The Transition of Male Student-Athletes to a Division I College

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The Transition of Male Student-Athletes to a Division I College

(TITLE)

BY

Tori Harrison

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2019

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE
The Transition of Male Student-Athletes to a Division I College

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Abstract

Using a qualitative methodology, the researcher studied high school student-athletes transitioning to becoming college student-athletes at the Division I-level. The study was narrowed down to six, second-year male student-athletes. There were two participants from baseball, two from football, and two from men’s track and field. These participants were interviewed and asked a range of questions about their high school experience, their legal guardians’ involvement in high school and in college, what their recruiting process was like, and how they managed their transition from high school to college. The interview was broken up into three parts to better understand their transition: How they transitioned academically, athletically, and socially.

Keywords: Transition, student, student-athlete, male, second-year, baseball, football, track and field
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wonderful husband, Malik James Theodore Alfonso Lee Harrison. I wanted to make my thesis longer than your name, but unfortunately, I didn’t get that far. On a more serious note though – Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you for all of your love, your support, and your patience throughout this process. Thank you for pushing me to keep working on it when I didn’t want to and for being there to distract me when I just needed a break. Thank you for challenging me to be a better student and professional, but ultimately, to be a better person. You are my best friend, my partner in crime, and my breath of fresh air. Thank you for continuing to make life exciting and never failing to make me laugh. I love you so much!
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first recognize and thank my Thesis Chair and Associate Professor in Counseling and Student Development, Dr. Dianne Timm. I could not have completed this thesis without your help, and I would not have wanted to. As much as you were there to answer all of my questions and give me your input or advice, you were more so there to push me to take initiative and make this thesis my own. I appreciate the multiple hours you spent reading my work, coming prepared to every meeting, being at every meeting, and giving me honest and thoughtful feedback. It was absolutely, one hundred percent, my pleasure to work with you as my Thesis Chair.

Also, I want to thank my two Thesis Committee Members: Cindy Almon, Director of Academic Services and Tom Michael, Athletic Director. Thank you for investing your time and energy into this study and for always coming with great feedback and questions to make my thesis better. I appreciate both of your willingness and eagerness to be a part of this and support me every step of the way.

Lastly, I would like to thank my participants. I appreciate all of you for taking the time to meet with me, open up, and share your stories about your transition to a college campus. As athletes, I know that your time is limited and you have priorities above meeting with me, but I thank you for making the time to do so. This research study could not have been done without you!
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Year-round there are high school student-athletes playing sports in their schools and competitive traveling teams within their communities. In 2014, there was a record breaking 7.8 million student-athletes competing at the high school level (NFHS, 2018). Some of these high school athletes will consider going on to compete in college. The NCAA (2018) reports less than 30% of all high school athletes will go on to play sports at the college level, or approximately 2 million students.

There is debate over whether the participation in college athletics limits one's ability to excel in the classroom or if it is beneficial to be a student-athlete (Robst & Keil, 2017). College student-athletes have several things to manage, including, but not limited to: demands of their time and energy, balancing a full load of classes each semester, maintaining a satisfactory GPA, and keeping up with an expected 20 hours of practice a week. A college campus is a different dynamic than high school, so the transition can be difficult to adapt to. They are moving away from one’s high school’s rules and regulations and towards the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which has greater expectations than student-athletes have ever had before. The better prepared and informed the university, faculty and advisors are in understanding this populations experience, the better they will be able to support this population of students on their campus toward academic success (Gayles & Baker, 2015).

The NCAA was established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 to monitor athletic practices at the collegiate-level (NCAA, 2018; Weathersby, 2016). It was not until the 1920s when “intercollegiate athletics were quickly becoming an integral part of higher education in the United States” (Smith, 2000, p. 13). As the more popular, commercialized, and competitive
college sports started to get, the more critical the NCAA became. After World War II, the public interest grew, recruiting became more popular, and the desire to win increased (Smith, 2000). This is when sports started to become televised and colleges and universities began adding sports teams, while simultaneously the rules and regulations were beginning to be in question (2000). It moved from being established to simply monitor regulated practice schedules, to ensuring students were meeting certain academic standards and completing their coursework in a reasonable amount of time (NCAA.org, 2018).

Over time, intercollegiate sports have become more prevalent and competitive than ever. More than 4 million student-athletes over the years have competed under the NCAA (NCAA.org, 2018). There are currently over 460,000 college student-athletes competing at the Division I level specifically. NCAA.org (2018) reported “more than eight out of 10 student-athletes are earning a bachelor's degree, and more than 35 percent will earn a postgraduate degree” (http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes). High school student-athletes have the opportunity to lessen the cost of college and “to receive top-notch academic support, quality medical care and regular access to outstanding coaching, facilities and equipment” when they attempt to play at the collegiate-level (http://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/future).

Even with all these things at their fingertips, there is still a transition they will need to go through to adapt and assimilate to the collegiate experience. In college there is a different level of demand placed on one's performing abilities, both academically and athletically. While in high school, a student goes home to their legal guardian every night, they have someone monitoring their homework assignments, and making sure they get their work done. On a college campus, that is almost never the case. Fortunately for students and athletes specifically, there are many resources to help aid in this somewhat overwhelming difference in academic culture. Even
so, athletes are used to the lifestyle of fighting through the pain and toughing it out, they may not always think to admit they need help or ask for it on their own when they are not transitioning well. They may not go straight to their advisor or seek counsel on how to deal with the demands of being an intercollegiate athlete, regardless of how much they need it. López and Levy (2013) reported the barriers that prevented student-athletes from asking for help as: A lack of time to seek the services provided for them, a fear of the stigma that comes from it, a fear of other teammates finding out and a fear of being considered weak. When student-athletes are not acknowledging their needs when they get to a college-campus, this can and will impact their transition greatly.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to understand how high school student-athletes are managing the transition to becoming college student-athletes at the Division I level. This transition will impact students athletically, academically, physically, socially, emotionally, and financially, and that is only the beginning. I know this transition all too well. I came from a small, rural farm town in the Midwest, playing basketball and running track and field. I got the opportunity to continue my track career at a Division I institution just one hour south of where I grew up. For me, the transition was fairly routine. I was excited to be on my own, but I knew that I still had support nearby. I came to the institution with an academic scholarship, excited to be able to compete on the team, but more focused on school and a future career. That quickly changed when I decided that the career, I thought I came to college for did not turn out to be exactly what I envisioned. Not to mention, in college, track and field is a year-round sport. We started the second week of school and did not end our season until the week after school got out. It was a lot on my body physically but juggling that on top of trying to figure out a new major,
see where I fit in outside of the track team, and adjust to the new class schedule, was a lot emotionally as well.

It is important to understand what this transition looks like for student-athletes specifically, but also for the academic and athletic departments to be aware of what students are experiencing. Depending on what sport one comes to play, whether they have a major or are undecided, and what their roommate situation looks like, all can be indicators for how a student-athlete adjusts to the transition or where they may begin to struggle or thrive throughout it. For me personally, it was finding my place at the institution outside of my sports team. I knew that I had great coaches and teammates, but I was not sure what I wanted to major in and where my life was headed outside of track.

This study looked at this transition for student-athletes, specifically male athletes in three different sports. It also worked to identify what resources these populations of student-athletes are utilizing to aid with their transition. Finally, it determined what the athletic and academic departments may be doing to help or hinder the students’ progress. The following research questions guided the research:

1. How do male college student-athletes describe the transition to becoming a student-athlete at the Division I level?

2. Who are the key players that are impacting male student-athletes transitioning from high school to college?

3. What resources do male college student-athletes use on campus and how does that differ from high school?
Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was for student affairs professionals to better understand how a high school student-athlete transitions to becoming a college student-athlete. The population being targeted is one that are typically recruited earlier on in high school. Coaches will begin scouting runners, baseball and football players at the beginning of their high school career and will follow them all the way up until recruitment and signing days.

These student-athletes are the ones with the largest scholarship awards. With each of those sport teams being prestigious and competitive at the Division I level, many people are involved in the decision-making process for them: The athlete themselves, any high school coach or assistant coaches who have helped them throughout the process, their parents and other family members, their peers, school counselors, academic advisors, and obviously their new head coach and assistant coaches at the collegiate-level. With so many individuals being involved, it is important to know the role each of them play in the transition for that student-athlete. Typically, these three sports have lower GPA’s than non-revenue sports, as well. Because of this, some of the players may even begin taking college courses during the summer prior to matriculation, to help ease into being able to balance their academics on top of their athletics. This will impact their transition.

