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Sophomore Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Athletic Academic Support Services

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Eastern Illinois University

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Sophomore Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Athletic Academic Support Services

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Lindsey Sturm

THESIS

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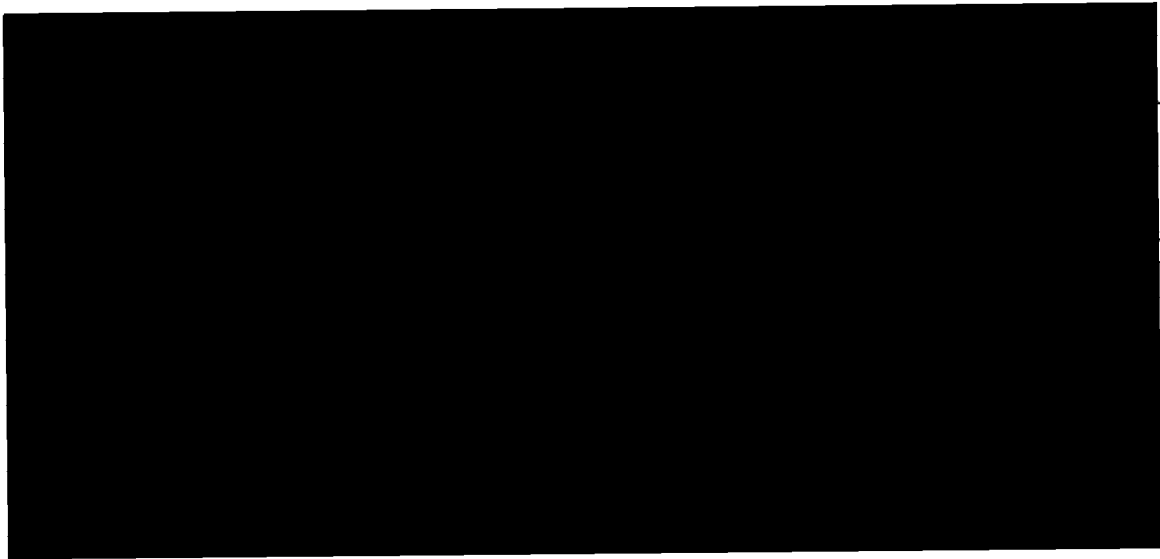
Masters of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2016

YEAR

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my parents and sister. The continuous support that I receive from my family has given me the determination and courage to know that I can do whatever I put my mind to. I am thankful beyond words for the guidance that my family has instilled in me to achieve my dreams and further my education. I love you all very much and appreciate the support that you will continue to give me in my career as a student affairs professional.

To my high school sweetheart, Tom Prior. These six years of long distance during college have not been easy. Through the challenges of being miles apart, your constant support of my academic achievements and professional development has made me the luckiest girl in the world. I look forward to using these experiences as a foundation to encourage our children to achieve their dreams and follow their heart.

Also, this thesis deserves dedication to my peers, friends, professors, and supervisors who have challenged me in all aspects of life. Through your guidance and confidence in me, I have been able to develop as a professional and hope to do the same for others as I enter into the field of student affairs.

Lastly, to my grandpa Buddy. Thank you for being my guardian angel as I developed into the young professional that I am today. You stressed the importance of an education to the woman that I look up to each and every day. Throughout my journey in completing my thesis, I know you were there challenging me to do the best work possible. I love and miss you every day.

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I would also like to acknowledge the assistance from the Athletic Director and Associate Athletic Director for Compliance and Student Services. Your assistance and approval in allowing me to conduct my study at your institution is much appreciated. Additionally, to the student-athletes that took time out of their busy schedule to participate in my interviews. To all of you, this thesis would not have been possible without you.

Abstract

Student-athletes' are faced with a unique set of challenges to balance both athletic and academic responsibilities. Many colleges and universities have provided their student-athletes with support services to help assist them in achieving academic success. This study focused on sophomore student-athletes perceptions of their institution's resources and their identity as a collegiate athlete. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of identity development was used to better understand the new experiences and development of student-athletes' during their transition from freshman to sophomore year. The results of the present study indicated that without the athletic academic support services, student-athletes felt they would not do well in their courses and/or not graduate from the institution. The daily routine of going to class, practice, and working on homework requires that student-athletes' have time management skills to earn high achievement in each aspect of their collegiate experience. Athletic academic support services help to monitor student-athletes progress towards degree and athletic eligibility. The services provided will vary based on resources to adequately staff and maintain the athletic academic center.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The student-athlete experience is different from the traditional college experience with the responsibility to balance being a student and being an athlete. The additional athletic responsibilities can lead to circumstances that affect a student's ability to succeed in different aspects of the college experience. Fertman (2009) stated that "today success in the classroom is equal in importance to success on the playing field" (p. 39). It is important for student-athletes to recognize the resources that are available to them in support of their academic success.

In addition to academic responsibilities, student-athletes operate on schedules with limited flexibility, typically attending classes in the morning and participating in sports related activities during the early evening, while devoting their evening for studying or other necessary activities (Jordan & Denson, 1990). Each commitment related to their sport takes away from the time that they could be making to their school work. There are many resources provided to student-athletes that can help support them with any obstacles they may face during their college career. It is evident that "without being a student first and foremost, you would not even have the opportunity to be a collegiate athlete" (Fertman, 2009, p. 45).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has created a system that supports academic success called the Academic Progress Rate (APR). This system is in place to encourage institutions and athletic programs to retain

their student-athletes at high academic standing (Gayles & Hu, 2009). This is a metric intended to provide feedback based on students remaining enrolled at the university and on their athletic team, as well as remaining academically eligible to compete (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). APR is a yearly report, evaluating the progress of each student-athlete and the overall average among each team. The idea behind this system is that retention and continuing eligibility assist in the graduation of student-athletes.

The NCAA also utilizes the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) which “credits institutions for in-coming transfers or midyear enrollees who graduate, and does not penalize institutions for student-athletes who leave prior to graduation if they are in good academic standing” (LaForge & Hodge, 2011, p. 221). This group can look different over the years because transfers and mid-year enrollees can be added to the group, as well as, subtracting early departures that are in good academic standing at the university. The NCAA developed an alternate method of computing graduation success than the federal government method (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). GSR is a six year rolling average of student-athletes graduating from that institution. The method assists the coaching staff and the academic support staff by holding higher expectations for their students-athletes. The NCAA was concerned about graduation success and implemented a methodology to help schools maintain a focus on the importance of graduating student-athletes.

In addition to APR and GSR, the NCAA has responded to criticism about sport participation by limiting the number of hours students spend on athletic

activities (Gayles & Hu, 2009). By limiting the number of hours, student-athletes are able to devote more time to the required academic support services for student-athletes at Division I institutions and students are less likely to miss out on classroom learning and interacting with peers outside of their sport (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The overall experience of participating in a collegiate sport should encourage student learning and personal development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine sophomore student-athletes' perceptions of the academic services offered to them during their college experience. The perceptions of student-athletes will assist in understanding the use of academic services and generate recommendations for maximizing use of the academic center. Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) argue that "higher education institutions have to realize their obligation to provide supportive environments as soon as possible for student-athletes to succeed" (p. 21). The academic center can play a major role in creating the supportive environment needed to assist student-athletes in college. This study specifically looked at sophomore student-athletes to examine if the athletes perceived any change in support from freshman to sophomore year. Significant attention is given to the freshman experience, which has made the second year a more difficult transition because the services offered during freshman year, typically do not continue into sophomore year. Due to the lack of recent research on the topic of academic services, this study focused on the individual experience of student-athletes using the academic services provided at their institutions. The use of these services by

student-athletes is important to ensure that students are maintaining eligibility and taking time from their busy schedule to focus on school work. These services are meant to support student-athletes in different aspects of their college experience, including areas outside of their academics.

Research Questions

Five questions were used to conduct research for the current study.

1. What makes the student-athlete experience different from non-athletes?
2. In the student-athlete population, who utilizes the athletic academic support services?
3. What are student-athletes' perceptions of why athletic academic support services exist?
4. What quality of support do student-athletes receive from the athletic academic support staff?
5. How do sophomore student-athletes describe the transition from freshman to sophomore year?

The focus of the research questions were to gain further knowledge about the perceptions of the academic services for student-athletes. The questions helped to understand if the services provided assist student-athletes in their academic and athletic responsibilities.

Significance of the Study

A study of sophomore student-athletes' perceptions of academic services is significant in determining the use of the academic center and to seek recommendations from student-athletes about the services. The purpose of

academic services are to assist student-athletes in their academic responsibilities.

In order to properly assist student-athletes, it is important to find out their perceptions of the resources provided to them.

Also, as mentioned previously, there is a lack of recent research on the student-athlete population. The topic of academic services and academic success is currently growing, in terms of academic monitoring and too much assistance for student-athletes. This topic will continue to grow, as more research is done on the student-athlete experience.

It is important for a student-athlete to be eligible, to participate in the games for their sport. Student-athletes may need guidance during their academic career and they will seek guidance from many individuals on campus. It is important to help assist students because not all students have the same ability to succeed on their own.

Limitations

The first limitation is the researcher. The researcher may have observer bias, which is the “possibility that certain characteristics or ideas of observers may bias what they see” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011, p. 448). A researcher may let their observer bias impact the interview too much, in order to get the information they were wanting to support their research. Just the presence of the researcher can impact the study. The second limitation is seen in writing the results of the study, “qualitative research is dependent on the researcher in both collecting and interpreting information” (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 431). The researcher will formulate the findings as the study progresses.

A third limitation is that the sample will be selected based on sophomore student-athletes that used academic services at their institution. This is a purposive sample, a sample that will provide the best understanding of what the researcher wishes to study (Fraenkel et al., 2011). The sample will be limited to student-athletes currently attending a large public institution. A fourth limitation is the sample size. The participants being asked to participate in the research will not represent all student-athletes. The research will represent members of different teams within the student-athlete population.

Personal Reflection

This study was important to my professional development and future career goal of working in athletics. I currently work in the Panther Academic Support Services for student-athletes at Eastern Illinois University. My office works with student-athletes to ensure they are meeting NCAA eligibility requirements, refers students to tutors/mentors for help in academic success, and meets with students one-on-one about academic performance. This area within the athletic department helps student-athletes manage their academic and athletic responsibilities. It is important that student affairs professionals seek to better the services we are providing to our students. By doing so, we can ensure that students are getting the most out of their college experience. I hope to continue a career in academic services for student-athletes.

Definitions of Terms

The definition of terms will assist in clarifying terms that will be used in relation to the current topic.

Athletic Progress Rate (APR).

A metric intended to provide more real-time feedback on the progress of student athletes toward graduation. One point is earned each semester if the student athlete remains enrolled and on the team (retention point) and one point is earned if he/she is academically eligible to compete (eligibility point) (LaForge & Hodge, 2011, p.222).

Division I. The highest level of intercollegiate athletics by the NCAA that “generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships” (NCAA Division 1, 2014, para.1).

Graduation Success Rate (GSR).

An alternate graduation-rate methodology developed by the NCAA that credits institutions for incoming transfers or midyear enrollees who graduate, and does not penalize institutions for student athletes who leave prior to graduation if they are in good academic standing at the time of their departure (LaForge & Hodge, 2011, p. 221-222).

In-Season.

