Surveys Collected

The football team was comprised of 87 members. Out of that number, 60 members were present at the meeting and completed a survey (~69%). Given the percentage of total response, generalizing the sample of 60 respondents to the entire team is reasonable. No formal statistical test of similarity on descriptive variables, such as the proportion of team members by class year, was made to test the assumption of generality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Analysis of Data

All data were first coded into an Excel file, and then transferred into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 15, for statistical analysis. The researcher developed a coding form (Appendix B) to develop variable names for each of the data elements used in the SPSS computations. Variable names developed for the SPSS analysis are used to identify specific variables in the discussion below.

Responses to individual items were cumulated into four *a priori* scales (according to each of the four research questions) as defined above. The mean and standard deviation, along with the frequencies of responses to each item were determined. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was determined for each scale to assess internal consistency across items, and to determine if scale reliabilities were strong enough for further statistical analysis (Hays, 1963). The resulting scaled scores were to be compared in a series of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) computations across class in school, type

of major, athletic scholarship status, and overall grade point average. Since the Cronbach Alpha results indicated that several scales were unreliable, an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to determine whether reliable factors could be identified from the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Factor scores resulting from the factor analysis were used in the series of ANOVAs with the descriptive data.

One survey item, number 16 [When I am in the classroom, I am welcomed just like any other student.] was omitted from the statistical analysis due to the number of players failing to respond to the item. The survey was printed on two sides of a single sheet of paper (Appendix A), and many men did not remember to turn the paper over. A second survey item was also not used in the analysis due to little or no variability in responses to the item [If it were not for football I would not attend college.]

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter is a report of the statistical analysis conducted from the responses of the Student-Athlete Survey. For each phase of the statistical analysis, there was a table constructed to represent the results of the analysis. Table 1 shows the results of the descriptive analysis of the data collected for each of the survey items, including the frequencies, means, and standard deviations for each item.

Table 1

Response Frequencies, Means and Standard Deviations for Scaled Items

Item No.	Content	N (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7(SA)	M	s.d.
1.	My academics are important to me.	60	2	-	-	-	6	7	45	6.48	1.21
2.	My sport takes priority over my academics.	60	12	3	12	12	7	5	9	3.83	2.01
3.	In the classroom, I am treated like a student rather than an athlete	60	3	1	1	11	13	13	18	5.35	1.59
4.	My athletic academic advisor is receptive to my academic needs.	60	2	-	3	3	7	22	23	5.85	1.41
5.	I have enough time in my day to focus on both academics and practice time.	60	3	7	10	18	9	7	6	4.13	2.06
6.	My football practices and workout training cause me to get behind in classes.	60	3	12	15	15	12	3	-	3.50	1.30
7.	I have a place on campus that allows me to focus on my studies.	60	1	2	-	1	6	17	33	6.20	1.29
8.	I am treated differently by faculty, because I am an athlete.	60	11	10	12	17	7	2	1	3.15	1.49

Table 1(continued)

Response Frequencies, Means and Standard Deviations for Scaled Items

Item No.	Content	N (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7(SA)	M	s.d.
9.	I am treated differently by fellow students, because I am an athlete.	60	4	5	2	11	24	6	8	4.60	1.63
10.	I can balance practice time, training and academics during my day.	60	-	2	4	10	15	16	13	5.30	1.34
11.	I am concerned when I have to miss class because of my football obligations.	60	12	4	5	9	9	15	6	4.13	2.06
12.	I receive adequate advising from my athletic academic advisor.	60	4	-	5	4	13	18	16	5.33	1.66
13.	I am able to participate in football practices/training and still finish my schoolwork.	60	-	1	2	6	15	22	14	5.62	1.15
14.	I have adequate campus support to be successful in my academics.	60	1	2	3	6	9	20	19	5.60	1.46
15.	My commitment to my sport is higher than my commitment to my academic performance.	60	10	6	9	13	7	5	10	3.93	2.02
16.	When I am in the classroom, I am welcomed just like any other student.	43	1	-	-	2	8	12	20	6.07	1.20

The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was determined for each scale (represented by a research question) to assess internal consistency across items (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The following are the results of this analysis.

Research Question One

5. Is the sport more important than academics?
 - a. My academics are important to me. (Item 1)
 - b. My sport takes priority over my academics. (Item 2)
 - c. I am concerned when I have to miss class because of my football obligations. (Item 11)
 - d. My commitment to my sport is higher than my commitment to my academic performance. (Item 15)

Cronbach's alpha for the four above items was .097, which is a value indicating that the scale was unreliable for purposes of analysis.