Limitations of the Study

With this study came a few limitations. I was only able to focus in on six different student-athletes’ experiences transitioning from the high school level to participating in athletics at the intercollegiate level. This took place at the Division I-level from an institution in the Midwest. It was also limited to male, second-year college student-athletes, playing one of the prominent male sports (i.e. baseball, football, and men’s track and field). I chose these teams
because they have larger squads, thus there were more opportunities for participants. Therefore, it is not generalizable. Fortunately, though, that was not the purpose of this study. The purpose was to get the opportunity to see six unique and different experiences for student-athletes transitioning to a Division I college campus.

With studying prominent male sports at the Division-I level came a lot of opportunity. These were the sports that, typically, have student-athletes being recruited a lot earlier on in their high school career than most other sports. Their transition from high school to college was very unique compared to other sports. Also, because the teams are typically bigger in size, I was able to create more anonymity for the participants in my study.

Each team’s transition looked slightly different, too. Football is in-season during the fall, baseball competes during the spring, and men’s track and field is a year-round sport. Therefore, even though my study was limited with six participants, these participants each had a very different transition and experience. My hope is that each group will then have relatable transitions with other sports that are in-season the same time they are (other fall, spring, and year-round sports).

This transition is affecting multiple student-athletes at a Division I institution, athletically, academically, and socially, but research shows that these sports tend to have the hardest transition. They are demanding, there is a lot of travel time involved, and they are the majority of a semester, if not, full year. While I am only able to key in on six stories specifically, this will give me the opportunity to get to know these six student-athletes very well.

It may seem limiting to only be able to interview second-year student-athletes, but this is the population that has made the transition from high school to college sports and is able to remember what it is like and how well they have or have not transitioned. I looked at how they
managed their transition and what may have helped aid them during it. This population provided
the most accurate information regarding their transition and adaptation to a Division I college
campus in the Midwest.

**Definitions of Terms**

Throughout the study the researcher refers to several terms that are used in regard to
athletics at the collegiate level. Due to the complexity of them, the researcher does not have them
ordered alphabetically, but in a way where readers may compare and contrast some of the terms.
Many of the terms will be discussed more fully and elaborated on in sections to come, but this
will give readers a base understanding of what a certain term may entail.

**Student-Athlete.** For this study, a student-athlete is someone who is a full-time student
working towards a degree and competes in at least one sport, full-time at the Division I collegiate
level.

**Competition.** This term refers to the games being played by a student-athlete.

**Resources.** These are the academic opportunities that student-athletes may or may not
take advantage of to increase their academic success. These can be anything from meeting with
their advisor, going to tutoring, utilizing the study tables provided, and more.

**In-Season.** In this study, when using the term in-season, it refers to the time that a
student-athlete's official sport has begun, per NCAA Rules. During this time, they are restricted
by 20 hours a week that they can practice and when their coach can be around them (NCAA
Manual, 2018). They may not start competitions right away, but their sport will begin to have
competitions weekly in-season.

**Out-of-season.** When a student-athlete is out-of-season, they typically will not be
traveling or participating in competitions, so will not have the athletic demands they would
during their sports season. They are still required to practice eight hours a week per week, but the time their coach can be around may be limited. The rules for this will vary depending on the sport and season (NCAA Manual, 2018).

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).** “The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a member-led organization dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes” (http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/ncaa-101/what-ncaa).

**Recruitment.** This is the process that a high school student-athlete will go through when a college coach wants them to play for him/her at the collegiate level. This can start as early as a student-athlete’s first year of high school, but a coach is limited to how they can contact the athlete and how much they can contact them, which is regulated by the NCAA.

**Red-Shirting.** When a student-athlete redshirts during a season in college, they are not able to legally compete. This can be due to academic ineligibility, an injury, or to gain another year for more practice and development to be able to compete at the level their coach needs them to be. They are still able to practice with the team, but they are unable to compete and travel for competitions.

**Partial Scholarship.** This is when the coach and institution has agreed to give a student-athlete a certain amount of money to play for their program. This can vary from hundreds to thousands of dollars, depending on the agreement between the athlete and their coach. This compensation can be taken away from the athlete at any time, but it can also turn into a full scholarship if the coach chooses to do that.

**Full Scholarship.** This is when an athlete has the opportunity to get their education completely paid for by the university based off their athletic ability. As long as the student-athlete stays in good athletic and academic standings with the institution, this will be covered for
the amount of time the athlete and coach agree on. This can always be taken away from a student-athlete based off their athletic or academic performance.

Summary

The purpose of this research study is to understand how high school student-athletes are managing the transition with becoming a college student-athlete at the Division I level. With approximately two million high school student-athletes going on to play at the collegiate level, this study is important for student affairs professionals. To assist with understanding this transition, the researcher will be asking three questions: How do male college student-athletes describe the transition to becoming a student-athlete at the Division I level; Who are the key players that are impacting male student-athletes transitioning from high school to college; What resources do male college student-athletes use on campus and how does that differ from high school? The research study will be limited to six, second-year college student-athletes at a Division I institution in the Midwest playing either baseball, football, or men’s track and field.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This literature review exposes each crucial part of a high school student-athlete’s transition to the collegiate-level. The rules and regulations at the high school level and the expectation for a student-athlete at that level is reviewed. Based on their experiences and expectations in high school, this will impact their transition to a college campus. Throughout their experience, student-athletes will begin to go through the recruiting process if they decide to play at the next level. This will be looked at with a holistic approach, but because this study focused on baseball, football, and men’s track and field specifically, the section was written with that in mind. In this chapter, the NCAA will be explained in greater detail because it is a huge part of the recruiting process and overall experience of a student-athlete (NCAA, 2018). Coaches and athletes have to follow certain rules, fill out the correct paperwork, and ensure that athletes have taken the necessary classes to be able to compete at the collegiate-level (NCAA, 2018).

After the recruiting process and high school graduation are completed, the transition to living on a college campus will begin. Students may move to their campus early and start taking classes in the summer to become more acclimated to their new environment. The researcher will look at what that looks like for a non-athlete college student because when one understands all that goes into being a non-athlete college student, they can better understand the demand and expectation for a college student-athlete.

Throughout this whole process, these student-athletes will gain mentors to help them with this transition. Whether this is their parents, past or present coaches, advisors, professors, or a mixture, it is a significant part and will impact their transition positively or negatively. Using transition theory, the researcher will discuss why this theoretical framework is necessary in
understanding a student-athlete’s transition in its entirety. The researcher will explain the importance of knowing what kind of transition they are going through, how they are coping with it, and where they are at with the 4 S’s: Self, Situation, Strategies, and Support.

**High School Student-Athlete Experience**

Although state education standards have been around since the 1990s, there was not much consistency with what was being taught at each school throughout the United States (CCSSI, 2018). Moving forward, each state began adopting its own learning standards for what each grade level, 3-8 and high school, should be capable of doing (CCSSI). Every state had their own way, their own definitions, and their own expectations (CCCSI). With the lack of standardization, in 2009, states decided to develop the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). School chiefs and governors wanted to ensure that “all students, regardless of where they lived, would graduate high school prepared for college, career, and life” (http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/development-process/).

The Common Core refers to “a set of clear college- and career-ready standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts/literacy and mathematics” (http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/development-process/). There was concern amongst parents, teachers, and school administration that students were not prepared to be taking college courses at two- or four-year institutions after they finished with high school, so the CCSSI was put into place with the hope that all students would have that opportunity to succeed post-graduation. This was a positive transition for high school students in general to be better prepared after high school graduation, but especially for elite athletes who spend most of their high school careers seeking out scholarships to be able to go on and play at the collegiate level
(Gayles & Baker, 2015). There is pressure for these students to do well in high school to be admitted into a college not just on their athletic ability.

Forty-two states have adopted the Common Core and are in the process of gradually applying the standards locally, but still at their own pace (CCSSI, 2018). The major challenge that student-athletes will encounter, even at the high school level, is working to balance their academic, athletic, and social lives. With NCAA academic requirements increasing over the years and at different rates than the state mandates, this can cause different challenges and confusion with the transition to the next level (NCAA, 2018; Gard, 2017; CCSSI, 2018).