Student-athletes engaging in 4 hours per day and 20 hours per week of athletic related activities. A countable athletic related activity occurs at the direction of or supervised by one or more institutional coaching staff members, including strength and conditioning coaches (NCAA Division 1 Manual, 2014-2015).

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). An organization intended to “stimulate and improve intercollegiate athletics programs for student-athletes and to promote and develop educational leadership, physical fitness, athletics excellence and athletics participation as a recreational pursuit” (NCAA Division 1 Manual, 2014-2015, p.15).

Out of Season. Participation in 4 hours per day and 8 hours per week of required strength and conditioning activities and individual skill instruction (NCAA Division 1 Manual, 2014-2015).

Principle of eligibility. “Eligibility requirements shall be designed to assure proper emphasis on educational objectives, to promote competitive equity among institutions and to prevent exploitation of student-athletes” (NCAA Division 1 Manual, 2014-2015, p.161).

Sophomore. A second year college or high school student (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015).

Support Services. “Member institutions shall make general academic counseling and tutoring services available to all student-athletes. Such counseling and tutoring services may be provided by the department of athletics or the institution’s nonathletic student support services” (NCAA Division 1 Manual, 2014-2015, p. 214)

Student-athlete. “A student who is enrolled at a university and participates in a competitive sport that is sponsored by the college/university he/she is enrolled in” (Defining the Student-Athlete, 2012, para. 2). The

individual must balance the roles and responsibilities of being a full-time student and full-time athlete.

Summary

The current study was designed to provide further research on the 'student-athlete.' Student-athletes' perceptions of the academic services will help in understanding how to improve the services that are provided and the use of the services that are available to the specific population. Chapter I provided an introduction into the current study, while Chapter II provides literature and research that relate to the topic.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The review of literature for the current study is focused on the athletic academic services provided to student-athletes. The combination of maintaining academic and athletic requirements can cause strain to any student-athlete. Through continuous support in and out of the classroom, a student-athlete has a better opportunity to succeed in college.

History of Athletic Academic Reform

Academic reforms have been developed to restore public trust and improve the integrity of intercollegiate athletics (Watt & Moore III, 2001). The reforms will continue to develop as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) confronts the increasing concerns about college athletics and academics. According to Covell and Barr (2001), the NCAA slowly assumed the primary role for initial eligibility academic requirements with the goal of assuring that all institutions use the same minimum academic standards for prospective students. It took the NCAA over 50 years to create a process for national initial eligibility legislation and enforcement of procedures now required of Division I institutions.

When the NCAA was founded in 1906, it created principles of honor, integrity, amateurism, and good sportsmanship in its original constitution (Blackman, 2008). Universities were able to develop their own rules, as long as they upheld the principles of the NCAA. According to Blackman (2008), schools were able to benefit from students' willingness to transfer from school to school seeking the highest financial reward for their athletic ability. This resulted in the

NCAA implementing “progress towards degree” requirements (Blackman, 2008). This requirement was designed to increase retention and graduation rates among student-athletes. The rate that the student-athlete progresses through their degree must be continuous.

In 1965, the first true academic eligibility standard was passed to establish a methodology to pre-screen potential student-athletes’ academic success (Blackman, 2008). The academic standard provided a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) for a high school student’s projected potential in college level courses. If the projected GPA, based on high school GPA and test scores, was above a 1.6 the student-athlete would be considered eligible to participate at the collegiate level. This was known as the “1.6 rule” (Oriard, 2012). The 1.6 was replaced by the 2.0 rule in 1973. According to Falla (as cited in Oriard, 2012), the new rule removed the institutions’ ability to determine student-athletes’ projected eligibility at the institution to a simpler requirement of a 2.0 high school GPA for initial eligibility. This rule lasted a little over a decade due to the lack of uniformity in high school systems across the nation. As the standards were changing, the NCAA acknowledged the things that were working and not working within its academic requirements. This led to continuous modifications within the system to ensure equal opportunities for all student-athletes and recruitment guidelines for college coaches.

Shortly after the 2.0 rule was removed, the NCAA added Proposition 48 and Proposition 16 to its academic standards for incoming student-athletes at the Division I level. By introducing Proposition 48 in 1986, the NCAA (as cited in

Stansbury, 2004) required that schools could not admit student-athletes who were lower than the academic scores of the general population of students at the institution. According to Petr and McArdle (2012), Proposition 48 was developed based on two primary factors; high-profile academic scandals within intercollegiate athletics and a national movement to improve higher education as a whole. This was implemented to ensure that student-athletes were not being accepted into the institution based solely on their athletic abilities. The academic reform required potential student-athletes to earn a score of a 700 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or a score of 15 on the American College Test (ACT) and complete eleven core academic courses in high school with a minimum 2.0 GPA (Blackman, 2008). Due to increased scrutiny by the public, the NCAA sought to improve Proposition 48 by implementing a stronger academic reform package. This created Proposition 16, which was implemented during the 1995 school year (Corvell & Barr, 2001). This raised the previous standard by increasing the GPA and SAT or ACT scores of student-athletes seeking to enter college on an athletic scholarship. However, a “sliding scale” was created to make the new eligibility requirement more manageable. This allowed for student-athletes to meet eligibility requirements if their GPA dropped, as long as the SAT or ACT was considerably higher. The new standards helped to ensure that student-athletes were not being admitted if they did not have a strong academic background. There are many high school athletes trying to go to college on scholarship due to the high cost of attending college. When a scholarship is at stake, athletic departments must consider the academic standards

to determine if it is worth the institutions' money to allow the student to attend (Stansbury, 2004).

According to Blackman (2008), "recommendations have been brought to the NCAA to increase graduation rates by the year 2007" (p. 235). The NCAA attempted to meet those recommendations through the use of core course requirements, academic progress rates, graduate success rates, and progress towards degree requirements. Many institutions are responding to the recommendations presented by implementing their own rules within their programs. The NCAA continues to "improve and adjust their bylaws in order to support the reason why students attend college" (Stansbury, 2004, p. 8). In order to improve and maintain academic reform, academic facilities must be developed and maintained. The cost to provide these outstanding academic facilities is concerning due to the "lack of financial resources needed to ensure academic success in college" (Blackman, 2008, p. 237). Time and money has been spent on specific athletic academic services to help support student-athletes during their time in college.

Academic Progress

In 2004, NCAA President Myles Brand announced an academic reform package to ensure that student-athletes are academically successful (Blackman, 2008). The program is called the Academic Performance Program (APP), based on two main components, Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR). GSR is used to assess academic performance of athletic teams at a specific institution. This rate has little ambiguity because it accounts

for early departures in good academic standing. Although the GSR is important when evaluating academic success for student-athletes, it does not provide timely feedback for institutions. In order to receive information about academic performance on a yearly basis the APR is used. APR is a tracking signal that monitors retention and eligibility for each student-athlete on athletic scholarship (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). Each student-athlete can potentially earn two APR points each semester for the institution by remaining at the institution and in good academic standing. LaForge and Hodge (2011) explain that one point is earned by remaining enrolled and on the team, while another point is earned through being academically eligible to compete. This program helps ensure that coaches and administrators are helping a student throughout their academic and athletic journey, in case the student decides to leave at any given point or the coach removes them from the team.

A team's score is based on the total points earned, divided by the total possible points, and multiplied by one thousand (Blackman, 2008). The baseline average score for APR has recently changed from 925 to 930. The minimum score of 930 must be achieved each year or an average of 940 over two years, in order to prevent penalty (NCAA, 2014). Once a team falls below the minimum 930 team APR, a public warning is given. Blackman (2008) stated that after the warning, an institution or team will suffer various degrees of limitations on practice/play, recruiting, and financial aid, if the score does not improve by the following year. Implementation of APR over recent years has led to opportunities for institutions to request adjustments due to unique circumstances (LaForge &

Hodge, 2011). These circumstances are on a case-by-case basis due to the variety of adjustments that could be made based on the appropriateness of the unique circumstance. The adjustment is carefully looked at and denied or approved by the NCAA. The use of the APR statistic should be a regular exercise by the institution and athletic department. The information that is reported on a yearly basis is reflective of recruiting, athletic admissions and academic support services. APR provides an opportunity to identify issues, analyze problems, and seek solutions appropriate for the circumstances and institution (LaForge & Hodge, 2011).

The APR score is not only reflective of the institution and athletic department, but also the support of academic success by the coaching staff. The coaching staff can help enforce expectations of academic success through required study hall, checking on athlete's attendance in class, attending tutor/mentor programs, and being a role model in the community. Each of these components will help gain support from faculty, staff, and the community. In 2005, a survey was conducted at Division I institutions where student-athletes were asked about their overall college experience. Student-athletes were asked to evaluate the influence of a number of individuals during their college experience. The results showed that 85% reported that their college coaches' influence on their academic goals was positive (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Overall, student-athletes reported having a strong support system to help them succeed in college. This information shows that there is demonstrable concern for student-athletes as students, and not just athletes (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). In regards to APR,

skeptics might claim that institutions are only focused on academic performance so that student-athletes remain eligible to compete (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Although this is important, a high level of academic performance is reflective in other areas outside of eligibility requirements.

In order to support high levels of academic success for student-athletes, athletic academic support services have been implemented. The academic support services provided to student-athletes vary between institutions. Although the services vary, they serve a similar purpose, the academic support staff works with student-athletes to hold them accountable for their performance in the classroom. Through continuous academic monitoring, the institution and teams have a better chance in meeting the APR requirements set by the NCAA. Comparisons of APR between different sports at a given institution are meaningful because the same support services are present for all sports (LaForge & Hodge, 2011). As stated by LaForge & Hodge (2011), institutional factors that impact the ability to retain student-athletes include the nature of the institution, academic rigor and academic expectations, athletic admissions process, attendance policies, and academic support services for athletes. Each factor represents the overall evaluation of APR by sport and the institution as a whole.

Athletic Academic Support Services

A student-athlete has many responsibilities in and out of the classroom during their intercollegiate experience. If student-athletes fail to meet their academic tasks, they are in jeopardy of being ineligible to compete, lose their scholarship aid, and fail to graduate from the institution (Carodine, Almond, &

Gratto, 2001). Many NCAA colleges and universities have designated staffs of advisors, tutors, and learning specialists to support the continued eligibility and successful degree completion of student-athletes (Lovelace, Downs, Dailey, 2015). Despite the rules put in place by the NCAA about time spent participating in a sport, student-athletes must learn to devote free time to their academic studies. Due to the unique challenges that student-athletes face, higher education institutions are beginning to recognize the obligation they have to provide a supportive environment for student-athletes to succeed (Carodine et al., 2001).

According to Greer and Robinson (2006), advising and counseling for student-athletes is a growing field. The support from academic advisors and counselors helps student-athletes balance their athletic and academic endeavors. Traditionally, athletic departments have provided resources for student-athletes; however, institutional student services are contributing to the academic success in the lives of athletes as well (Greer & Robinson, 2006). The amount of athletic academic support given to student-athletes is based on the resources an institution or athletic department has to fund the services. Most Division I schools have multi-million dollar facilities and an adequate amount of personnel in the form of advisors, counselors, and tutors to provide academic support to student-athletes (Lawry, 2005). Athletic academic support services monitor student-athletes' eligibility and are committed to athletes' academic success. These services "have come to take control of athlete's curricular life and study habits" (Lawry, 2005, p. 21). Some of the academic support services include, tutoring, mentoring programs, study hall, academic monitoring, and services for students with

disabilities. A unique difficulty for student-athletes involves taking advantage of the wide range of services available to assist them in their school work (Jordan & Denson, 1990). Many traditional academic centers maintain normal business hours, which can limit student-athletes due to their practice time. Student-athletes have limited flexibility to attend programs available to all students. Academic centers specifically for student-athletes can extend their hours to late afternoon to adequately support the limited flexibility that student-athletes have in their day-to-day schedule.