Research Question Two

1. Does the amount of practice time have an effect on academic performance?
 - a. I have enough time in my day to focus on both academics and practice time. (Item 5)
 - b. My football practices cause me to get behind in classes. (Item 6)
 - c. I can balance practice time and academics during my day. (Item 10)
 - d. I am able to participate in football practices and still finish my schoolwork. (Item 13)

Cronbach's alpha for the four above items was .188, which is a value indicating that the scale was unreliable for purposes of analysis.

Research Question Three

1. Does the student athlete's view of how others perceive him affect his academic performance?

- a. In the classroom, I am treated like a student rather than an athlete. (Item 3)
- b. I am treated differently by fellow students, because I am an athlete. (Item 9)
- c. I am treated differently by faculty, because I am an athlete. (Item 8)
- d. When I am in the classroom, I am welcomed just like any other student. (Item 16)

Cronbach's alpha for the four above items was .005, which is a value indicating that the scale was unreliable for purposes of analysis.

Research Question Four

1. Do student athletes feel like their resources are adequate to be successful in the classroom?
 - a. My athletic academic advisor is receptive to my academic needs. (Item 4)
 - b. I have a place on campus that allows me to focus on my studies. (Item 7)
 - c. I receive adequate advising from my athletic academic advisor. (Item 12)
 - d. I have adequate campus support to be successful in my academics. (Item 14)

Cronbach's alpha for the four above items was .830, which is a value indicating that the scale was reliable for purposes of analysis. In the exploratory factor analysis detailed below, all items in this scale also loaded on the same factor, AcademicFac.

Since three of the four scales were unreliable, an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation (Hays, 1963) was conducted in which 3 factors were identified (Table 2). According to how the survey items loaded in the factor analysis, the following three factors were named the academic factor (AcademicFac), the sport importance factor

(SportImport), and the balance factor (Balance). These factors had Cronbach alphas of .83, .91, and .70 respectively (Tables 3, 4, & 5). The resulting factor scores were compared across class in school (PleaseCir), whether student/athletes had selected a major (HaveYouSel), athletic scholarship status (AreYouCurr), and overall grade point average (PleaseList). Class in school was a self-report item asking respondents to indicate whether they were Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, or Senio. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had selected a major (Yes or No), whether they were currently on an athletic scholarship (Yes or No), and to self-report their current cumulative grade point average.

The tables below show the factor loadings of survey items based on the exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation (Table 2), and the Cronbach alpha coefficients of the three factors that resulted from the analysis, AcademicFac, SportImport, and Balance (Tables 3, 4, & 5).

Table 2

Rotated Component Matrix

Item No.	Content	Component			
		1	2	3	4
2.	My sport takes priority...			.909	
3.	In the classroom, I am treated...	.503			
4.	My athletic academic advisor...	.904			
5.	I have enough time in my day...		.743		
6.	My football practices and work...		-.593		
7.	I have a place on campus...	.661			
8.	I am treated differently by fac...				.605
9.	I am treated differently by stu...				.817
10.	I can balance practice time...		.765		
11.	I am concerned when...			-.527	.511
12.	I receive adequate advising...	.859			
13.	I am able to participate...		.759		
14.	I have adequate campus supp...	.679	.461		
15.	My commitment to my sport...			.911	

Table 3

Cronbach Alpha Reliability for the Academic Factor

Item No.	Content	Cronbach's Alpha
1.	My academics are...	
3.	In the classroom, I am treated...	
4.	My athletic academic advisor...	.831
7.	I have a place on campus...	
12.	I receive adequate advising...	
14.	I have adequate campus supp...	

Table 4

Cronbach Alpha Reliability for the Balance Factor

Item No.	Content	Cronbach's Alpha
5.	I have enough time in my day...	
10.	I can balance practice time...	.703
13.	I am able to participate...	

Table 5

Reliabilities for Sport Importance Factor

Item No.	Content	Cronbach's Alpha
2.	My sport takes priority...	
15.	My commitment to my sport...	.907

The inter-correlation of the three factors was determined for independence and there was a significant positive relationship found between the Academic Factor and the Balance Factor (Table 6). If respondents scored higher on the AcademicFac score, they also tended to score higher on the Balance Scale. None of the factors were so inter-related that they appeared to measure similar constructs.