Several opportunities, developments, and positive outcomes can come from being a high school student-athlete. Gard (2017) reported how high school athletes get the opportunity to increase their leadership skills, model good behavior, and have strong work ethic. She goes on to discuss that high school and college student-athletes will take skills on in sports, such as, “communicating with teammates and coaches” and “serving as a team captain” as leadership roles and behaviors and discusses these roles and how they may vary across each level (Gard, 2017, p. 44). Their leadership role during their senior year of high school will look a lot differently than their role transitioning to a first-year student-athlete on a college campus.

Although, high school athletics is providing students with the opportunity to grow and foster those leadership skills at that level (Gard, 2017); they are also learning how to balance athletic and academic life and how to manage their time when they have a game after school and homework due the next day. This is vital to be aware of because the 2014-15 High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by The National Federation of State High School Association (NFHS) reported that around 7 million students are participating in athletics at the high school level (NFHS Handbook, 2015-16). With so many students participating in athletics,
"interscholastic sports are considered one of the most important activities sponsored by high schools" (Gayles & Baker, 2015, p. 43). That being said, it is easier for student-athletes to have the capacity to be able to compete in multiple sports at this level, so this study does not account for the students who choose to participate in multiple sports.

High school student-athletes, at most schools, will already have an idea of the celebrity status that comes with being an athlete at their school and how they are typically held to a higher standard than a non-athlete. A reporter in New York wrote a story about how punishment for wrongful and dishonest behavior will not only result in detentions, suspensions, or dismissal from school, but student-athletes may also be penalized with sitting out games/practices or even removal from their sport’s team (Goot, 2015). He compared a couple different schools and noted that the punishments will vary but says that “school officials are constantly tweaking the policies” (http://poststar.com/news/local/student-athlete-punishments-for-drug-alcohol-offenses-vary-by-school/article_9d625947-d764-57c3-bb18-3fdf421328b1.html). On top of that, they also may go home and get punished by their parents or legal guardian. With high school, student-athletes always have someone looking over their shoulder and checking up on them. College student-athletes, on the other hand, may not really have that anymore. They may have their coach watching over them, but not every single second, and usually an athlete’s coach is worried about their athletic eligibility over anything else. High school is on a much smaller scale though, so when junior and senior year comes, and the recruiting process begins, the transition is already beginning before high school student-athletes even step on to a college campus.

**Recruiting Process**

For some athletes, they will meet with a coach or walk on to a college campus and know that is the place for them, but for others, it could be a taxing process. The pace of recruiting can
be intimidating for athletes and can leave them feeling overwhelmed (Sander, 2008). Appearing in *Coach & Athletic Director*, Kostoff (2008) explains that there is a lot of decisions to be made in a short amount of time, which can become complicated for some. The whole recruiting process can become drawn-out because of all the commitment, hard work, and time put into it (Sander, 2008; Kristoff, 2008). In a study Sander (2008) did on the recruiting process, she surveyed nearly 300 athletes at seven different universities that attend schools in the Mid-American Conference. This study omitted football, but the research represented 17 other men and women’s teams. Sander found that 54% of participants began the recruiting process when the coach contacted them, while 28% initiated contact.

The recruitment process is beginning earlier and earlier because athletes have access to every coach’s email that they could ever want (Feiner, 2015). Not only that, most can find cell phone and office numbers online now. More preparation and strategy are necessary because of this, so coaches and athletes have to do whatever they can to catch the eye of the other (2015). After the initial contact, Sander’s survey showed that 24% spoke at least once a week, 28% spoke once a month, and 30% spoke every two weeks (2008). Kristoff (2008) expressed the importance of having an appropriate and tasteful voicemail and greeting because recruiters may be calling to get into contact with their prospective student-athletes at all hours. Most of this will be happening during a student’s senior year but it is important to be educated about the recruitment process as soon as intercollegiate athletics may be a future for a student-athlete. Sixty-three percent of high school athletes verbally committed their senior year of high school in Sander’s study, while 35% verbally committed in their junior year, and 2% their sophomore year (2008).
From the 17 different sports teams, 71% of athletes ended up making an early verbal commitment before signing day (Sander, 2008). Before the survey participants committed to a university, 46% of them visited the campus at least once, 23% visited it twice, and 16% had never stepped foot on the campus. Johnson (2005), a football coach at Bethany College, gave an inside look into how he goes about recruiting student-athletes. He said Bethany College puts on a summer camp that brings over 300 young men to his campus. This is where his recruiting processes really begins. With over 300 men attending, he has a large pool to connect with and see who he can envision on his campus. From there, Johnson offered a few different recruiting strategies that many football coaches utilize such as: Inviting high school athletes to their home games, and personally writing them letters. He further stated that he watches prospective players play and sets up weekends for them to come visit their players and even potentially stay with current players. For 60% of the athletes that Sander’s surveyed, they said their head recruiting coach would attend one of their football games every couple months and stay for at least one half, while an assistant coach may attend more often than that (2008).

Kostoff (2008) reiterates that the biggest thing for student-athletes during this time, is to have the support they need. It is a grueling process and includes more than simply picking a college and going there. Sander reported that 85% of athletes were given one week or more in the decision process, but 16% were only given 1-6 days, so that support is needed (2008). The athletes, parents, teachers, and counselors/advisors all need to be communicating and understanding what is going on throughout the whole process (Kostoff, 2008). Kostoff believes it is important to start educating the students and parents the freshman year of high school about what this process will look like. He says, as educators, it is their job “to ensure the student-athlete [understands] how to qualify for college recruitment every step of the way” (Kostoff,
Advisors and coaches will be the ones who are knowledgeable on the recruiting process and can help with making sure their student-athletes are eligible to be admitted into college and play at the collegiate level. The survey showed that out of nearly 300 recruited athletes, 73% of them did not sit in a class or visit with a professor during their official visit. NCAA has certain academic requirements that must be achieved before a student is able to compete at the collegiate level, which will be discussed later, so that should be a crucial part of the recruiting process but was lacking in this study. A student-athlete’s transcript plays a critical role in determining if they will be eligible to be a college recruit (2008).

On the other end, the importance of the head coach’s reputation, recognition of the athletic program, and the success of one’s sport, were all around 45% of importance in decision-making for the athletes. Sander’s survey specifically, representing a large and diverse population amongst 17 teams, showed that it made a difference when the coach not only contacted the student-athlete first, but stayed in frequent contact with them. Most of the committed athletes visited the campus and their coach would come to visit them and watch their high school games. Also, most of the athletes had more than a week to make a decision on where they ended up committing too, which may be a reason why they chose that institution. The recruiting process can occur over the course of several years, but it will impact the next four years of a student-athlete’s college career. They are in the transition of moving from playing with everyone they know, having teachers, coaches, and parental support, to potentially starting fresh and moving away to a new place, with new facilities, new classes, a new roommate(s), and new rules, regulations, and expectations.
The NCAA is comprised of 3 divisions, Division I, Division II, and Division III. In each Division, there are further breakdowns depending on the institutions size and sports offered, with this study focusing on the Division I athlete. It is important to understand each Division to get a better insight into the similarities and differences amongst them. The NCAA revolves around 3 core tiers of the student-athlete: Academics, Well-being, and Fairness (NCAA, 2018). They state the heart of their mission is to give students the opportunity to earn a college degree. For well-being, they identify how they “work hard to promote safety, excellence, and physical and mental well-being for student-athletes” (http://www.ncaa.org/). The NCAA’s focus is to prepare student-athletes for the rest of their life, focusing on “respect, integrity, and responsibility, both on and off the field” (http://www.ncaa.org/).

The NCAA (2018) reported that the underlying difference amongst the three different Divisions are how each institution chooses to fund their athletic programs, which results in a disparity of how much national attention they receive. The more money they are funneling into the programs typically means the more attention they will receive, especially sports like men’s football, which was discussed earlier. All in all, though, all three Divisions highlight academic and athletic excellence for their student-athletes (NCAA).

Division I. On the NCAA Website (2018) it reports that the Division I athletic programs have the biggest institutions, with much larger student bodies on each campus, and more than 170,000 student-athletes. They have the largest budget, offer the largest number of scholarships, and have more than 6,000 athletic teams represented. NCAA says that, “Schools who are members of Division I commit to maintaining a high academic standard for student-athletes in addition to a wide range of opportunities for athletic participation”
Most Division I athletic programs choose to devote more resources and bigger financial contributions to support their athletic programs (NCAA). The way they can do this though, is through the large media contracts. Because of this, they are able to create a large following for their athletic programs, most notable are men's basketball and football teams. This provides them with the competitive edge smaller schools do not have.