There have been various programs developed at Division I, II, and III athletic programs to serve student-athletes in their academic endeavors. A study conducted in 2012 examined student-athletes' satisfaction of academic support services and student-athletes' career decision making self-efficacy (Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, & Fletcher, 2013). Recognizing that college athletes are at risk of having their academic and career development stunted, many institutions provide assistance through academic support services (Burns et al., 2013). Burns et al., (2013) found that student-athletes who were more satisfied with their school's academic support services typically had higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy. As found in previous research (as cited in Burns et al., 2013), provides support to the idea that academic support services help improve student-athletes' future career development. A theme emerged in the literature review with a study by Cox, Sandstedt, Martens, Ward, Webber & Ivy (as cited in Burns et al., 2013), that students' athletic obligations have a negative impact on their personal, academic, and career development. When faced with challenges,

student-athletes tend to change their career goals. Burns et al. (2013), expected that satisfaction with academic support services would have a positive impact on student-athletes' career development. Not only are the services provided to student-athletes important for their academic success, but also their life outside of college sports. Academic support services can help student-athletes cope with challenges by teaching them how to approach school work, social life, and personal life with the skills they have learned being an athlete (Greer & Robinson, 2006).

For student-athletes the balance between academic responsibilities and athletics leads to success (Greer & Robinson, 2006). Strong advising programs and counseling services will help support the developmental processes of student-athletes. According to Greer and Robinson (2006), athletic student services personnel must continue to reach out to student-athletes about their academic progress, as a student seeking a degree. These student-athlete support services will vary from institution to institution based on the resources of the institution and the athletic department.

Programs for Academic Support Services

Every university has different resources and support services for student-athletes. These services vary based on the amount of money available to help manage student-athlete academic support services. The most common personnel to help student-athletes with their academic endeavors include academic advisors, counselors, and tutors. This section will look at three different Division 1 Midwest public institutions and the academic support services they provide to

their student-athletes. Three different institutions were selected to demonstrate the breadth of services offered to student-athletes. The institutions selected were based on the number of students enrolled, location of the school, and division of athletic participation. The researcher deliberately went through the information provided on the student-athlete academic support services at each institution.

Purdue University. The first institution is Purdue University with 36,616 students currently enrolled at the institution (Office of Enrollment Management, 2015). There are currently 18 varsity sports as members of the Big Ten Conference. Purdue is located in West Lafayette, Indiana. The name of the academic support services program is the Drew and Brittany Brees Student-Athlete Academic Center. According to Purdue University Athletic Department (2015):

The demands of intercollegiate athletics require every student-athlete to acquire an ability to balance a rigorous schedule and to confront outside influences that are contrary to the goals you have set first as a student and second as a student-athlete. Our staff will be here with you every step of the way (para. 2).

The staff for the academic services include a senior director, four associate directors, two academic support service advisors, one learning specialist, one leadership specialist, three academic graduate assistants, and a secretary. Each staff member has specific responsibilities and teams that they advise during the academic year. The staff encourages student-athletes to take full advantage of

their services and help students become independent and self-reliant members of society (Purdue University Athletic Department, 2015).

The Drew and Brittany Brees Student-Athlete Academic Center recently expanded to 5,350 square feet, providing a space for academic advisors' offices, tutoring, walk-in tutoring, mentoring, monitored study areas, group and individual study rooms, and the Chris Ribnek Computer Technology Center (Purdue University Athletic Department, 2015). Student-athletes have the opportunity to have one-on-one tutoring, and mentoring. In the mentorship program, a student-athlete is paired with an individual selected by the athletic academics staff, whom is seen as a role model and academic leader on campus. The mentor will assist a student-athlete in managing all of their responsibilities as a student and an athlete. Another form of mentorship is known as the Vanguard Mentoring Program. This program is used to serve at-risk student-athletes by providing required study hall, staffed with professional educators to help with students' study skills and approaches to their academic coursework. Lastly, Purdue Athletics has partnered with Teamworks, which is a software used to submit grade checks throughout the semester to student-athletes' instructors. This information is shared between the instructor and appropriate athletics academic staff to assist student-athletes in succeeding in the classroom. Through constant communication between instructors, student-athletes, and athletics academic staff, poor performance in the classroom can be addressed in a timely manner.

The athletic department operates within the overall mission of Purdue University and supports the education mission of the institution through the

pursuit of higher education and graduation of student athletes (Purdue University Athletic Department, 2015). A partnership between the athletic department and university helps to ensure that student-athletes have the necessary academic support services in their goal of earning a college degree.

Missouri State University. The second institution is Missouri State University, recently reporting enrollment in 2014 of 22,385 students (Missouri State News, 2014). The institution currently has 15 varsity sports as members of the Missouri Valley Conference. The campus is located in Springfield, Missouri. The academic center at Missouri State University is called The Dr. Mary Jo Wynn Academic Achievement Center. The center creates a culture that encourages and fosters accountability, responsibility, and preparation, which leads to the graduation of student-athletes (Missouri State University Athletics, 2015). Some of the academic achievement center's goals include monitoring the academic progress and performance of student-athletes, communicating concerns with coaches about academic performance and providing information about academic major/course requirements.

The achievement center is staffed with one director, one assistant director, two academic counselors, and one administrative assistant. Each staff member operates in several capacities with student-athletes and is assigned as the academic supervisor for one or more teams. The responsibilities of the staff members vary between position and sports team. All staff members will conduct weekly one-on-one meetings with student-athletes to help monitor academic

progress throughout the semester. This creates a proactive approach to academic performance and the overall pursuit of helping student-athletes graduate.

The Dr. Mary Jo Wynn Academic Achievement Center requires that all incoming freshman or transfer students attend study hall (MSU Athletics, 2015). After the first semester, mandatory study hall hours are based upon cumulative GPA. Each coach plays a role in determining the study hall hours required of their athletes. It is important that student-athletes learn time management from the start to ensure that they are giving equal time to their academic and athletic responsibilities. Every student-athlete has access to tutoring, which is available to them during evening study hall hours or by appointment. The achievement center works to find tutors for any subject when the student-athlete shows need. The center also provides 22 computers due to the increase in technology use by faculty and staff. The computer lab is equipped with the same software that the university has in its open labs. A student-athlete is able to check out a laptop when they travel for competition to ensure that they have the adequate resources to complete assignments on time. The staff spends the majority of its time working with student-athletes to ensure they are making progress towards a degree.

The academic achievement center staff has implemented The Bear Cup, which encourages commitment in five areas of its life skills program. The five categories include student development, athletic excellence, academic achievement, career development, and community service. These five areas build unity among teams, as well as within teams. Through constant support in and out

of the classroom, the academic achievement center can help in the pursuit of graduating its student-athletes.

Wichita State University. The third institution is Wichita State University, which recently set a record for fall 2014 enrollment with 15,003 students (Wichita State News, 2014). Wichita is located in Wichita, Kansas. There are currently 13 different sports competing in the Missouri Valley Conference. The academic center is called the Downing Academic Learning Center. The staff provides guidance, resources and support that will enhance academic and personal development (Official Website of Wichita State Athletics, 2014). The athletic academic staff includes a director of athletic academic services, a director of compliance, an associate athletic director of compliance, two academic coordinators, Shocker Life intern, and one graduate assistant. Each team is assigned an academic staff member responsible for communicating with student-athletes, supervising tutor services, and monitoring academic progress. There are additional responsibilities, but these tasks are specific to their assigned team.

The Win Mentoring Program creates a hands-on, individualized focus on student effort by teaching time management, organization, and study skills through weekly objectives based on their course work (Official Website of Wichita State Athletics, 2014). A tutor program is available to all students in many academic areas. Student-athletes are able to request tutoring specific to their academic requirements. Incoming freshman and transfer students have a required five hours of study hall per week in their first semester at the institution.

After the first semester, student-athletes' required study hall is based on their performance the previous semester. By requiring study hall, student-athletes are learning how to manage their time to get the required hours in each week, while also ensuring that they are working on their school work. The academic learning center is equipped with 25 computers that are available where study hall hours are completed each week.

Another program at Wichita State University is the Student-Athlete Orientation. This orientation provides guidance for the adjustment to college by introducing student-athletes to staff, faculty, administrators and procedures to ensure academic success during their collegiate career. The coaches and academic staff encourage student-athletes to use the services available to them during their collegiate career. The athletic academic service staff can better support student-athletes based on their knowledge of the time demands and eligibility requirements of college athletics.

Sophomore Experience

The sophomore experience is the year in which students make many decisions that will help them to succeed in the upcoming years, such as clarifying their sense of purpose, declaring their major, and narrowing their career options (Tobolowsky, 2008). According to Scott Evenbeck (as cited in Tobolowsky, 2008), "some have argued that the significant attention institutions now given to first-year students has actually made the second year the more difficult transition experience" (p. 60). Sophomore students begin to face a new set of experiences and challenges that are different from their first year experiences. Experiences

that become more daunting for many second-year students include financial hardships, academic concerns, and questions about their future goals and aspirations (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). According to Gore (2006), “self-efficacy beliefs help to determine what activities individuals will pursue, the effort they expend in pursuing those activities, and how long they persist in the face of obstacles” (p. 92). Self-efficacy beliefs for sophomore year experiences may help to ease the fear of first year students and their transition into their second year of college.

In 1965, Mervin Freedman (as cited in Tobolowsky, 2008) described “students who have not clarified their reasons for attending college or have not selected a major may feel the inertia, confusion, and resulting stress that define the sophomore slump” (p. 61). With a more intentional focus on sophomore students, they can feel supported when making the critical decisions that arise during their sophomore year. In the second year “courses may become more challenging as students begin to focus on fields of potential interest” (Tobolowsky, 2008, p. 61). The success of sophomores has powerful implications for the work of faculty, staff, and campus administrators (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). By recognizing the need for continuous support and resources into students’ sophomore year of college, institutions can address the critical importance of retention and success of sophomore students.

Not only do sophomore students experience academic challenges, but they begin to evaluate their friendships from high school as well as the friendships they developed during their first year of college. Student’s high school friendships

begin to lessen as new friendships are formed when they go away to college. Schaller (as cited in Tobolowsky, 2008) stated that “second-year students begin to question the relationships they developed during the first year and seek new, healthy relationships with their peers” (p. 63). A new support system is formed when students begin to develop friendships and peer groups in college. Friends and peers are able to relate to one another and provide additional support when faced with challenging experiences.

Gahagan and Hunter (2006) recognized the unique challenges for students and institutions during their second year of college. They provide recommendations as guidance for institutions to provide a positive and supportive experience for sophomore students (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006). These recommendations include creating sophomore-appropriate programs, designing first-year experience offerings that will extend into the sophomore year, and creating institutional traditions specific to sophomore students. First, creating sophomore-appropriate programs will help to address the unique population’s needs as well as the institutions values and goals. Second, designing first-year experience offerings that extend into the second year, such as academic, social, and personal support. Engagement in the campus culture will allow sophomore students to play a vital role in the institution and will help to retain sophomore students. Lastly, creating traditions specific to sophomore students, which may include a sophomore retreat, a class ring ceremony, or other specific events for sophomore students.