Table 6

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Matrix of Three Factors, Academic, Sport Importance, and Balance, among 60 varsity football team members

	AcademicFac	SportImport	Balance
AcademicFac	-	-.020	.320*
SportImport	-	-	-.132
Balance	-	-	-

*A relationship between AcademicFac and Balance was found to be significant.

From the original five self-reported items on the survey, four were used in the analysis of survey results: (1. I have selected a major, 2. Please list your cumulative GPA, 3. I am currently on athletic scholarship, 4. Please circle your class rank) in a one-way ANOVA as independent variables to compare with the three factors (1. Academic Factor, 2. Balance Factor, 3. Sport Importance Factor) that were named after the factor analysis was conducted (Tables 7, 8, 9 & 10). An ANOVA on the fifth categorical variable was not performed since responses to the item did not have any variability among the respondents. The ANOVA statistic is not robust if variables do not have a sufficient level of variation (Hays, 1963).

A One-way Analysis of Variance was conducted with the three factors as dependent variables in relation to the athletic scholarship status (Yes or No) of each football player (Table 7). There were no significance differences found in the analysis.

Table 7

One-way Analysis of Variance Summary Table comparing Athletic Scholarship Status, with three factors, Academic, Sport Importance, and Balance, among 60 varsity football team members*

Factor	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
AcademicFac	Between	46.864	1	46.864	1.149	.288
	Within	2366.119	58	40.795	-	-
	Total	2412.983	59	-	-	-
Balance	Between	6.572	1	6.572	.605	.440
	Within	630.278	58	10.867	-	-
	Total	636.850	59	-	-	-
SportImport	Between	.003	1	.003	.000	.988
	Within	874.730	58	15.082	-	-
	Total	874.733	59	-	-	-

*Athletic Scholarship Status was collected using the survey in a self-report manner. The football team members circled yes or no according to whether they were currently under athletic scholarship.

A One-way Analysis of Variance was conducted with the three factors as dependent variables in relation to the class ranking of each football player, Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, or Senior (Table 8). There was a significance difference between the classes found in the AcademicFac variable ($F(3) = 3.387, p = .024$).

Table 8

One-way Analysis of Variance Summary Table comparing Class Ranking, with three factors, Academic, Sport Importance, and Balance, among 60 varsity football team members

Factor	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
AcademicFac	Between	370.573	3	123.524	3.387	.024**
	Within	2042.411	56	36.42	-	-
	Total	2412.983	59	-	-	-
Balance	Between	42.713	3	14.238	1.342	.270
	Within	594.137	56	10.610	-	-
	Total	636.850	59	-	-	-
SportImport	Between	59.096	3	19.699	1.352	.267
	Within	815.637	56	10.610	-	-
	Total	874.733	59	-	-	-

*Class Ranking was collected using the survey in a self-report manner. Each football team member circled his class standing (FR, SO, JR, SR) according to what class he was in at the time of the survey.

** There was significance less than $p \leq .05$ found between the Academic Factor and Class Ranking.

A One-way Analysis of Variance was conducted with the three factors as dependent variables in relation to the GPA level of each football player (Table 9). Grade point averages were originally reported on a scale from 4.0 to 0.0. A nominal variable was created from the original data, with a High GPA ranging from 4.0 to 3.1, Middle GPA defined as a range from 3.0 to 2.7, and Low GPA defined as a range from 2.6 to 2.0. There were no significance differences found in the analysis due to GPA.

Table 9

One-way Analysis of Variance Summary Table comparing High, Middle, and Low Grade Point Average (GPA), with three factors, Academic, Sport Importance, and Balance, among 60 varsity football team members*

Factor	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
AcademicFac	Between	150.881	2	75.440	1.901	.159
	Within	2262.102	57	39.686	-	-
	Total	2412.983	59	-	-	-
Balance	Between	1.613	2	.806	.072	.930
	Within	635.237	57	11.145	-	-
	Total	636.850	59	-	-	-
SportImport	Between	48.416	2	24.208	1.670	.197
	Within	826.317	57	14.497	-	-
	Total	874.733	59	-	-	-

*High GPA was defined as a range from 4.0 to 3.1, Middle GPA was defined as a range from 3.0 to 2.7, Low GPA was defined as a range from 2.6 to 2.0.

A One-way Analysis of Variance was conducted with the three factors as dependent variables in relation to whether or not each football player had selected a major at the time of the survey (Table 10). There was no significance found in the analysis based on whether team members had selected a major or not.