Division I stated that, in order “to practice, receive athletic scholarships, and/or compete during their first year,” high school student-athlete must meet several academic requirements to be eligible (NCAA Eligibility Center, 2018). Hosick and Sproull (2012) said NCAA continues to increase their eligibility standards to set the expectation that student-athletes must make their academics a priority before their athletic involvement. The NCAA now requires freshmen to have a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.3 to be able to participate, but if they maintain at least a 2.0, have completed 16 hours of coursework, earn the correct ACT/SAT score, and are a high school graduate they would still be eligible to practice as an academic redshirt (NCAA Eligibility Center, 2018). An academic redshirt refers to a student-athlete that has not yet achieved the minimum academic requirements to be able to compete at the collegiate level, but is still able to receive athletic aid and practice with their teammates, while taking the necessary class(es) in order to get academically eligible to compete in the next semester or school year to come (Division I Manual, 2013; Wilkes, E. C., 2014). Student-athletes must have a minimum of 10 core courses completed before their senior year of high school, and they need 16 core courses by the time they start their collegiate athletic career (Hosick & Sproull, 2012). The NCAA Eligibility Center Handout (2018) explains that these courses are as follows: Four years of English, three years of Math (Algebra I or higher), two years of science (one with a lab), one additional (English, math, or science), two social sciences, and four years of additional courses.
(math, English, science, foreign language, religion/philosophy). Without those requirements, the
student-athlete is considered a non-qualifier, which are “college-bound student-athletes [whom]
cannot practice, receive athletics scholarships or compete during their first year of enrollment at
an NCAA Division I school” (NCAA Eligibility Center Handout, 2018).

**Division II.** Division II does not financially support the athletic programs as much as one
will see with Division I programs, but that is not to say they are not “just as competitive and in
many cases as skilled as Division I” (http://www.ncaa.org/about?division=d2). On the NCAA
website (2018) it addresses Division II as more of a holistic approach for a student-athlete. Each
individual has the opportunity to compete at a high level, while also being known for their
athletic participation, academic success, involvement on campus, and their contribution to the
community (NCAA). They are able to “fully [engage] in the broader campus experience,” all
while still “excelling in the classroom,” (http://www.ncaa.org/about?division=d2). Division II
offers a mix of financial aid through athletic scholarships, academic aid, need-based grants, or
employment grants (NCAA). The website reported that approximately 87% of Division II
institutions have over 8,000 students, they can range anywhere from less than 2,500 students to
more than 25,000. Regardless, student-athletes are a large part of that population, so they greatly
impact the on-campus environment.

**Division III.** Division III focuses on making sure student-athletes are students first
(NCAA, 2018). Academics are the primary focus here and the student-athletes are treated like
any other individual walking around on campus. NCAA described the experience as “a
competitive athletic environment that pushes student-athletes to excel on the field and build upon
their potential by tackling new challenges across campus” (http://www.ncaa.org/about?division=d3). This has the largest amount of institutions, but with a
lot smaller student body at each campus. This division encompasses more than 180,000 student-athletes at 450 different institutions (NCAA).

**College Student Experience**

Once one begins to understand the college student experience and how students are spending their time day in and day out, one will be more equipped to grasp the college student-athlete experience. The theoretical framework used to interpret how a college student’s time can be broken up into three different dichotomous factors was first explained by Brint and Cantwell (2010). They found there are “1) scholarly versus non-scholarly uses of time, 2) active versus passive uses of time, and 3) uses of time that connect students to or separate students from campus life” (Brint and Cantwell, 2010, p. 2442).

Brint and Cantwell (2010) used the University of California Undergraduate Student Experience Survey (UCUES) (2006) to learn more about how students are spending their time each week. With over 6,000 undergraduate responses from eight large institutions in the University of California system, they separated scholarly and non-scholarly time by hours spent in and out of classes each week. This included when they are working on homework, typing a paper, studying for a quiz, or preparing for a test outside of the classroom. Active time use refers to how many hours are spent a week participating in physical exercise, sports, socializing with friends, volunteering in the community, and participating in student organizations (Brint & Cantwell, 2010). Student-athletes spend the majority of their time in the active time use realm, going to practices, competing, and weight lifting, so their time use is limited in other aspects. Passive time use involves watching TV, being on the computer for fun, commuting, playing video games, and attending entertainment events. Brint and Cantwell say that a time use spent connecting each week is calculated by how many hours they spend participating in student
organizations, having paid employment related to their major, or having paid employment on campus. Separating time use though, for example, is described as having paid employment off campus, commuting, religious activities, and family activities. Student-athletes have time for these things, but as mentioned, it will also include the demand of specific practice times and competition schedules. To make time for areas in their life that are non-academic and non-athletic, they will experience the obstacle of having to work around the schedule that is already given to them and set by their coaches and advisors.

Students can spend their time in any way they choose. Babcock & Marks (2010) said that, on average, students are spending between 25 and 30 hours per week attending class and studying for class (scholarly versus non-scholarly time use). On the other end, the UCUES (2006) reported that, on average, students are spending more than 40 hours per week on active and passive time use (social and leisure). A day in the life of a college student is full of decisions on how they should spend their time: Class or sleep, stay in and play video games or go out with friends, pick up a hobby or get a part time job, do homework or watch Netflix. Student-athletes do not always have the choice to decide how their out-of-class time is spent because their coach provides the expectation of when they should be in the weight room/training room or in the pool/on the field/track/court. Being immersed in a culture of classes, work, scheduling, time management, and having to organize all of it too, mostly on his or her own, can be a hard and a taxing process. Has high school equipped a student to be able to take all that on?

**College Student-Athlete Experience**

Student-athletes spend over twenty hours per week in practice and sometimes they must miss a number of classes due to the demand of when their sport is in season (Watt and Moore, 2001; Wolverton, 2008). Student-athletes balance a lot, like their peers, including: time
management, organizational skills, coping with stress, but they have the athlete demands as well. They are expected to perform well in the classroom to ensure they are making progress towards a degree ensuring they maintain their NCAA eligibility, so they can participate in their athletics (NCAA, 2015). Non-athletes will face several challenges to overcome, such as: balancing their personal lives with daily schedules, class times, homework responsibilities, work, and any extracurriculars they decide to participate in. Student-athletes have each of these as well, they also have the additional challenges of scheduling out rehabilitation time, weight training, practice, film review, and travel for competition (Gard, 2017).

Robst and Keil (2000) did a study at a Division III college comparing athletics and academics. They identify that the basic issue related to collegiate athletics is that athletic participation may limit one’s academic ability, while others will argue how it is extremely beneficial. Considering most research is done at Division I institutions, they were curious about the impact at the Division III-level. Robst and Keil (2000) reported that, “Division I athletes in revenue sports (usually men’s football and basketball) typically have lower grades than nonathletes,” (p. 547) but “this study [added] to the evidence that athletic participation in nonrevenue sports does not harm students academically” (p. 557). This leaves us to question whether students are being prepared in high school for what the transition will be like and the challenges student-athletes will face on a college campus.

Depending on the sport one plays, will determine how each student-athlete’s transition will look. If their sport is during the fall season (volleyball, football, soccer, field hockey, cross country), they will have more time for the recruiting process in the spring semester of their high school senior year. Although they will dive right into starting practices and traveling for competitions when they get to college in August. Some students may even start early and come
to the college campus in the summer for practices and summer classes. Winter sports (men’s basketball, women’s basketball, indoor track and field, swimming, and hockey) have a small overlap between the fall and spring semester but will be a different experience and transition than that of fall sports. Winter sport teams may start practices a little later during the year, but their season may overlap with thanksgiving break, winter break, and even spring break, which results in more demands on their time and commitment. This offers a unique experience that a non-athlete will not receive. Breaks from school allows for spending time with family, traveling, and a break from academics, that athletes may not be able to experience due to the demand of their sport. Spring sports on the other hand (baseball, softball, lacrosse, outdoor track and field), will strictly be in the spring and will have a distinct and different transition process. They will not be traveling for competition in the fall, with a few recent exceptions by the NCAA, so they will have an easier transition for their academics and social life as they enter the institution in the fall. Spring sport student-athletes will still need to learn how to navigate the transition for combining traveling for their sport in the mix of that when that time comes during their second semester on-campus.