Student transitions, primarily the transition into college, have been a major focus in higher education research over recent decades. With most of the focus on the first-year experience, there has been a lack of research on the second-year experience. Recognizing that the second-year experience is just as important as the first-year experience has led to an increased amount of research on how to better support students transitioning into their second year. Initiatives designed for sophomore students can help to improve the overall satisfaction of the sophomore year experience.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of identity development is used as a guide to understand the progress and growth of college students as they experience different situations while at college. The sophomore college experience has its own set of unique challenges, separate from the freshman college experience. Student-athletes may find the shift particularly challenging as they acclimate to highly competitive and demanding academic and athletic expectations (Lovelace et al., 2015, p. 1). Chickering and Reisser (1993) focused their theory on college students' establishing an identity and developing a purpose in that environment.

Chickering and Reisser. In 1993, Chickering and Reisser published their revisions of Chickering's 1969 theory of identity development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). The theory uses seven vectors to explain the developmental process of one's identity. According to Chickering and Reisser the seven vectors include: developing competency, managing emotions, developing

autonomy through interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. These vectors are used as a map to help determine where students are and which way they are heading (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser's theory of identity development can occur at different rates and can interact with movement along other vectors.

Developing competency. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), developing competency is focused on the intellectual, physical/manual, and social/interpersonal competencies. Intellectual competence is based on the ability to use critical thinking skills and create new ideas. Physical and manual competence uses physical things to master previously unattainable skills. Social competence is related to an individual's interactive and communication skills. Each skill within the developing competence vector is important in understanding how individuals progress through the vectors.

Intellectual competence. The academic rigor and expectations placed on student-athletes to balance school work and athletic responsibilities begin as soon as they arrive on campus. Gaston-Gales (as cited in Lovelace et al., 2015) state that regardless of athletic motivation, academic motivation will contribute to a student-athlete's academic success. Being able to balance academic achievement and athletic responsibilities will contribute to later success in life.

Physical competence. Physical competence receives attention instantly for fall sports teams because student-athletes will come back to campus a few weeks prior to the first day of class for preseason workouts. Student-athletes who are

not in season in the fall are also expected to begin working out and training for their season at this time. Athletes entering their second year may feel that they are prepared and ready because they know what is expected of them physically, but may also be challenged by not being fully prepared to step up on a team and push themselves even harder.

Social/interpersonal competence. According to Tinto (as cited in Lovelace et al., 2015), student-athletes often naturally develop an institutional and social commitment as part of a sports team. Friendships are instantly formed when participating in intercollegiate athletics and pride for your institution is formed by representing your college in competition. Due to the friendships that are built from being on a sports team, student-athletes may not necessarily have friends who are non-athletes or attend events that are not athletic in nature.

Managing emotions. The second vector, managing emotions involves an increasing awareness of ones' feelings. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993) this is about an increasing awareness of feelings and an understanding of what they mean and which emotions are appropriate at what times. Being able to control and express emotions will help in knowing how to handle different emotions. Common issues associated with coming to college include, living away from home for the first time, developing social groups, assuming responsibilities of self-discipline, to name just a few. Student-athletes are facing additional hurdles throughout their college experience with athletic involvement (Jordan & Denson, 1990). Some emotions that athletes may be facing include being exhausted trying to balance their travel schedule and school work or being tired

from practice, but still having to do their school work. Additionally, facing an injury that may be temporary or season ending. Awareness by both the student-athlete and athletic support staff of these common issues that college students may face, will help in providing emotional and social support appropriate for each student.

Developing autonomy through interdependence. The third vector focuses on developing independence when creating personal goals, identifying resources, and problem solving. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), a student should take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals and to be less bound by others' opinions. A sophomore student-athlete is likely to start making decisions without needing approval from their upperclassman teammates or guidance from the academic support staff. Identifying resources on campus and getting from place to place is something that sophomore students should be familiar with because they have already been on campus for a full academic year. Having required study hall hours and mandatory academic meetings may become more of a task, than a requirement that is seen as beneficial to their academic success. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), the need to be independent and longing for inclusion occurs in this vector. In regards to the student-athlete experience, an athletic academic support services staff should play a role in building confidence and autonomy for their student-athletes to help in their successes as a student and as an athlete.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships. The fourth vector shows that there are differences among people and students should begin to accept that

those differences exist. According to Brown, Jackson, Brown, Sellers, Keiper, and Manuel (2003), “when individuals representing different races participate in integrated, organized team sports and feel committed to the role of athlete, some may become oblivious to racial division” (p. 163). This may occur because the playing field is a place where athletes are socialized to believe that race does not matter (Brown et al., 2003). High levels of athletic identity may be connected to the perception that racial and ethnic discrimination is no longer a problem in the United States (Brown et al., 2003). It is important that student-athletes are educated about difference, in order to try to prevent negativity and conflict among teammates. Rather than believing that those differences do not exist and perceiving that discrimination is no longer a problem.

Additionally, being able to manage one’s emotions reflects the ability to have mature and intimate relationships with other people (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Student-athletes should be encouraged to develop relationships with other student-athletes or non-student-athletes to help when support is needed.

Establishing identity. The fifth vector, based on one’s own experiences and the ability to experiment with new decision making skills. “An individual who is addressing identity issues might include self-acceptance, self-esteem, personal stability and integration, comfort with body appearance and comfort with gender” (Evans et al., 2012, p. 68). A student-athlete can address these issues by rejecting the identity that others might be giving them. According to Watt and Moore III (2001), “positive and negative reinforcements can facilitate the development of an identity as a student and athlete or can encourage the student

athlete to focus on one element of that identity” (p. 13). An emphasis on the athletic identity can lead to stereotypes where student-athletes are portrayed as academically unqualified (Watt & Moore III, 2001). Student-athletes have a unique challenge when trying to establish their identities outside of their roles as athletes. Student-athletes must adjust to the transition into non-athlete status once they are done playing their collegiate career.

Developing purpose. The sixth vector helps decide the career path one might choose and achieving the goals that were set in the first few years of college. At this vector, a student-athlete may have a better understanding of their career path after college. The career path that is chosen by the student-athlete could be to pursue a professional athletic career or pursue a career based on their undergraduate major. Once a career decision is made, a student can identify a purpose for the remainder of their time in college. Developing a purpose entails an increasing ability to be intentional and form a plan of action (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Specific to the study, sophomore students may not be at a point to decide their purpose and career path after college. Support staff can help students understand how their values and interests relate to their career choices (Carodine et al., 2001),

Developing integrity. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), the seventh vector allows for individual core values and beliefs to provide the foundation for guiding behavior and interpreting experiences. Younger students may have acquired assumptions about college from parents, church, school, media or other sources (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). According to Chickering and

Reisser (1993), this vector emphasizes creating an environment where diversity, critical thinking, and experimentation all come together. Not only do students evaluate their own beliefs, but they assess people around them. Students will rarely reach this vector during their sophomore year. Experiences need to be had, in order for college students to develop their own set of beliefs.

Throughout a students' college career, they will interact with people that are at different vectors. Someone who interacts with students on a daily basis will notice the different vectors that students may be in during their experiences in college. This theory helps to understand how students transition at a different pace and how professionals can assist students in different vectors.

Summary

The literature review supports the positive influence that athletic academic support services provide to student-athletes in pursuit of earning a college degree. The services vary between the size of institution and the resources available in the athletic department to support the advisors, counselors, and tutors. The NCAA has improved its eligibility standards to support the high expectations of student-athletes at the college level. Due to the increase in eligibility standards, athletic departments have placed a high priority on the athletic academic services for student-athletes. Chapter III provides the methodology used to conduct the research for the current study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative method used to conduct the current study. Included in this chapter is a detailed description of the study design, participants, site, instrument, data collection, treatment of data, and data analysis.

Design of Study

The study used a type of research method known as qualitative. The study's main objective was to conduct interviews that inform the researcher of student-athletes' perceptions of the athletic academic support services. Qualitative research studies, such as this one, investigate the quality of relationships, activities, and situations putting greater emphasis on describing the information (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2011). Qualitative researchers seek to gain an understanding of experiences that participants have in relation to the research topic. This method investigates where perceptions come from and how they are formed. Qualitative research emphasizes the quality of information provided to the researcher (Fraenkel et al., 2011).

All qualitative studies begin with a foreshadow problem, the particular phenomenon that the researcher is interested in investigating (Fraenkel et al., 2011). The semi-structure interviews that were conducted were not restrictive or limiting, rather the interview could build on the questions that were being asked. The qualitative research method helped to gain information in greater detail versus making generalizations.

Participants

The participants were selected from a Division I Midwest public institution. The selection of participants was a purposive sample. In qualitative research, “random sampling ordinarily is not feasible, since the researcher wants to ensure that he or she obtains a sample that is uniquely suited for the intent of the study” (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 430). The minimum standards for the study included that the participants were current sophomore student-athletes and the participants used academic support services ranging from a semester to multiple semesters. There were no restrictions in regards to demographics, but the researcher attempted to have a diverse population pool of student-athletes. There were a balance in participants based on gender and the sport that they currently participate in at the institution. Based on the criteria for the current study, the researcher received recommendations for participants from the current associate athletic director of compliance and student services and led to the selection of six participants. The participants are listed by their sport in Table 1.

Table 1: List of participants.

Participant	Sport	Major
1	Women’s Track and Field	Health Education
2	Baseball	Exercise Science
3	Men’s Basketball	Undeclared
4	Women’s Soccer	Exercise Science
5	Softball	Business
6	Men’s Soccer	Accounting

The current study required the researcher to contact the athletic director, associate athletic director of compliance and student services, and current student-athletes. By contacting the athletic director, the researcher was able to gain consent for the study to be conducted within the athletic department at the institution. The athletic director was contacted before receiving approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The associate director of compliance and student services was contacted during the summer via email to begin communication between staff and researcher. Most communication occurred during the month of August and September 2015. Through continuous communication, the recommendations for participants were established. At the beginning of the students fall semester of their sophomore year, the researcher sent personal e-mails (Appendix B) to the student-athletes, requesting participation in the research study. Three participants responded confirming their participation in the study. Two weeks into the fall semester, the researcher sent out the e-mail a second time to the same list of participants. No participants responded after the second e-mail was sent. The associate athletic director of compliance and student services provided assistance in gaining the last three participants for the study. After confirmation of participation in the study, interviews were scheduled during the fifth week of the fall semester. The interviews were scheduled and confirmed, allowing about an hour for each interview.

The six participants selected for the study were current sophomore student-athletes enrolled at the institution. A demographic questionnaire was used

provide more detail about the participants used for the study. The participants included:

Participant 1: Participant 1 was on scholarship, pursuing a degree in Health Education. Participant 1 lived on campus and was not involved in any other organizations on campus. Participant 1 studied on average five to nine hours per week, not including class. Participant 1 reported only telling some professors that she was a college athlete. Both of participant 1's parents attended college.