Table 10

One-way Analysis of Variance Summary Table comparing Major Selected/Major Not Selected, with three factors, Academic, Sport Importance, and Balance, among 60 varsity football team members*

Factor	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
AcademicFac	Between	.224	1	.224	.005	.942
	Within	2412.759	58	41.599	-	-
	Total	2412.983	59	-	-	-
Balance	Between	2.017	1	2.017	.184	.669
	Within	634.833	58	10.945	-	-
	Total	636.850	59	-	-	-
SportImport	Between	5.400	1	5.400	.360	.551
	Within	869.333	58	14.989	-	-
	Total	874.733	59	-	-	-

**Major Selected/Major Not Selected was collected using the survey in a self-report manner. Each football team member circled yes or no according to whether he had selected a major or not at the time of the survey.

To explore the significance of the Academic Factor between groups in relation to the class ranking of the football players, descriptive statistics were computed (Table 11). The data showed there was a difference between how the junior football players (class rank 3) responded to the survey compared to the rest of the classes represented on the football team as a whole: freshman, sophomore, and senior (class ranks 1, 2, and 4 respectively).

Table 11

Descriptive statistics by class rank on the academic factor for 60 varsity football team members

Class Rank	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	24	35.38	4.83	.99	33.33	37.42
2	14	37.93	2.84	.76	36.29	39.57
3	14	30.79	10.02	2.68	25.00	36.57
4	8	34.75	3.69	1.31	31.66	37.84
Total	60	34.82	6.40	.83	33.16	36.47

Interpretations of these results as reported are discussed in Chapter V,
Conclusions and Recommendations, which follows.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study was developed to investigate varsity football student athletes and assess their attitude towards their academics in relation to their sport. For this study, football players at Eastern Illinois University were asked to participate in a study to help the researcher understand their self-reported perceptions of their college experience. Four research questions were posed for the study. The first question was: Is the sport more important than academics? The second was: Does the amount of practice time have an effect on academic performance? The third question was: Does the student athlete's view of how others perceive them affect their academic performance? The last question was: Do student athletes feel like their resources are adequate to be successful in the classroom?

Since the *a priori* scales, which were modeled after the original research questions, proved to be unreliable, factor scales were developed according to the results of an exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation. With that, the research questions were analyzed according to the established scales that proved to be reliable after completing the exploratory factor analysis, which resulted in three well-defined factors: the football players' attitude and perception of their academic experience (AcademicFac), their football experience (SportImport), and the balance of the two (Balance).

Academic Experience (Academic Fac)

According to the AcademicFac ANOVA (Table 3), a majority of the football players had a positive view of their academic experience. There seemed to be a relationship between being accepted and supported by faculty and advisors, and a

positive experience in the classroom. However, the results of the data showed that the junior class football players had a less positive response to the AcademicFac items (Table 11), which could be interpreted to suggest that the junior class football players had some negative experiences with their academics as reflected by their responses. Due to the content of the items in the AcademicFac scale, perhaps this group of football players may have experienced some difficulty in the advising process. In addition to that possibility, the junior class football players may be at a point in their academic/athletic career where they are particularly concerned about their future as a student/athlete.

Based on the responses of freshman, sophomore, and senior class football players, there was no apparent problem detected by the AcademicFac scale with the way they were received by the faculty and advisors and, for the most part, the football players at the institution felt supported and confident in the resources that were provided for them. A larger sample of senior football team members available to complete the survey may have resulted in differential results, also. However, as the data were reported from the eight senior class football players who participated in the study, their attitude as reflected in the AcademicFac scale was parallel with that of the freshman and sophomore class football players.

Football Experience (SportImport)

According to the data analysis for this factor, the football players at the institution felt like they had a good grasp on their football experience and did not necessarily place their sports experience before their academic experience. In fact, the football players reported to be very conscientious of the fact that they were students *as well as* athletes and that academic study and football activities have a time and place.

Balance of Sport and Academics (Balance)

According to the ANOVA for the Balance factor (Table 4), the football players reported that they experienced little difficulty balancing their sport with their academic success. What was implied from the data is that since the football players reported they felt adequately supported by faculty and advisors, they were able to accomplish satisfactory progress in classes in order to remain eligible according to NCAA regulations to participate in the football program. The fact that the football players have been under the same leadership (one which encourages academic discipline) for many years may play a role in how successful the athletes are with their academics. It is important to note that the support of faculty and advisors facilitates the success of student athletes (Harmon, 2009).

Is the Sport More Important than Academics?