**Mentoring Relationships**

Throughout this process, these student-athletes are gaining mentors, whether they realize it or not. They may have one already or gain one during their transition to becoming an intercollegiate athlete. Either way, they will be a crucial part of their transition and therefore make up a large portion of this study. Simply put, in Humberd and Rouse’s (2016) research, they define a mentoring relationship as a “specific relationship between a person with more experience (a mentor) and a person with less experience (protégé)” (Humberd & Rouse, 2016, p.
426). For this research, Humberd and Rouse would refer to the student-athlete as a protégé, but the researcher will refer to them as a mentee, using the same definition.

Dimaria (2016) brings forward the idea of mentoring first-year students instead of advising them. Coming from *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, she said that her small college in Iowa, Morningside College, has adopted this for their academic advisors because the transition from high school to college can overwhelm many students (2016). First-year students need mentors in order to be successful, so this may look a little different than for athletes specifically, but it will be the same idea and reasoning. Dimaria reiterates the importance of mentoring first-year students, starting from the beginning and doing more of a holistic approach rather than simply helping them sign up for classes. It is important for advisors to understand there is more to the transition than just the classes and just the athletic side of things. In the article, Morningside College’s VP for Academic Advising, Lillian Lopez, explains the importance of getting to know the student and understanding who they are. When student-athletes have advisors like this in their life, their transition will be easier than having the burden of not having someone to talk to about it.

The authors of *Faculty and Male Football and Basketball Players on University Campuses: An Empirical Investigation of the “Intellectual” as Mentor to the Student Athlete*, Harrison, Comeaux, and Piecha (2006), explored the relationship between faculty and student-athletes because they felt like those were the ones who frequently came in contact with and influenced student-athletes academic and personal development. Specifically, this research looked at revenue-producing sport (men’s basketball and football) and academic achievement (2006). With a final sample of 693 football and basketball players, their study explored “the relationship between student-athletes and faculty and the impact of specific forms of student-
athlete and faculty interaction on academic achievement” (Harrison, et al., 2006, p. 277). The sample was from predominately white universities at Division I and II institutions and was not randomly selected but was representative of several student-athletes at numerous four-year universities. Their results supported the impact that faculty have mentoring students-athletes.

Arguably, advisors, professors, and coaches would be the main mentors a student-athlete would have on a college campus. High school coaches and parents may check in with them and stay involved with their transition, but they will not see the student-athlete going through the transition on a daily basis like a coach, professor, or advisor may. Ohio University (2018) discusses the importance of a strong coach and student-athlete relationship. To be successful as a team, “coaching runs deeper than wins and losses, it also includes reaching athletes on an individual level,” (https://onlinemasters.ohio.edu/the-importance-of-a-strong-coach-athlete-relationship/). Ohio University explains that a student-athlete’s coach is someone who is respected and held to a higher standing, but is also someone the athlete can go to, confide in, and see as a mentor in his or her life. Hosting events on the weekends, offering fun activities outside of the athletes’ sports, providing office hours, and even offering their own tutoring services, are all ways that coaches can try reaching their athletes to be more than just their coach on the field, but a mentor off of it as well (Ohio University, 2018).

Transition Theory

Using Nancy Schlossberg’s (1984) transition theory will help better understand the student-athlete transition from high school to college. Schlossberg encompasses crisis, transformations, changes, and transition into her theory. She acknowledged that this can be something obvious and abrupt or quiet and subtle. Whether it is graduating high school and going to college (anticipating) or going to college to play a sport, but not getting the scholarship
offer you intended to in order to be able to afford it (a nonevent), Schlossberg included them all. She explained that an anticipated event is something that is expected to happen and does, while a nonevent is something that is expected to happen but then it does not. Schlossberg also referred to unanticipated transitions in her theory, which accounts for the events that are unpredictable and unscheduled. In this scenario, an example would be a senior high school student-athlete expecting to play at the collegiate level but injuring himself/herself to the point of no longer being able to participate in athletics anymore. Each of these scenarios will result in change, but it is key to know which type of transition one is experiencing, in order to best accommodate that change.

Schlossberg’s (1984) talks about how one’s setting and context make up a large portion of the transition. This will depend if the individual is affected by the transition happening or if their friends and family are going through the transition as well. With student-athletes, many will be impacted. The student-athlete mostly, but also their friends and family, their current coaches and soon-to-be new coaches, and the new team they will be joining. Their context will stretch to include several things such as whether it is a positive or negative transition, if they are healthy at the time of it, how their finances look, and even how their relationships are (doing well or full of strife) during the transition (Schlossberg, 1984). The type and context are important to know and understand, but the impact the transition will have on an individual, Schlossberg explains, is what is crucial.

The impact a transition has will depend on “the degree to which the transition will alter his or her daily life” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 52). For this, the college sport and team a student-athlete chooses could definitely alter the rest of their life. The choice of a college may determine whether a student-athlete goes on to play at the professional level, it may determine whether they
finish with a bachelor’s degree, and it may even determine where they get a job after college. In college, students may meet their future husband or wife, study abroad, or even transfer colleges after a couple of years, but a college experience is something that can ultimately change the direction of one’s life. The impact a transition will make is not guaranteed to be positive or negative, but it may be a combination of both. Schlossberg (1984) says that we can assume “the more the transition alters [an] individual’s life… the longer it will take for assimilation and adaptation” to occur (Schlossberg 1984, p. 52). At the collegiate level, there are several different variables in play (living, social, work, school), but with athletes, their sport, teammates, coaches, trainers and athletic schedules are also added to those variables. For assimilation and adaptation to occur, there will be specific people put along a student-athlete’s path to assist with that. This encompasses, but is not limited to, professors, advisors, coaches, teammates, family, friends, and even resident assistants.

So, as much as they are going through and attempting to adapt with, Schlossberg (1984) refers to “a transition [is] a transition only if it is defined by the person experiencing it” (p. 44). Therefore, it is important to understand how high school student-athletes transition to becoming a college student-athlete. “To understand the meaning a transition has for a particular individual, we need to examine the type of transition” (anticipated, unanticipated, nonevent), “the context of the transition” (relationship to the person & setting of the transition), “and the impact of the transition on the individual’s life (on relationships, routines, assumptions, roles)” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 54).

Research shows that student-athletes, along with other populations such as first generation, at-risk, and low-income students can have a more challenging transition from high school to college due to the complexity of their experience (McFarlane, 2014; Gayles & Baker,
They must adapt “to the academic and social norms of the institution” while balancing “their time and energy due to the demands of athletic participation” (Gayles & Baker, 2015, p. 46). Because of this, Schlossberg’s (1984) theory is useful for managing a multi-faceted transition, such as this one. In navigating this, Schlossberg offers the 4 S strategy for “moving in, moving through, and moving out as pivotal points through the transition process” (as cited in Gayles & Baker, 2015, p. 45). As cited in Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye (2016), these four dimensions are self, situation, strategies, and support.

Using this theory, I am going to give an example of two student-athletes (Jake & Brandon) transitioning to college through Schlossberg’s (1984) theory. They are both men, full-time students, full-time football players, and both have been at the Division I university for a full year now. Even though they are going through the same process, they will each be experiencing the transition differently based off their previous experiences, where they are from, the support they have, their athletic expectations, their academic ability, and other variables out of their control.

Jake is a White male who came to college from a small rural town about an hour away from the institution. Still to this day, he has great family support, is an A-B student, and is transitioning well to the collegiate-level, academically and athletically. Jake was the star running back on the football team in high school and received a partial scholarship to play in college, but his coach thought it would be a good idea to take a year to develop, mature, and perfect his football skills. The coach decided that he would redshirt his freshman year, which was an upsetting situation for him at first because he went from the star player to not being able to play at all. Positively though, it was much easier for Jake to focus on school because he was not traveling for competitions his first semester on-campus. He also had a lot more time on the
weekends to make new friends, travel, be social, and keep up with his academics like a lot of those on the team would not be able to because they are gone most of the weekends in the fall. Jake was still able to practice every day with the team though, so he has never felt disconnected or left out, but he cannot wait until he gets to travel with everyone. Now that he is a sophomore his situation has changed, he is playing a significant amount of time, traveling for games, and starting to learn how to navigate balancing being a full-time student and a full-time athlete. Overall, he is feeling a bit better about himself and his experiences at the college.