Participant 2: Participant 2 was on scholarship, pursuing a degree in Exercise Science with a minor in Psychology. Participant 2 lived off campus and was involved in a leadership program. Participant 2 studied on average 15 to 19 hours per week, outside of class. Participant 2 reported both parents attending college. Participant 2 only told some of his professors that he was a college athlete

Participant 3: Participant 3 was on scholarship and was an undeclared major. Participant 3 lived on campus and does not have any other involvement on campus. Participant 3 studied on average five to nine hours per week, not including class. Participant 3 reported telling all of his professors that he is a college athlete. Both of his parents attended community college.

Participant 4: Participant 4 was on scholarship, pursuing a degree in Exercise Science. Participant 4 lived off campus and was only involved in her sport. Participant 4 studied on average 25 plus hours per week, outside of class.

Participant 4 reported telling all of her teachers that she is a college athlete. At least one of participant 4's parents attended college.

Participant 5: Participant 5 was on scholarship, pursuing a degree in Business and a minor in Applied Communication Studies and Health Education. Participant 5 lived on campus and was involved in SAAC, student government, and university board. Participant 5 studied on average 10 to 14 hours per week, not including class. Both of Participant 5's parents attended college. Participant 5 reported telling all of her professors that she was a college athlete.

Participant 6: Participant 6 was on scholarship, pursuing a degree in Accounting. Participant 6 lived off campus and was not involved in an organization outside of his sport. Participant 6 studied five to nine hours per week, not including class. Neither of participant 6's parents attended college. Participant 6 reported telling all of his professors that he is a college athlete.

The student-athletes provided their satisfaction with the current academic support services and recommendations for improvements based on the needs of student-athletes. The interviews with each participant provided insight into the student-athletes' perceptions of the athletic academic support services. There was no time constraint on the interview session, but each interview lasted about one hour.

Site

The research was conducted at a mid-sized institution in the Midwestern United States. The school has more than 13,800 students with 43 different undergraduate academic programs. The research took place in a university

building where the interviewee felt most comfortable and available to talk.

Locations included offices, conference room, or lab room. During the interview, the room was closed to ensure that the information being discussed was private.

Instrument

For qualitative research methodology, data is usually obtained through interviews, observations and focus groups (Fraenkel et al., 2011). For the research study, semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) were conducted to obtain insight into student-athletes' perceptions about athletic academic support services. The purpose of interviews was "to find out what is on their mind and how they feel about something," as well as crosschecking the observations of the researcher (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 451). The interviews allowed student-athletes to explain their reasoning behind their perceptions through the experiences that they have had using the athletic academic support services. The interviews were conducted one at a time and consisted of six different participants representing six different NCAA sponsored sports programs (see Table 1).

The researcher was an instrument for the current study. There is potential bias, in regards to the researcher's idea of the expected responses received during the interviews. Research bracketing requires the researcher to put aside their own beliefs or what they already know about the subject prior to and during the study (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). The researcher was a former student-athlete with high academic achievement during her participation in intercollegiate athletics. With high academic achievement, the researcher understood the importance of balance between being a student and being an athlete. The researcher is currently

an academic advisor for student-athletes though not employed by the institution where the study was conducted. In the researcher's experience working as an athletic academic advisor, the researcher frequently hears positive and negative comments about the athletic academic support services. For this study, it was important to understand the experiences that have led to those perceptions.

Data Collection

Data were collected by interviewing six participants using audio recordings in an athletic conference room located near the athletic department offices. The audio recording was necessary in order to transcribe the interview for the results of the study. The audio recording was transcribed on the researcher's personal computer. The interviews did not last the allotted one hour time frame, but all of the interview questions were answered by each participant.

In regards to ethics and qualitative research, "the identities of all who participate in a qualitative study should always be protected; care should be taken to ensure that none of the information collected would embarrass or harm the participants" (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 438). Each participant was given a number to ensure confidentiality of the participants for the study being conducted. The names of the participants were not used in the results section of the study. All participants of the study were protected and treated with respect (Fraenkel et al., 2011). The participants were asked to respect the researcher as they were respected during the collection of data. Also, "the researcher should do their best to ensure that no physical or psychological harm will come to anyone who participates in the study (Fraenkel et al., 2011, p. 438). Situations that arise from

physical or psychological harm were addressed during the interview and the participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any time.

Treatment of Data

The information collected was stored on the researcher's personal computer and was only read or viewed by the researcher. The computer was used to transcribe the interviews to help with data analysis. After the audio recordings were transcribed, the researcher stored the audio recordings in a locked space. The transcription was stored on a password protected computer until the researcher was completely finished with the study. The transcription was then put on a disc and stored in the same location as the audio and video recording. The disc will be stored for three years and will be erased at the end of that time period.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using the transcribed audio recording. When analyzing data, "conducting a code-recode procedure of the data will increase the dependability of the study" (Krefting, 1991, p. 221). This procedure ensured that the researcher did not miss information from the interviews. The data analysis focused on the commonalities and differences between the perceptions made by student-athletes of the athletic academic services. Coding was done by the researcher to help find themes in the interviews. According to Saldana (2013), in qualitative research a code "is often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). The co-investigator assisted the researcher throughout the coding process to ensure that the themes found were

accurate and information was not missed. The data collected helped draw conclusions and provide suggestions for athletic academic support services, athletic departments, and student affairs professionals.

Summary

This chapter explained the qualitative research method that was used to conduct the research for the study. The interviews were conducted to provide insight into the perceptions that student-athletes have of athletic academic support services. The interviews conducted provided data for the results in the following chapter. Chapter IV will present the findings, as they relate to the purpose of this study and the established research questions.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter outlines the perceptions of the student-athlete participants and highlights the similarities and differences among their responses. The first six interview questions were focused on their experiences as a student-athlete, while the remaining nine questions were focused on the athletic academic support services. Each participant provided a unique perspective to the balance between academic and athletic responsibilities, specifically drawing attention to the use of the athletic academic support services and the role the services place in the success of the student-athlete. The student-athletes identified that between the support from the athletic academic staff and their coaches, they knew that performing well in the classroom was a major priority.

Academic Progress/Success

The participants recognized the importance of academic progress and success. Participant 1 said, "I know that if I do not maintain my grade point average (GPA) or do what I am supposed to, I would not be here, so it is very important to me." In addition, Participant 3 said, "Basketball is going to end sometime so you want to have your education. That is the most important part." These responses show that participants perceive their academic progress and success as being important in order to stay eligible in their sport, as well as for their future after college. Participant 5 stated, "Whatever I do academically here, is what is going to get me where I want to be in life." Of the participants, five out of the six interviewed, expressed the importance of academic success to them,

whereas one participant described mainly being focused on their sport.

Participant 6 said, “I am mainly focused on soccer, but I also do have standards for school. Having a 3.20 is pretty much my goal.”

For a student-athlete, coming to college requires them to focus on two main responsibilities, being a student and being an athlete. In regards to academic success, there is a high standard to maintain eligibility and seek assistance during challenging academic experiences. For example, participant 4 recognized the role of being a student and an athlete stating, “Well of course I am a student first and I plan to go to either PA school or medical school.”

Findings

Research Question #1. What makes the student-athlete experience different from non-athletes?

Research Sub-Question I. What is an average day like for you in season? And out of season?

When describing an average day in season, three participants discussed their daily schedule, which ends around seven or eight every night. Participant 2 and Participant 3 discussed getting their study tables time in each night once they are finished with practice. Participant 5 described a typical in season day as, “Practice, dinner, studying, and sleep, that is pretty much a routine day.” Other participants described an average day with limited time to eat between classes and work on homework during the day. With a student-athlete’s daily responsibilities, participant 6 stated, “Sometimes I have a couple of hours to spare and sometimes I have like 45 minutes to spare.”

Participants were asked how their average day differs from their in season routine to their out of season routine. Each participant in some aspect of their answer described the main differences to be the amount of time spent in practice and additional free time. For example, participant 1 stated, “We wouldn’t practice as late and when we are not in season it seems like we don’t have as much homework, so the work load isn’t as much, so we have more relaxing time.” Participant 6 said, “I get to sleep in longer and I have a lot more time to do the things that I want in my free time.”

Research Sub-Question V. Describe how you think your experience is different from non-athletes.

The participants’ discussions of their experiences as a student-athlete in comparison to a non-athlete, presented two major findings. First, three of the six participants talked about the additional pressure of being a student-athlete. Participant 3 described the main difference to be in the daily routine and the amount of stress that comes with it. He believes that you know coming into college that you are here to play your sport, so you must hold yourself to a different standard than non-athletes. Participant 6 discussed, “travel, play, train, go to class, then go on the road where we are also held accountable in school work, so we have to do the assignments even though we are not in class.” The expectation put on student-athletes to maintain high achievement academically, while also performing well in their sport can become demanding and stressful. For example, participant 1 felt obligated to go to class and do well in class and perform well, where non-athletes can choose to not go to class if they don’t want

to and they could fail a class if they wanted to. The increased demand for high performance can create additional pressure. Second, four of the participants felt that the time commitment of being a student-athlete prevents them from having free time during the day. Participant 4 discussed the amount of hours spent in his sport and how he must spend his free time.

As an athlete you spend 20 plus hours a week in your sport, so that's 20 plus hours a week where you can't be just goofing off. So with our free time we have to focus on getting the work done that we need to get done, instead of relaxing.

Other participants talked about their daily routine, such as participant 2, who said:

We are up at about 6 am lifting and then throughout our entire day we get two hours off and then we have our practice. We pretty much start at 6 am and go through the evening. Compared to someone who isn't in a sport, they probably have six to eight hours of free time in their day.

These responses provide a detailed outline of the daily time commitment, in order to stay on track in the classroom and in their sport.

Participant 5 provided a detailed explanation comparing the physical demands that student-athletes must work through, while also scheduling time in their days to complete academic requirements. Participant 5 said:

The biggest difference is time restraints that are given. Other students, they may have jobs or they may have to take care of their families, but this is what is paying for our school, so obviously we have to be successful on the field or courts. Non-athletes have a job to pay for their school and this is

what is paying for our school. In a way it is kind of the same thing, I just think with athletics it is a lot more pressing physically, so we are not just tired, we are exhausted, physically and from a mental standpoint. People do have jobs and may have a 12 hour shift, but they aren't necessarily sore.

She also discussed creating time in her day to eat, so she will often take food to class or to the training room. The struggle to find time for basic needs may be a significant difference between student-athletes and their non-athlete peers.

Research Question #2. In the student-athlete population, who utilizes the athletic academic support services?

Research Sub-Question VII. How many study hall hours do you attend each week?

Each participant was familiar with the study hall requirement, specifically the number of mandatory hours that are based on the student-athlete's GPA.

Participant 2 and 5 discussed that performance in the previous semester determines how many study hall hours you are in for the next semester.

Participant 1 mentioned that it was requested that she had a weekly meeting in addition to her study hall hours because she was an international student.

Participant 1 said:

I am an international student and my advisor was trying to make sure that I got into the fix of everything. First semester I had eight hours and there was no way I wanted to be in eight hours second semester, so I had to make sure that my grades were up.

Participant 3 stated that he is required to complete eight hours of study hall each week and has learned how to space it out, so he tries to get two hours of study hall every day and that helps. Participant 3 described the hours as, “Very helpful, but after time it gets tiring because you’re constantly in there and sometimes you want to nap. Sometimes I complain about it, but it helps a lot.” Each participant was asked about the weekly eight study hall requirement and the responses were similar. For example, participant 1 said, “It was rough, but when you are in there every single day the hours don’t really matter. Even though I had eight hours, I was in there for more than 8 hours.” Participant 6 stated, “I do at least 8 hours of studying a week anyways. I think that the study tables helped me zone in on the school work itself rather than procrastinating in my dorm.” Overall, each participant seemed to have a positive view on the study hall requirement and the amount of time they spend on school work each week.