A careful review of individual item responses (Table 1) also helps to understand athletic and academic motivations among the respondents. Given the present data, football players at the institution did not perceive that the pursuit of their sport was more important than their academics. In fact, a majority of the football team members who participated in the study reported that one side was not more important than the other. In addition, a majority reported that they did have a genuine concern for their academics and how much their sport played into the factor of their academic success. However, there were a few outliers who felt quite the opposite, but there were not a significant amount of responses to raise concern, or affect the outcome of the data analysis.

Does the Amount of Practice Time Have an Effect on Academic Performance?

From the data presented, football players at the institution did not have any issues in regards to excessive practice time and not being able to balance that with their academic performance (Table 1, Item 6). A majority of the player respondents who participated in the study reported that they had adequate time to complete work and that they were still able to participate in their practices, workouts and games.

Does the Student Athlete's View of How Others Perceive Them Affect Their Academic Performance?

According to the data analysis, these football players benefited from the feeling that they were accepted by faculty (Table 1). They reported they did not feel like they were treated differently in the classroom by the faculty and that they felt very much like a student when they were in the classroom. However, according to item response frequencies (Table 1, Item 8, Item 9), while the football players reported they felt accepted by faculty, they also reported that they did not feel like they were treated in a positive manner by fellow students. While the original *a priori* scale asking for the football players' perception of their non-athlete peer relationships was discarded due to low reliability, it was still interesting to note that there was an oppositional effect in the players' perceptions of faculty support compared to their perceptions about themselves gathered from their non-athlete peers. This reinforces the idea that student athletes are perceptive of the attitudes that their faculty and non-athletic peers have of them (Simons, et al. 2007).

Do Student Athletes Feel Like Their Resources Are Adequate to Be Successful in the Classroom?

According to the data analysis, most of the football players at the institution felt supported and were confident with the resources provided for their academic success. There was a high concentration of responses on the positive end concerning adequate places on campus to focus on academics (Table1, Item 7) as well as the support provided by advisors and faculty (Table 1, Item 8, Item 12). However, as mentioned before, the junior class football players may have had a different experience since their responses were significantly lower on the AcademicFac scale.

Implications for Future Research

The present study focused on one institution and members of its football team. A more comprehensive study would have included teams from several other institutions within the same athletic conference. An even stronger study would have included other revenue producing teams in addition to the football team.

One of the issues that the researcher faced was the confidence in some of the responses from the categorical data items. For example, one of the reasons why the analysis came back unreliable may have been due to participants' false report of GPA, scholarship status, and so forth. Gathering this information from a more reliable source independent of respondent self-reports would have been useful. Some of the participating football players very well could have been confused about their scholarship status or about what exactly they held as a GPA.

The present study was completely quantitative. A mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative approach might have the best opportunity to both provide comparable

empirical data augmented with the “voices” of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Often, the results of quantitative surveys are interpreted without the benefit of the “voices” of the persons who completed the items in the survey. In the present study, the stories of participants about their interaction with faculty members, non-athlete students, and their athletic academic advisors could have illuminated the survey responses in ways that the researcher could only imagine.

The reliability of the survey instrument was another issue that the researcher had to face. To help alleviate this problem, it would be best to pretest the reliability of the instrument being used for the study on an independent sample of varsity athletes and adjust the survey instrument prior to the formal study. In effect, the validity of the instrument needs to be demonstrated prior to its use in a study (Whiston, 2000). In addition to reliability, the formatting of the instrument is very important. For future research, the researcher will want to be sure to format the survey so that each item is easily visible on the same page to alleviate any confusion while the participants take part in the survey (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In the current study, there was an item that had to be deleted (Item 16) because there were not enough responses, partly due to the fact that the item was poorly placed within the survey.

Recommendations for Future Practitioners

Practitioners in the field of student affairs should take notice of how to become more supportive of student athletes. Strategies need to be developed to help bridge the gap between student athletes and their non-athlete peers. From the current study, it was implied that there may be some stress in that relationship and it is worthy of future investigation. Perhaps an initiative can start with residence life professionals. If the

student athletes can connect with their non-athlete peers within their living space, it may be easier for them to do so within the classroom, and vice versa. Moreover, faculty can help bridge the gap within the classroom, perhaps by developing engaged learning strategies to have the two groups interact more effectively, in an effort to establish consistency between the two groups in respect to their experience in the classroom. From the advising standpoint, it could be of benefit to take a close look at the development of the student athlete and provide more specific advising styles to students of different class standing as opposed to utilizing a universal method with each category of students (Harmon, 2009).