Brandon is a Black male who made the decision to move from a city in New York, to a small rural institution in the Midwest. He has a strong support system from his family, but they are over 13 hours away from him. Unlike Jake, his family is unable to come to any games and Brandon cannot go home on the weekends. He was also a star athlete, but averaged C’s and D’s in high school and that has continued in college. Fortunately for him though, he was granted a full-ride scholarship to the university, promised to start every game his freshmen year. The coaches kept their promise and he is traveling and playing every weekend, doing exceptionally well on the field during his first year. He is making some of the best defensive plays the coaches have seen at his age and he is projected to play professionally after college if he can remain healthy and does not get injured, but he needs to keep up academically. With traveling for competitions every weekend though, Brandon is missing most of his classes on Friday and some on Thursdays. He does not have a lot of time on the weekends to get his homework done, so he is turning things in late or not doing them at all. His focus is on his sport right now and his priority is to stay healthy, practice hard, and perform well during his games, which is working for him. One of his roommates is also a football player and he has gotten really close with him and the rest of the team that is traveling each weekend. Recognizing the situation he is in, and his
struggle to keep up with his academics, he begins to seek out support and develop some new strategies, so he is not at risk of being unable to play football anymore, let alone stay at the institution.

Each of these scenarios relate to and help explain Schlossberg’s transition theory. Although Jake and Brandon are not real people, many high school students will have similar stories or at least share pieces of them. This is a way that may help navigate and better understand how one can use the transition theory to first, understand, and then second, meet each student-athlete where they are in their transition. For most student-athletes, it may go beyond that they are just not showing up to class, not doing well academically, or missing practices. It may be that they are homesick, that they do not know there is departmental tutoring for a class, or that they do not get along with one of their coaches. Each student will be different and unique, but when one adds athletics into the mix, it can change the dynamic even more. Comprehending the entire picture using these four dimensions can help aid in this complex transition.

**Self.** Self relates to how one’s sex, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, age, sport, health, socioeconomic status, and more, will all impact a student’s transition (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016). Whether they see themselves as more of a student or more of an athlete will make up the self-dimension, as well. They may change roles as the day or semester goes on, and it will impact the way they function throughout their transition. Schlossberg breaks the dimension of self into two categories: personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016). As much as personal and demographic characteristics will make up a student-athlete’s transition, support systems will be able to key in on where they are at in their transition by one’s psychological resources.
Psychological resources “include the following: ego development; outlook, in particular optimism and self-efficacy; commitment and values; and spirituality and resiliency” (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016, p. 39). This, in part, is because sports are all about wins and losses and being able to successfully manage those. For athletes, a large part of their game is being able to manage their emotions and being able to do it well. For Brandon, it would be telling to know where he is at in his transition with self by how he copes with controversy when a referee calls a penalty on him and the coach pulls him from playing the rest of the game. For Jake and Brandon this will look very differently their first-year at school because Brandon is traveling for competitions while Jake is staying behind. Jake may be able to see himself more as a student during this first semester and focus on that, but he may not feel accomplished on how to exactly deal with his emotions yet because he has not had the experiences Brandon has had thus far in his journey.

**Situation.** Schlossberg identified one’s situation as very important in the transition process (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016). To keep the example going, for Jake and Brandon, this looks very similar. They are transitioning from being a high school student-athlete to becoming a college student-athlete. The factors that this section will be made-up of are: the trigger of the transition, the timing of it, who has control over it, how one’s role changes during the transition, the duration of it takes place, and the stress that comes along with the transition (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016). Unlike some sports, they are walking on campus to begin their sport because it is already in-season. Many football athletes will already be on campus in the summer, taking classes, practicing, and getting ready for their season to begin. The first-year students are each coming into an environment where they now have a perceived flexibility of schedule. For the first time, they are on their own and away from the legal guardians they had in high school.
As independent as they now may feel, they are also walking into a football season for the fall semester that is pretty set and laid out for them. They will practice at certain times, travel when there are competitions, and their classes will be scheduled accordingly so they are not missing any practices. The athletes will also have certain times for weightlifting, eating their meals, watching film, utilizing their trainers if necessary, and meeting with their advisors and/or tutors. Typically, a student-athlete’s day is structured for them. The expectation coming in is for these student-athletes to show up to things and to show up on time, to be in the classroom when they have class, and to stay healthy so they are able to practice and travel to games. In high school, Jake and Brandon probably went to school all day where they had a lot of their teammates in class. Then, right after school got out, they had practice for a couple hours, and then went home afterwards. Now, they are going to be in different classes from their teammates, at different times of the day, and will need to be sure to fit in a lunch before practice so they are well-energized. It is a different dynamic than high school and everything is not scheduled out for the student-athlete by bells, teachers, and coaches telling them what to do, but rather, a student-athlete is in charge of making sure they take ownership and are responsible for getting done what they need to get done.

**Strategies.** This leads into strategies. Strategies refers to how one is coping with the transition that is happening (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016). With the expectation of a student-athlete performance being exponentially greater in college than it was in high school, student-athletes need strategies in order to ensure they are managing this transition to college well. Schlossberg says that individuals may decide to try and modify their transition, control the meaning of it, or attempt to aid in managing the stress when it is over, but they will fall into one of those three categories (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016). For instance, because Brandon
struggles academically, it would be important for him to be educated on the resources he could be utilizing to assist him with his schooling. In order to aid in managing the stress of his school work, this may involve him speaking with his academic advisor about coming up with an academic success plan, going to any departmental tutoring being offered, or even getting set up with a personal mentor or tutor to ensure that he succeeds. While in season, him and his advisor may even speak about taking a lighter course load in order for him to stay on track, athletically and academically. Many institutions may have resources that student-athletes can take advantage of, but it is up to them to take ownership of when they need a resource and what that resource may be (University of Washington, 2018). Jake, on the other hand, may want to reach out to the civic engagement and volunteerism office if he is feeling homesick or alone on the weekends since he is not traveling. This would be a great support system for him to use as a strategy to make him feel more connected to campus, meet new people, and distract him from wanting to go home every weekend. Having strategies in place are key when it comes to being a student-athlete because the demand to balance everything can become overwhelming for some.

Support. Student-athletes need a strong support system to help them cope and respond to the transition. Schlossberg “identifies four types: intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions/communities” (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016, p. 39). For Jake and Brandon, most of these support systems will appear the same, they will have a team and coaching staff, advisors, instructors and classmates; but intimate relationships that they have with their teammates may look different initially as they are getting to know their teammates and all of those around them. They may also be living with someone they know little about in the beginning and need to develop a stronger relationship with, but that will take time. Their family’s support may still be strong and stable but may look different depending on the distance
from home, ability to interact and communicate, or time spent with family. Jake will be able to go home on the weekends and have his family in the stands for the majority of the season, while Brandon will have to settle with a phone call or FaceTime because his family is so far away. Friends and teammates will influence this as well and whether they are playing from day one, sitting on the sidelines, redshirting, or injured. The “affect [from them, the] affirmation, aid, and honest feedback serve as the functions of support” (as cited in Patton, et al., 2016, p. 39).

The institution is where a lot of support can lie in making this transition. Storch and Ohlson (2009) reported on the kind of support student-athletes need to utilize from student services to help achieve their goals now and after college. Their study was conducted at a community college but was based on a four-year college model. For their research, they looked at some of the best practices and offered recommendations for ways to improve the student-athlete experience. Primarily focusing on community college student-athletes, they pulled from a program put on by NCAA in 1994 called CHAMPS (Challenging Athletes’ Minds for Personal Success (Storch and Ohlson, 2009). The first student service that the student-athletes identified were their academic advising services. They said it was integral to the student-athlete experience and that “an essential role of the academic support staff is to examine and evaluate the academic progress of each student-athlete” (Storch and Ohlson, 2009, p. 78). As mentioned earlier, this is something that Brandon could benefit greatly from. Advisors are the ones who can set up a student-athlete’s class schedule and pair them up with tutors and mentors, which helps set them up for academic success. Student-athletes have special degree-seeking requirements required by the NCAA that non-athletes do not have. Therefore, to have the support of an academic advisor can be crucial to their academic success at an institution. Also, Storch and Ohlson (2009) mention the idea of student-athlete counseling. A student-athlete’s demand to balance their
academic responsibilities and athletic expectations can become very overwhelming; so, a recommendation that Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) had was to ensure there was a partnership among different student services on campus, such as: clinical psychologists, mental health service providers, and special education professionals. With the fluidity amongst different departments, this would allow each to introduce new strategies for addressing the needs of specific student-athletes depending on their situation.