Some of the participants felt that even though they didn’t have required study hall hours this semester, they constantly utilized the athletic academic services. Participant 2 stated specifically that he still utilizes the services for about six to eight hours each week. Similarly, participant 5 said, “It is a common place to meet because it is convenient. I would say not every day probably, but probably four times a week, maybe 5 times a week.” The participants stressed the role that the athletic academic services has played in their academic success. The services are utilized by a majority of the student-athletes on a consistent basis.

Other participants talked about the tutoring services being available at night, such as participant 2, who said, “Tutoring is available from seven to nine in

the evening. In the study table room, I know they are in there at night and the tutors will stay with you if you need to stay after nine.” Because of student-athletes limited flexibility, academic centers specifically extend their hours late in the afternoon to make their services available during the times that the students are available. Academics plays a pivotal part in student-athletes careers, and they are aware of the resources, such as study tables, that their university provides to them.

Research Question #3. What are student-athletes’ perceptions of why athletic academic support services exist?

Research Sub-Question IV. Can you tell me about your most challenging academic experience? How did you get through it?

For most of the participants, it was evident that they had challenging academic experiences specific to a class that they had taken. These challenges came from being unprepared and the transition from doing work in high school versus work in college. Participant 1 and 6 related their challenging academic experiences to their athletic experiences. Participant 1 said:

We had our first exam and I didn’t really study for it because we were in season and I was really tired from practice. I thought since it was the first exam and all multiple choice and I had paid attention to lectures, so I should be fine.

After taking the test and receiving a low score, participant 1 met with her athletic advisor who made it mandatory to attend the exam reviews. Once she started attending, she noticed that she was given questions and answers that will be on

the exam, making it beneficial to attend. By the student attending the academic services outside of tutoring provided by the athletic department, the student was able to gain additional information to help in her succeed in the classroom.

Participant 6 described an athletic injury that he suffered in relation to his challenging academic experience. A student-athlete may face a temporary or season ending injury and may let that injury take away from their academic success. He said, "I had to write a lot of essays and during that time I was recovering from a knee injury. I wasn't really mobile at all, so I was just fed up with school at this point." He described what he was feeling and how it impacted his ability to focus on things outside of the restrictions of the surgery. Although this was a challenging experience, he turned it in to a positive experience stating, "I had a very understanding professor, who helped me through it. I also got support from the student success center, with the tutors there." He was able to recognize that he needed help and was falling behind and use the institutional resources to complete the course.

Participant 5 discussed the difference between high school courses and college courses, stating, "She was the typical college instructor, four tests, no homework, no readings nothing." When comparing it to her high school, she said, "In high school you never had that, you had homework, readings, and all of these things to base your studies off of." She became more comfortable with the class when she realized that the material was only based on the PowerPoints and taking your own notes. She felt "had not experienced something of that level before."

She learned how to study properly and do well in the course once she had become more familiar with the instructors teaching style.

Research Sub-Question IX. What other academic services do you use on campus?

Different aspects of the campus resources were mentioned by participants in helping with their academic success. Participant 2 and 6 utilize the Student Success Center, specifically with its tutoring services. Participant 2 stated, “Besides going to specific professor’s room and offices, the student success center has tutors that help me with working on modules.” The researcher followed up, asking about the difference between the Student Success Center tutors and the athletic tutoring services. He stated, “I utilize both resources, mainly in the Student Success Center just for tutoring, whereas in the study tables, I can work by myself until I need help on something.”

Other participants mentioned the use of the Math Resource Center, the Speech Center, and the Writing Center. Additionally, three participants described that the services they are given through the athletic department provide enough support for them to succeed academically. Participant 6 described the current associate athletic director of academic services and compliance as “providing [him] with a lot of help to stay on task and help manage [his] time. Especially as a freshman, she helped [him] figure out the time I had to do certain work.” Support given to student-athletes will vary between institutions and the resources that the athletic department is able to provide to its students. As participant 6 mentioned, not only do the services provided help with academic success, they

help additionally with gaining different skills and time management to help in career development.

Research-Sub Question X. Why do you think academic services exist?

Most participants identified that the athletic academic services aided in their ability to pass their courses and graduate. Participant 2 stated, “They help so we can graduate and pass classes because if they weren’t here I probably wouldn’t be here.” Furthermore, he said:

After my morning workouts I am half asleep from the workout and I don’t catch things explained by my instructor, so whenever I go in the academic center we go over the entire PowerPoint that we went over in class, so it is like a second time through.

Participant 3 related in his response, stating, “They save people like me, probably. Everyone is going to struggle, it is college. Especially being an athlete. You have two things to juggle.” Participant 4 felt that the athletic academic services help both athletically and academically. Overall, the student-athletes perceived that the athletic support services exist as a resource to help in their journey to graduating from the institution.

Other participants talked about the time restraints put on student-athletes and the focus on being a student-athlete versus an athlete-student. Participant 5 described the coaches as:

Accommodating the student-athletes for them to succeed in the classroom.

Coaches need to make times and tutors available for us and just for our services, not for regular students. We are already so stressed with practice

and getting sleep. This is just a push to help us out more because we need it, we really need it.

She further discussed the services by saying, “Some people are a student-athlete, but some people do put athletics above the student part. I think the services are a way to emphasize that you are a student-athlete versus an athlete-student.”

Research Question #4. What quality of support do student-athletes receive from the athletic academic support services?

Research Sub-Question II. Where does your support to succeed come from athletically?

A common response from the participants was that their support to succeed athletically came from their coaches and teammates. Participant 3 stated, “Everyone here, I mean from the academic advisors to the coaches to the students. I mean whenever you need support from somebody you will have it somewhere.” Other participants, such as participant 5, mentioned that support received by the coaching staff is received both on and off the field. The head coach meets with freshman and transfer students each week to see their progress, as well as discuss the plan for the upcoming week. The student-athletes can continue to have these meetings with their coach into their sophomore, junior, and senior year.

Additionally, she talked about support from her teammates, stating:

Teammates because there are a lot of things you don't want to tell coach and shouldn't tell coach, so I will go to my teammates, especially older girls because they have been through it. There is a lot of support from each other, really.

LaForge and Hodge (2011) discuss the rules set in place by the National Collegiate Athletic Association regarding academic progress rate. As discussed in the literature review, two points are earned by each student-athlete on the team. One of the points is earned through being academically eligible. These rules are put in place to ensure that coaches are helping both on and off the field. The values of coaches can influence the values and behaviors of student-athletes. For instance, if a coach does not value academics, the student-athlete on that team also may not value academics. It is evident that participant 5 felt that the coaching staff provides the necessary support to push her to excel in the classroom, as well as on the field. Overall, teammates and coaches create a team culture and this culture may influence student-athletes' academic performance.

Research Sub-Question XI. What would you tell an incoming or perspective student-athlete about your institution's athletic academic support services?

All of the participants talked about utilizing the resources available to them. Participant 2 and 4 stressed the importance of taking advantage of the athletic academic support services. Participant 2 stated, "Take advantage of them because they aren't going to beg you to come get help, but they are always there if you need help." Although the resources are available to all student-athletes, the athletic academic staff may not recognize every student that needs help to succeed academically.

Participant 3 felt that with his institution's athletic academic support services, there is no excuse to not get help because they are always there helping

students. He said, “If you ever fail a class, it is definitely something you are doing.” This participant believes, if you utilize the study table hours and the tutoring services, you will get your work done and succeed academically. Generally all participants describe their institution’s services as holding you accountable to do your work.

Research Sub-Question XIII. How often do you interact with the athletic academic support staff?

Participant’s responses about their interaction with the athletic academic support staff varied between every day to once a week. Participant 6 described his interaction to be both informal and formal. He has a meeting scheduled with this athletic academic advisor once a week, but he enjoys stopping in to just talk on most days. He stated, “[My academic advisor] likes to know how we are doing in our classes. They help us academically, but they are just good people in general. Most of the time our conversations are about how we are doing.” Similar to participant 6, participant 5 discussed seeing her advisor 3 or 4 times a week. Most of their interactions are informal, where they see each other in the hall or go into their office for a variety of reasons. She mentioned receiving support academically, as well as on resume critiquing.

Other participants, such as participant 3, talked specifically about the things that he and his athletic academic advisor go over during their weekly meetings. His athletic academic advisor fills out a sheet that focuses on what is due in the specific week. This is used as a reference for the following week to discuss how he performed on the assignments, as well as a reference for the

upcoming week on what assignments need to be completed. Participant 3 felt this system was beneficial to his success and holding himself accountable academically. Additionally, they discuss utilizing resources on campus, such as tutoring, and would review his class schedule for the upcoming semester.

Overall, the participants described their interactions with the athletic academic advisors and staff to be both informal and formal. Generally, the participants identified they could go to their athletic advisor for any questions they had and to just talk to them.

Research Sub-Question XIII. How would you rank on a scale of 1-10 the support you receive from the athletic academic support staff?

Half of the participants identified they would give the support received a 10 out of 10. Participant 3 described the staff as, “Never being a time where they are not there to help you. Whenever you need help, just ask and they will be there willing to help automatically.” Half of the participants felt the support received by the athletic academic support staff was an 8 or 9 out of 10. Although participant 4 felt the support was very helpful, she believed that the staff is not as educated as your major advisor. She recommended that student-athletes go to their major advisor first and then to the athletic academic advisors. This will be beneficial in meeting the progress towards degree requirements set by the NCAA.

Overall, there was high levels of satisfaction in the perceptions of the athletic academic support services by student-athletes. These high levels of satisfaction can impact student-athletes success in all aspects of their intercollegiate experience.

Research Question #5. How do sophomore student-athletes describe the transition from freshman to sophomore year?

Research Sub-Question VI. Describe how your experiences have changed from your freshman to your sophomore year.

Participants described the sophomore experience to be less stressful and felt they were more comfortable and confident in their academic and athletic success. Participants 2 and 6 discussed the transition to be more laid back and a big adjustment academically. Participant 6 said, “I experienced a more laid back attitude, I didn’t really plan on having it. I definitely learned to manage my time a lot better, which I think reduces a lot of stress that I experience freshman year.” During students’ sophomore year, they are more familiar with the available resources. Participant 6 felt more prepared in his sophomore year than in the previous year. He stated, “I didn’t know what I was getting into last year.” Most participants identified that they were more prepared than they were entering their freshman year of college.

Participants 3 and 4 expressed being more comfortable and confident in their sophomore year experience. Participant 3 said, “You know what to expect. You know what you can do and what you can’t do and what are the consequences.” The expectations put on student-athletes come from various personnel, both on and off campus. Similarly, participant 4 felt more confident in the way that she does things and has experiences from her freshman year to go off of. You can use past experiences to know what you need to do in the future.

Participant 5 provided a detailed explanation of the respect gained by various individuals on campus because as a sophomore you are at the bottom, but not the very bottom. She said:

I like it better because you are respected and you don't have to adjust as much because you already know the things that you are expected to do. You already know that you have to make these grades and make these plays. I think it is a little more enjoyable because you are not necessarily treated like you are kind of incompetent to certain things. It is also a higher expectation because you are expected to know the things that you were taught your freshman year. I think that my role kind of changed my freshman year to my sophomore year because now I kind of support the freshman.