For the coaching staff of these student athletes, it is recommended that they set a standard that academics are just as important as the sport in which they are participating. Building a stronger relationship with faculty members and advisors would be a great first step in achieving that goal.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPAT IN RESEARCH*“Academic Responsibility among College Football Players”*

You are hereby invited to participate in a research study conducted by *Terry Coleman*, a student from the Department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to determine the attitudes you possess concerning your experience here on campus as a student athlete.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to: Respond to all twenty-one items. To the right of each statement (1-16) is a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) through 8 (strongly agree). Circle the number you feel indicates your feelings with regard to the statement. The remaining five items are objective that should be answered to the best of your ability. Completion of the survey should take no longer than ten minutes from start to finish.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study. All information provided is considered confidential and will only be disclosed to the researcher and the faculty sponsor.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There is no intention that participants will gain any direct benefit from participating in this study. Data collection will be added to the growing body of research in the areas of college student development and college athletics.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only with your permission as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of the researcher collecting the completed surveys and storing them in a safe facility to which only the researcher has access. The only other person who will see the data will be the advisor of the researcher's project, Dr. Charles Eberly, who will help compile the data for statistical analysis.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time, without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also elect not to respond to any items you do not wish to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:

Principle Investigator: Terry Coleman Phone: 581-5553 e-mail: tjcoleman@eiu.edu

Address: 280 Grant Avenue, Douglas Hall, Charleston IL 61920

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Charles Eberly Phone: 581-7253 e-mail: cgeberly@eiu.edu

Address: 2112 Buzzard Hall, Dept. of Counseling and Student Development Office

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board
Eastern Illinois University
600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920
Telephone: (217) 581-8576
E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX B

Student Athlete Survey

For each item, please read carefully and circle the number that best describes you.

Remember to turn the sheet over and complete both sides of the survey sheet.

Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
								SD A
1. My academics are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2. My sport takes priority over my academics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3. In the classroom, I am treated like a student rather than an athlete	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
4. My athletic academic advisor is receptive to my academic needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5. I have enough time in my day to focus on both academics and practice time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
6. My football practices and training cause me to get behind in classes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
7. I have a place on campus that allows me to focus on my studies.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
8. I am treated differently by faculty, because I am an athlete.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
9. I am treated differently by fellow students, because I am an athlete.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
10. I can balance practice time, training and academics during my day.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
11. I am concerned when I have to miss class because of my football obligations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
12. I receive adequate advising from my athletic academic advisor.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
13. I am able to participate in football practices/training and still finish my schoolwork.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
14. I have adequate campus support to be successful in my academics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
15. My commitment to my sport is higher than my commitment to my academic performance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

16. When I am in the classroom, I am welcomed just like any other student.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please read each item below and respond accordingly.

1. I have selected a major. Yes No
 - a. If you selected yes, please list your major _____
2. Please list your GPA. _____
3. I am currently on athletic scholarship. Yes No
4. If it wasn't for football, I would not attend college. Yes No
5. Please circle your class rank. FR SO JR SR

Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses are very important.

If you would like to tell me about some of your experiences as a student-athlete in the classroom, please contact me at 217-581-5553 (no one answers the phone besides me), or email me at tjcoleman@eiu.edu.

I will be glad to interview you in person, or you are welcome to send me information via email.

Terry J. Coleman

Associate Resident Director

Douglas Hall

APPENDIX C

Data Coding Sheet for ExcelStudent-Athlete Survey

Column Number	Column Content	Variable Name
01	Survey No. (1...78)	SurNo
02	My academics are important to me	MyAca
03	My sport takes priority	MySpor
04	In the classroom	InTheClass
05	My athletic academic advisor	MyAthlAc
06	I have enough time in my day	IHaveEnough
07	My football practices and workout	MyFootball
08	I have a place on campus	IHaveAPI
09	I am treated differently by faculty	IAmTreated
10	I am treated differently by fellow students	IAmTreatedDi
11	I can balance practice time	ICanBalance
12	I am concerned when I have to miss	IAmConce
13	I receive adequate advising	IRecAd
14	I am able to participate	IAmAble
15	I have adequate campus support	IHaveAd
16	My commitment to my sport	MyComm
17	When I am in the classroom	WhenIAm
18	I have selected	IHaveSel
19	If you selected	IfYouSel
20	Please list your	PleaseLis
21	I am currently	IAmCurr
22	If it wasn't	IfftWas
23	Please circle	PleaseCi

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