**Summary**

There are nearly seven million student-athletes at the high school level learning how to balance their athletic and academic life but there is not much that can help them prepare for the recruiting process that lies ahead when and if they choose to compete at the next level. Research explains that the whole process can be drawn-out and there is a lot of decisions to be made in a short amount of time, which can become complicated for some. This is where support from advisors, coaches, mentors, counselors, and families is crucial. There are several NCAA requirements that student-athletes must follow to be able to successfully compete at the collegiate-level, so it is a process to get there. Once on campus, that is when the transition is in full force. Athletes are no longer living at their legal guardian’s house and they do not have someone watching over them to go to class and get their homework finished every day, so their situation has changed dramatically. It is a unique transition that, in order to thrive both academically and athletically, takes the athlete owning their transition, support from the mentors around them, and strategies they both agree on to ensure that it is successful. The researcher will use Schlossberg’s transition theory to understand all that encompasses this.
CHAPTER III

Methods

This chapter outlines the qualitative methodological framework that was used to conduct the research study. The purpose of this research study was to understand how high school student-athletes are managing the transition to becoming college student-athletes at the Division I level. The following research questions helped guide this qualitative study: How do male college student-athletes describe the transition to becoming a student-athlete at the Division I level; Who are the key players that are impacting male student-athletes transitioning from high school to college; What resources do male college student-athletes use on campus and how does that differ from high school?

Design of the Study

This qualitative framework was meant to “focus on the “why” rather than the “what” of social phenomena” and seek an “in-depth understanding of social phenomena within [one’s] natural setting” (http://nursing.utah.edu/research/qualitative-research/what-is-qualitative-research.php). The qualitative approach looked to get insight from six unique stories relating to the topic of a student-athlete’s transition to a Division I college campus in the Midwest. This process of conducting qualitative research allowed the researcher to gain understanding from their personal stories.

Research Sites

The researcher completed their study at a rural university in the Midwest. Currently, this Division I university has approximately 7,500 students, with around 450 of them being student-athletes. The total population has about 61% females and 39% males. The interviews for this study were conducted at the athletic academic advising services building in a private conference
room. This room was easy to access for student-athletes, they knew what it was and where it was, and they did not have to travel far to get to it. Also, this location ensured confidentiality. The researcher was not be able to monitor if people saw them going into the conference room, but no one was able to identify why they were in that room and what they were doing. It was a safe and quiet place for the interviewee to talk freely about his transition to a college campus.

**Participants**

Participants in this research study were full-time, second-year male student-athletes at a four-year midsized, Midwestern state university. Second year students were selected because they were able to easily recall their experiences of transitioning from their first year. Currently, there are approximately 450 student-athletes enrolled at this institution right now. However, participants only came from baseball, football, and men’s track and field programs. At the time of this study, baseball had 34 players in total, with only 3 meeting the qualifications; Football had 73 players in total, with 18 players to select from; Men’s track and field had 53 male athletes in total, and 14 athletes meeting the expectations set for this study. The researcher worked to acquire two, first-year participants from each of these sports teams because they would be second-year athletes when the researcher interviewed them. The researcher was able to get two student-athletes from each sports team, baseball, football, and men’s track and field. This was 6% of baseball’s population, 3% of football’s population, and 4% of the men’s track and field population.

The researcher will introduce each of the student-athletes, and give a snapshot of who they are, what sport they are in, what kind of high school they attended, and what they are now involved in at the four-year midsized, Midwestern institution. The researcher will go into greater detail in Chapter Four regarding the student-athlete’s transition, the role key individuals played...
throughout their transition, and the resources they used during it. They are not in a particular order, and again, to ensure anonymity, all names have been changed.

**Andrew.** Andrew is a second-year honor student majoring in Biological Sciences and aspires to be a doctor someday. He presented as a White male and shared that he is the oldest child with a younger brother and sister. Andrew comes from a very large and diverse high school. Both of Andrew’s parents are teachers, so it was always important for Andrew to do well in school when he was growing up, and that has continued today, even while away at college. Andrew comes from a very large and diverse town as well as high school; and his high school was in the most challenging athletic division. He is a member of the university baseball team where he is a pitcher. Growing up he wanted to be a Division I athlete and the institution is the only one at that level that offered him a scholarship to play, which influenced his choice to attend.

**Bryan.** Bryan is a second-year student majoring in Elementary Education. He presented as a White male and comes from a suburb of a major metropolitan area. Growing up his parents were very supportive of his athletic involvement and less involved in his academic achievements, believing that if he worked hard for what he wanted he would figure it out. He described his community growing up as extremely tightknit and spoke a lot about his faith. His high school was quite diverse, and the academic pressures were very high. His high school was not in the most challenging athletic division, and he is the only student from his high school to attend a Division I school as an athlete. He is a member of the baseball team where he is a pitcher.

**Christian.** Christian is a second-year student-athlete and has not declared a major yet. He presented as a Black male and comes from a state in the South-Central region of the United States. His high school was predominately white and was in the most competitive division
athletically. He has a large family, and a big support system back home, both athletically and academically. He said that he is the middle child with an older brother and sister and a younger brother and sister. Christian injured himself when he got to college last summer, right before he started his first year. He said, because of that, he had to redshirt due to his inability to play. He is a member of the football team where he is a wide receiver.

**Derrick.** Derrick is a second-year football player, majoring in Kinesiology and Sports Studies. He presented as a Black male and comes from a state in the southern region of the United States from a large and diverse metropolitan area. In high school, Derrick said his parents are heavily involved, academically and athletically, and made sure he stayed on top of everything, and went to college. When deciding on which university to ultimately go to, he said he wanted to go to a smaller town, have a few familiar faces on campus, and for it to be a Division I university, which all influenced his choice to attend. Derrick said that academics and athletics came pretty easy for him in high school, but academics are a lot harder on a college campus for him. Also, he is a first-generation college student. He is a tight-end on the football team.

**Ethan.** Ethan is a cross country and track runner majoring in Kinesiology Sports Studies, with a focus in Teacher’s Education. He presented as a Hispanic male and is from a large metropolitan area. Ethan said the world of recruiting, financial aid, and some of the major things that go into getting to a college campus as a student-athlete were all extremely new to him. He had several coaches recruiting him, but he narrowed it down because he was set on going Division I, needed the affordability aspect, and he wanted a supportive coach, which all influenced his decision. Ethan said academics have always come pretty easy to him, so he did
well in high school and has done well at the university. He said he got injured during his first semester here and had to redshirt his first year of cross country and track and field.

Finn. Finn is a preferred walk-on thrower for the track and field team. He presented as a White male and is from a small town in the Midwest majoring in Kinesiology Sports Studies, with a focus in Teacher's Education. He said that the three main things that helped make his decision to come to this institution were the proximity, it being Division I, and the cost of it. Finn is a 3.0 student who came to campus not knowing a single person. He said it was scary, but that academics have been a lot easier for him here than they were in high school. He spoke much of his mother and all the support she has shown him throughout this transition, and how the upperclassmen have helped answer any question he has had. Finn said he definitely would not be here without their help.

Instruments

The interview protocol (Appendix A) was designed to gain an understanding of a student-athlete’s transition from high school to a college campus. The questions started broad, so the interviewee was able to get comfortable and share as much or as little as they chose. As the interview went on, the participants were asked about their recruiting process, specific things about their transition, and who their key mentors were throughout it. All these questions were designed to better understand their transition on a more holistic-level.