Specific to the sophomore experience, sophomore students are still adjusting to the college experience, while providing support to freshman students.

Peers view of Athletic Academic Support Services

Participants were asked to discuss how their non-athlete peers would describe the academic services available to student-athletes.

Research Sub-Question XII. Describe what your friends/peers would say about the support services received by student-athletes.

All of the participants described their non-athlete friends or peers' perceptions to be jealous and entitled or privileged. Participant 1 and 5 expressed their friends or peers' perceptions are primarily focused on wishing they had similar support services. For example, participant 1 said:

I don't think they would really say anything besides I wish I had that. I feel like we need it because we are doing a sport, we are doing hard work, and so we are benefiting from it with the support. They would probably be jealous, but they are not doing anything hard.

These services help to support student-athletes through their academic and athletic responsibilities. As stated by participant 1, the NCAA has put rules in place to improve and maintain academic reform, so an increase in academic facilities have been created to provide the necessary support for student-athletes. Participant 5 discussed jealousy, as well as the additional perks of being a student-athlete. She said, "Others wish they had support. I think it is not just academics, but I think it is even our gear and perks we get. We are here for athletics and this is our job to be a student-athlete." Generally, the participants felt that these services are necessary for their academic success. The opportunities they are given come with the hard work and dedication they give to their sport.

For most of the participants, it was evident that they had similar experiences in the perceptions of the support they receive from their non-athlete peers. Participant 6 described, "Their peers think people are here to do the work for us or that they make sure we have our meetings set up with our instructors and that they can get us out of class." Participant 3 said, "They would call me lucky because they don't have people that can set up their class schedules and tutors." Overall, most of the participants felt that other students do know they exist, but do not really know what it is all about. Some participants stated that other students

think it is a special privilege as an athlete, but do not understand the unique challenges of their everyday experiences as a student-athlete.

Improvements to Athletic Academic Support Services

Improvements were discussed about academic services provided to the student-athletes, whether that was their institution's academic services or other institution services. The question was asked to establish recommendations to meet the needs of current student-athletes.

Research Sub-Question XV. What improvements would you make to the athletic academic support services to help you succeed academically? Why?

For most of the participants, the recommendations for improvements were based on their experiences at their institution. Few participants described other Division I institution's athletic academic services. In order to include the variety of responses received, each participant's recommendations will be presented.

Participant 1 felt like additional staff members would help to incorporate weekly one-on-one meetings with each person under the sport that they advise. She discussed the ability to talk to someone during a stressful week or just needing someone to talk to about her experiences. Another suggestion she gave that may be a solution to needing someone to talk to, stating, "Maybe if there was an actual counselor on staff at all times. Someone that is available to just go talk to them if we need it."

Participant 2 discussed services that he has heard about from student-athletes at other institutions. He referenced his friends having a specific tutor that goes with them on the road and on the bus. This individual helps them to study or

take exams on the bus, so they do not fall behind. He felt that, “This would make it easier, so we wouldn’t have to cram an exam in two days before we leave.”

Additionally, he suggested a tutor or two per team that are general tutors to provide support and consistency.

Two participants felt that this was a hard question to answer. Participant 3 specifically stated, “I think it’s fine right now. I don’t have a problem with anything.” Whereas, participant 4 had a hard time coming up with an answer, but reflected on her experiences and came up with a response. Participant 4 suggested that the athletic advisors become more familiar with the particular major requirements. She has heard other students talk about how they could have finished sooner or gotten classes finished more efficiently, if the athletic advisors knew more about the major requirements.

Participant 5 discussed the resources in the athletic academic center. She stated that during the evening hours, the computers are taken and students are unable to work on the papers that they need to work on. She said, “You are stuck because you have to print or write a paper and you don’t have your laptop, so more computers, or utilize the classrooms next door by providing laptops.”

Students work best in different environments and participant 6 felt that the academic center is not a place that he feels he works best in. He said, “Some student-athletes like to go into the academic center and not study and it may disrupt others who are trying to study. Others just feel more comfortable in different environments when they are doing homework.” Overall, he felt that as long as a student is succeeding in the classroom, they should have the choice of

the effectiveness of study tables and the working environment of the academic center.

Although there were a variety of recommendations about the athletic academic services, many participants had a hard time thinking of an improvement. All of the participants had only one recommendation, which showed their satisfaction with the services received.

Summary

This chapter provided the analysis of the responses to the research questions that guided this study. Participants were given the chance to reflect on their experiences as a sophomore student-athlete and how that has led to the perceptions they have about the support received academically. Interpretations of the results are provided in Chapter V including discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

A prominent expectation of student-athletes is recognizing the value of academic success and progress in their college career. Similar to a statement from Fertman (2009), it is evident that without being a student, the opportunity to be a collegiate athlete wouldn't be there. Student-athletes recognized the daily routine of going to class, practice, and attending study tables. This is consistent with Jordan and Denson's (1990) assertion that student-athletes operate on schedules with limited flexibility, requiring them to devote their evenings for studying or other necessary activities. With the additional responsibilities outside of their school work, participants identified that the athletic academic support services are necessary because they are presented with challenges and experiences that are different from their non-athlete peers. The struggle to find time for basic needs may be a significant difference between student-athletes and their non-athlete peers.

In the analysis, many student-athletes referred to the additional pressure to perform well in their sport and in the classroom, as well as the amount of time spent being a student-athlete preventing them from deciding how to spend their free time. This limited free time requires that student-athletes use their time effectively. The participant's discussion of required study hall can be associated with Lawry's (2005) assertion that these services take control of the athlete's free time and study habits in college. Not all college student-athletes know how to properly manage their time, particularly when it comes to responsibilities outside

of their sport. In order to assist student-athletes with their academic success, athletic academic support services are developed to provide support to the student-athlete experience. As stated by Carodine et al., (2001), failure to meet academic tasks can lead to the student being in jeopardy of graduating from the institution. Most student-athletes felt that without the athletic academic support services, they would not do well in the courses and would not graduate from their institutions. Students transitioning from high school to college may have a misconception of the amount of time that needs to be spent outside of the classroom. Greer and Robinson (2006) claim that institutional student services are contributing to the academic success in the lives of athletes. Constant communication with the athletic academic staff regarding their academic success, as well as their well-being, in turn enhanced the experience for the student-athletes allowing them to feel that they had the support needed to succeed in college.

Student-athletes acknowledged the role of their coaches' influence on their academic and athletic responsibilities. Not only did the participant recognize that their coaches pushed them to be better in their sport, but provided additional academic support outside of the athletic academic services. Similar to a study conducted in 2005, 85 percent of student-athletes reported their coaches' having a positive influence on their academic goals (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Participants discussed weekly meetings with their coaches separate from their meeting with the athletic academic support staff. These meetings involved conversations around their current academic performance and the possibility of

stepping away from their athletic responsibilities to be more successful in their school work. One participant discussed an initiative that their coach created amongst the team, which provided them with an academic competition between teammates. A coach who is concerned about academic success, may encourage a student-athlete to be more focused on their personal academics. Similar to the support received by their coaches, student-athletes reported a supportive atmosphere from their teammates. Specifically, sophomore student-athletes felt that the upperclassman helped them with study habits and advising them to use the resources available to them at their institution.

As a sophomore college student, being more confident in the classroom and feeling comfortable with the campus and professors, allowed them to build autonomy and experience a positive transition from their freshman to sophomore year. Similar to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector of developing autonomy through interdependence, sophomore students should be able to identify resources on campus and be familiar of the layout of campus because they have been on campus for a full academic year. It is evident student-athletes felt support by various offices at their institutions. The use of various resources outside of the athletic academic support services, allows for ample amount of opportunities for student-athletes to maintain or improve their grade point average.

Findings from the current study were generally consistent with literature on the existence of athletic academic services and maintaining eligibility with rules set by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

Conclusion

Student-athletes identified the connection between academic success and being an intercollegiate athlete. It was recognized by the participants that student-athletes needed to stay eligible in the classroom, in order to be eligible in their sport. Intellectual competency, according to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of identity development, acknowledges that student-athletes develop some form of academic motivation, which in turn contributes to athletic motivation. It was evident that when it is not required of student-athletes to attend study hall or meet with an athletic academic support staff member, most continued to use the services on a weekly basis.

Social competency contributes to the idea that student-athletes naturally develop friendships with their teammates. The friendships built around being a student-athlete or relationships developed with non-athlete peers, play a role in social identity of student-athletes. The participants were asked to describe what their peers would say about the athletic academic support services. Based on the perceptions of the student-athletes non-athlete peers, student-athletes may not fully express their student-athlete identity when in classes or walking around campus.

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) second vector, managing emotions, relates to the student-athlete identity. If student-athletes are criticized by their non-athlete peers, being able to handle the emotions can help in creating awareness that the athletic academic support services exist to assist student-athletes in their role of balancing an additional responsibility, which is being an

athlete. Some of the emotions faced by student-athletes, separate from those of their non-athlete peers, include athletic injury, travel schedule, and practice, leading exhaustion when trying to work on school work. These emotions may vary when the student-athletes are in season and out of season. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), developing mature and interpersonal relationships helps students on campus and within the student-athlete population to support each other when support is needed. The friendships that are built through participation in intercollegiate athletics can help one's ability to manage emotions and build mature and intimate relationships with other people. Specific to the sophomore experience, second year students are still adjusting to the college experience, while providing support to freshman students. The participants felt as a sophomore student-athlete, it is their turn to assist and encourage the freshman as they were helped when they arrived on campus. This is a quality that the student-athletes felt provided the leadership and growth needed to be an effective leader once they are an upperclassman.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) state that establishing identity is based on one's own experience and rejecting the identity that others might be giving to them. Watt and Moore III (2001), emphasized how athletic identity can portray student-athletes to be academically unqualified. The services provided to student-athletes exist to try to remove the stereotype that student-athletes do not put precedence on their academic responsibilities and success. Some participants lacked self-efficacy in academic achievement. When asked about a challenging academic experience, the student-athletes identified that the experience led to

being able to properly respond to academic challenges in the future. Although it may have required some guidance from the athletic academic support staff, it was ultimately up to the student-athlete to take action to overcome challenges.

The vectors that form the foundation for the theory of identity development can occur as students' progress through their freshman to senior year. It is important to understand that student-athletes can be in different vectors based on the development of identity through one's experiences. Most of the participants recognized the transition that will occur once they are finished with their intercollegiate career into their professional career

From the information received during the interviews, the researcher developed a model of the participant's perceptions of the factors that influence the support received by student-athletes. Student-athletes entering into their collegiate experience are challenged to balance their academic and athletic responsibilities. The current study showed that student-athletes with an athletic focus placed less importance on academic progress and success, whereas student-athletes with an academic focus felt that their academic success is the main reason they are at the institution. Once a student-athlete determines the role academic success plays in their collegiate experience, they are able to set an academic standard for themselves, which is key. This academic standard varies between student-athletes and their perceptions of being academically focused or athletically focused. One factor that was not evaluated in the study was the role that academics and athletics plays when student-athletes are in and out of their competition season.

Student-athletes perceived there to be differences that set their experiences apart from those of their non-athlete peers. Although non-athletes have similar responsibilities with work, homework, and campus involvement, student-athletes perceived that these factors are then the reason that athletic academic support services exist. The athletic academic support staff provides student-athletes with opportunities to discuss academic progress, as well as just having someone there to talk to about other aspects of their experience. It was clear that the support received does not just come from the athletic academic support staff, but also from the coaching staff. Between the staff and the coaches, the student-athletes felt that the support received was instrumental in their success and progress as a student. Student-athletes noted specific one-on-one meetings or team competitions that were focused on academics with their coach.

The perceptions that student-athletes have of the athletic academic support services is important in providing athletic departments and universities with an evaluation of why these services exist and how to improve them to ensure that student-athletes feel supported in their academic progress.

Recommendations

The current study provided insight into student-athletes' perceptions of athletic academic support services. Based on the findings, recommendations for athletic departments, athletic academic support services, and university administration have been established.

It is recommended that some level of academic support specific to student-athletes be provided to monitor and assist with academic challenges. There are

various levels of resources provided to student-athletes based on the size of the institution and the level of importance that the athletic department plays in school funding. As discussed in the literature review looking at programs for athletic academic support services, various institutions provide different levels of support to their student-athletes to help in their academic success. The institutions evaluated have a different number of staff members in the athletic academic support services, there are various initiatives put in place to challenge their student-athletes, and requirements put in place based on academic progress. The institution used for the current study may provide a different level of support to their student-athletes' based on the resources that they have available for support services.

The researcher recommends that the athletic academic support staff and coaching staff who have great influence over student-athlete academic success provide a positive level of support to all student-athletes. It was evident that student-athletes' recognized the role the coach plays in their athletic and academic success. Not only is the athletic academic support service staff instrumental in monitoring a student-athletes' performance, but also the coaching staff. Student-athletes' recognize that when their coaches understood how they are performing in their classes, they were being supported in all aspects of their collegiate experience.

It is recommended that athletic academic advisors and general academic advisors work together to inform advisors about academic requirements for both academic majors and NCAA rules and regulations. Athletic academic advisors

work with student-athletes to ensure they are in compliance with the eligibility standards and progress towards degree requirements. It is not expected that general academic advisors be aware of the NCAA rules and regulations, but it is important that the two departments share knowledge on the expectations put on student-athletes. The only person losing if this information is not shared is the student-athlete. A recommendation by the researcher is for the director of athletic academic services and an advisor or dean of an academic major meet periodically to inform each other of new requirements for the upcoming academic year. Both areas are critical to helping student-athletes meet graduation requirements.

Student-athletes should also be encouraged to use resources available to all students on campus. These resources include, but are not limited to: the writing center, student success center and departmental tutoring. The campus resources may be able to substitute for resources that are only provided to student-athletes. Although it is beneficial to the student-athlete knowing that there are tutors in the athletic academic center, the participants referred to using the tutors provided to all students, as well as the tutors provided to only student-athletes. By eliminating the funding used to provide tutors for only student-athletes, resources could be spent adding an additional athletic academic advisor to help manage all the sports teams.

The athletic academic support staff is not trained to assist with all areas of the student-athlete experience, so the staff must serve as a referral agent for student-athletes. It is recommended that a member of the Counseling Center staff at a particular institution provide a liaison that is familiar with common

challenges that come with being a student-athlete. It is not athletic academic advisor's job responsibility, nor are they trained to serve as a counselor for the student-athletes. Current athletic academic advisors, to the best of their ability, seek to provide the support needed with personal, athletic, and academic challenges. By providing a liaison, specifically for student-athletes, athletic academic advisors may be more likely to refer student-athletes to a trained counselor, rather than trying to provide the services needed in addition to the job responsibilities they already have.

Student-athletes that have generally high academic achievements mentioned the staff being instrumental in their successes. Although this may be the reason for their achievements, the researcher recommends that the athletic academic staff encourage their student-athletes in recognizing that their achievements are based on their dedication and performance in the classroom. While the student-athletes in the current study described the athletic academic staff having a positive impact on their academic success, the researcher felt the participants lacked the confidence in knowing that they could be successful with or without the athletic academic staff. In contrast, a study in 2012 found that student-athletes had higher levels of career decision making self-efficacy (Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, & Fletcher, 2013). According to Grove (2006), self-efficacy beliefs determine individual's future experiences and obstacles. These beliefs may help to ease the fear of transition from freshman to sophomore year. The time spent using the athletic academic support services is a decision made by the

student-athlete, which means the student-athlete wants to improve their academic performance.

An evaluation of junior and/or senior student-athletes and their experiences is recommended. Junior and senior students have a more established routine and are more familiar with the support provided for students on campus. With great emphasis on the freshman experience, evaluating responses and perceptions from junior and senior student-athletes may provide a different assessment of the athletic academic support services.

Additional research on this topic is recommended to enhance the student-athlete experience and provide a better understanding of the implementation of athletic academic support services by athletic departments. Also, further research on the hours of operation for athletic academic support services should be evaluated. It is recommended that a researcher look at how a traditional student-athlete spends their time to better assist them in making resources available on campus for all students, including student-athletes. In order to support the results of the current study, additional research at a different sized institution and level of athletic competition can help to confirm or contradict the research conducted.

Summary

The current study used a qualitative approach to better understand sophomore student-athlete experiences and why student-athletes perceive athletic academic support services exist compared to the services received by their non-athlete peers. Chapter V provided a discussion of the results from the current study, as well as recommendations for university administration. Results found

that in order to balance the many responsibilities that student-athletes are faced with, athletic academic support services help in the academic and personal success of student-athletes. Specifically focusing on the sophomore experience, sophomore student-athletes recognized the tools gained to be leaders to the incoming freshman student-athletes. The role of a sophomore student-athlete is to help assist new teammates in becoming acclimated to campus and the daily routine of being an intercollegiate athlete. Through this research, it was found that Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory of identity development supported the transition from freshman to sophomore year and the variety of vectors in which the student-athlete may be in based on their current experiences. The researcher provided recommendations for university administration and athletic departments to assist in meeting the needs of the current student-athlete population. The perceptions student-athletes have of athletic academic support services can help to increase the quality of support student-athletes feel they receive, as well as make adjustments to resources spent on providing support services to student-athletes.

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Appendix A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Athletic Academic Support Services

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Lindsey Sturm, a Master's student in the College Student Affairs program, and Dr. Daniel P. Nadler, Vice President for Student Affairs, 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.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a sophomore student-athlete at your institution. Additionally, you are currently a student-athlete that uses the athletic academic support services.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of the study is to examine student-athletes perceptions of the academic services offered to them during their college experience. The perceptions by the student-athletes will assist in understanding the use of the academic services and recommendations for getting maximum use of the academic center. The academic center can play a major role in creating the supportive environment needed to assist student-athletes in college.

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Fill out an optional demographic questionnaire.

Participate in a 45-60 minute audio recorded interview today asking about your perceptions of the athletic academic support services at your institution.

• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks or discomforts to participating in this study.

• POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Benefits include providing information to be the athletic academic support services. The interview style of study will help to give detail to their experiences and ideas for improvement of the services. Additionally, provide more information to this topic due to the lack of literature in this field.

• CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding, this coding will assign each participant with a Number representing the participant. Only the interviewing researcher will know the name of you as the participant. Access to audio recordings will include the Principle Investigator and Co-Investigator. Data will be kept in a locked drawer at the Principle Investigators desk and access to files on the computer will be secured by a password locked login.

- **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 be 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.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. Reasons for withdrawal may include student leaving the institution or no longer participating in intercollegiate athletics.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

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

Lindsey Sturm, Master's student (309-530-1207, lrsturm@eiu.edu), Principal Investigator, or Daniel P. Nadler, Vice President for Student Affairs (217-581-3221, nadler@eiu.edu), Co-Investigator

- **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

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B

Sample E-mail to Participants

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Lindsey Sturm, a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University, and Dr. Daniel P. Nadler, Vice President for Student Affairs. You are being asked to participate because **you are a sophomore student-athlete utilizing the athletic academic support services at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville**. The purpose of this study is to investigate student-athletes perceptions of the athletic academic support services.

If you are interested in participating, **please reply to this e-mail confirming or declining your participation**. I will **follow up** with available times to schedule the interview, if you confirm to be a participant.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at SIUE and the Athletic Director at SIUE have provided approval for this study to be conducted with participation of SIUE student-athletes.

The interview is expected to last 30-45 minutes, in hopes of understanding your experiences and perceptions as a student-athlete. You may answer only the questions you are comfortable with answering related to the study. The interview will help assist athletic administration to promote improvements to athletic academic services.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time from the study. If you decline from the study, it will not affect you in any way. Please ask any questions you may have about the study, in order to determine whether or not you would like to participate. Any information obtained during the interview will be kept confidential and anonymous and will be disclosed only with your permission. The data will be kept locked in an off campus location, in which only the researchers (Lindsey Sturm and Dr. Nadler) will have access to.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Lindsey Sturm, at (309)530-1207, or at lrsturm@eiu.edu; or Dr. Daniel P. Nadler, Vice President for Student Affairs, at (217)581-3221, or at nadler@eiu.edu.

I look forward to hearing back from you!

Thank you,
Lindsey Sturm

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Demographic Questionnaire

Name:

Year at institution: First Second Third Fourth Fifth
 Sixth

Major:

Minor:

How many hours a week do you spend on course work (reading, studying, completing homework, working of group projects, etc.), not including class?

0-4 5-9 10-14 15-19 20-24
 25+

Do you live on campus? Yes No

What are you involved in on campus?

Did your parents attend college?

Yes, both Yes, at least one Yes, they attended Yes, at least one No, neither
 attended community college attended community college attended college

Student Athlete

Are you a student athlete? Yes No

If yes, what sport(s) do you participate in:

How many years (including before college) have you played this sport?

Do you receive a scholarship as an athlete?

How many hours a week do you practice?

Do you tell your instructors that you are a college athlete?

Yes, all of them know. Yes, some of them know. No, I do not tell them

Interview Questions

Welcome and thank the participants. Ensure the participants that the door is closed to make sure that they are comfortable in the current setting. Provide the participant with the informed consent. Now, go through the informed consent with the participant and answer any questions that they may have before signing. When they sign, they agree to be a participant in the current study. Ensure that they know that the interview can be paused or stopped at any point.

1. Do I have permission to take audio recording of our interview?

A demographic questionnaire will be provided to the participant. The questionnaire is optional and the participant can select the questions they wish to answer. The information gathered will not be used with the identification of the participant.

The following questions will be asked by the interviewer to the interviewee:

Experiences as a student-athlete

1. What is an average day like for you in season? And out of season?
2. Where does your support to succeed come from athletically? Personally?
3. How important is your academic progress or success to you?
4. Can you tell me about your most challenging academic experience? How did you get through it?
5. Describe how you think your experience is different from non-athletes.
6. Describe how your experiences have changed from your freshman to your sophomore year.

Athletic Academic Support Services

7. How many study hall hours do you attend each week?
8. How often do you utilize the academic services for student-athletes?
9. What other academic services do you use on campus?
10. Why do you think athletic academic support services exist?
11. What would you tell an incoming or perspective student-athlete about your institutions athletic academic support services?
12. Describe what your friends/peers would say about the support services received by student-athletes.
13. How often do you interact with the athletic academic support staff?

14. How would you rank on a scale of 1-10 the support you receive from the athletic academic support staff?
15. What improvements would you make to the athletic academic support services to help you succeed academically? Why?