Data Collection

To collect the data for this research study, each interview was audio recorded. This allowed the researcher to go back, transcribe, and code each interview and find themes relating to one’s transition to a college campus. Also, with each player, the researcher personalized their interviews. For the data collection, each student-athlete was assigned a number and a
pseudonym. Starting with baseball, those student-athletes were labeled as one and two, the football players were labeled as three and four, and the men’s track and field competitors were five and six. Each player had the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym, if they chose not to, the researcher assigned them one. This was done to allow the participants’ real names to be kept out of the research giving them as much anonymity as possible. The same was done with any coaches, mentors, family members, friends or classmates mentioned in the interviews.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher used the suggestion Krefting (1991) makes with coding and recoding. They were able to do this by going through all the interview responses, putting them away, and then two weeks later going through them again with fresh eyes and coding techniques to see what may have been missed. Coming from *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, the researcher coded different topics from the interview and sub-coded them if need be (Zaldana, 2013). From there, themes were sectioned each code off and combined them into certain categories, and again, made subcategories if needed. These categories were consolidated to come up with certain themes and concepts to guide the research (Zaldana, 2013). The researcher was then able to see if they may have interpreted answers differently looking at it a second time with a fresh perspective (Krefting, 1991). Then, the researcher asked their thesis chair to see if the researcher’s interpretations aligned with his or hers.

**Treatment of Data**

Before the student-athlete respondents participated in the researcher’s study, they were required to read and agree to an informed consent to be able to go through with the interview process. Again, each participant in the study received a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. All data collected was recorded into an excel spreadsheet document and kept on the researcher’s
personal password protected computer. This was secured through a password protected computer that only the researcher had access to. The researcher, the thesis committee members, and the participants were able to review the transcribed data.

**Summary**

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach for their study. Every second-year student-athlete at this Midwestern, four-year and midsized university participating in baseball, football, and men's track and field, was able to voluntarily participate in the researcher’s qualitative study. The interviews were conducted at the athletic academic advising services building in the conference room. Student-athletes were asked open-ended questions, which sometimes resulted in several follow-up questions. To collect the data for this research study, each interview was audio recorded. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to go back, transcribe, and code each interview and find significant themes related to one's transition to a college campus. To ensure confidentiality, each participant, and any names used throughout the interview, were replaced with a pseudonym. All data collected was recorded into an excel spreadsheet document and kept on the researcher’s password-protected personal computer.
CHAPTER IV

Analysis

This chapter outlines the three research questions the researcher sought to answer. The participants were asked to describe their transition to a midsized, Division I institution in the Midwest. They spoke about how they transitioned academically, athletically, and socially. It was important to find out how they describe their transition to note what is important to them about it, what challenges they had along the way, and how they were dealing with the transition overall. The participants identified who their key players were in making their transition as smooth as possible. These were individuals they felt like they could talk to about their academics, athletics, financial aid problems, roommate issues, and any other conflicts that were raised during the course of their first-year on campus. Answering the third research question, the participants also identified any other resources they used to aid in their transition, other than their key player.

Student-Athletes Describe Their Transition

Participants were asked to describe how their transition was from high school to a Division I college campus. They elaborated on what they liked about the transition, what they thought was challenging, and how their experience was different from what they were told it would be like. Participants were asked about the transition as a whole, and then were asked to describe it in terms of how the transition was academically, athletically, and socially.

The transition. Bryan, a pitcher on the baseball team, and Ethan, a distance runner on the track team, liked being independent and on their own for once. Bryan shared, “I could choose what I wanted to do with my time, where I wanted to go, and what I wanted to believe in, whatever it was,” and he said that felt really good to him. Although, Bryan said the transition was a big culture shock for him. “When I got into this whole environment, my first couple of
nights here, because I came from a really small school, I was just like, “Woah,” and he said he had to learn how to balance the new environment he was put into. Ethan said it was a little scary at first because he had never lived on his own, “but it felt so good to be independent.” He shared that he was sad to leave his parents, but he quickly made friends and began to find his new normal. Finn started off his college experience going through a break-up, and he said, “It was a little rough of a transition at first, but then I met all my friends and we would hang out every weekend;” for him, it was helpful to have the support and distraction of new relationships to help him through a previous relationship that had ended.

Christian said that it seemed more of like a false sense of independence than anything. He said, “I’m supposedly on my own now, but professors still emailed my coaches if I didn’t go to class, and then I would get in trouble by them for not going.” After his first year of transitioning and learning how everything operates at the collegiate-level, “there are some things I would change, but it has been a great learning experience,” for him along the way.

Derrick, a teammate of Christian’s, talked about how he loved the university because it was a lot like his hometown. He said, “It wasn’t too big and there weren’t too many people, and that’s what I wanted.” He was happy there was not an extreme culture shock, or he may not have had such an easy transition to a new place. Andrew, a teammate of Bryan’s, realized the transition was easier than anticipated too,

It was kind of overwhelming at first. I always had the idea that I wasn’t going to be able to make it to classes and baseball and figure everything out, but I realized everything is pretty easily scheduled and it’s not that bad and everything is pretty close together… I thought it was going to be awful, but it was so much easier… I was also worried about having time on my own, but we have more free time than I thought.
One of the participants liked that it was not a big culture shock, while another struggled at first because of the culture shock, and where others appreciated their new independence, one of the men thought that there was not much independence once he got here. Each of them had a different perspective and unique challenges and circumstances impacting their transition through the first year of college as an athlete.

**Transitioning Academically.** Three of the participants identified their high school academics as being a lot more challenging than the curriculum in college. Ethan, a distance runner on the men’s track and field team, said he was prepared for the course work in college because he took a lot of college courses and AP classes in high school, and his high school always pressed more on academics than athletics. He said, “I always put academics in front of running [in high school], so it made it easier to do that in college.” Finn, a teammate of his, said that college was a lot easier for him,

my school focused a lot more on athletics [than academics] because we were a small school that took pride in our sports teams, but either way, I never really had to try too hard to maintain my 3.0 GPA in high school or college.

Finn said he could probably get a 4.0 GPA if he put in the effort and really wanted to, but he was content as long as he had a 3.0 or higher.

Bryan, a member of the baseball team said, “it may have just been that the standards were really high, but I think my high school was much harder than it is here.” He said that he was happy that was the case because he felt a lot more prepared than what he noticed in some of the other classmates. “We did work cited, APA papers, full-sentence outlines, PowerPoint presentations, and we always practiced in front of the class, so it may have been hard material, but I felt prepared for it,” Bryan said. His first semester, he took 12 credit hours which was pretty
easy for him, but “my second semester was a lot harder though because I didn’t know how to balance school during the season yet, especially because we played 56 games [in the spring], and that didn’t even start until February.” His teammate, Andrew, identified having to miss the labs for his classes as the hardest thing to balance, when it came to his academic transition. His major is Microbiology, so several of his classes have labs with them, and will be something he will have to plan accordingly for when he is in-season versus out-of-season.

Derrick, a tight-end on the football team, thought that his high school education was a lot easier than college. He shared how he struggled with his academics and managing his time well when he came to college. He said “[in high school] I really didn’t have to do anything, it was so much easier. But here? You have to do everything and stay on top of your work.” Before coming to college, Derrick was not required to write many papers in high school. While in college though, he said, “Papers, papers, papers, that’s all we had to do when I got here!” Derrick identified his transition to campus as not being too much of a culture shock, but in the classroom specifically, Derrick said, it definitely was. “I wasn’t managing my time well and I wasn’t doing all of my school work either, but this year, I hope to do better about that,” and he said he has been so far. His teammate, Christian, said that high school was easier too, and “as long as he was doing his homework, and was staying on top of everything, then nothing else really mattered.” Christian said that you cannot get away with that in college; “Even if you do your homework, they still expect you to be in class, and I didn’t do that my first-year here.” Right before school started, Christian got injured during his Fall Camp, and had to sit out for the entire season. He really struggled to get to class and stay motivated to do well because football was not going how he anticipated. He was interviewed at the end of his first year in college and said he really wants to start going to class next year, and he even thought about getting more involved in his major
and joining an organization for it. Each of the student-athletes came in with different levels of academic preparation which impacted their transition. Upon reflection, at the end of their first year and the start of the second, the student-athletes were becoming more aware of the things they needed to do to be successful.

**Transitioning Athletically.** Each of the athletes spoke about the challenges they faced in transitioning to college athletics. In high school they practiced two to three-hours after school a day, but other than that, there were not a lot of things required or expected of them. Three of the participants had never lifted in high school and that was a big part of their training in college, so there was an adjustment for some.

Ethan, the distance runner, and Christian, a wide receiver on the football team, had to redshirt their first year on campus due to an injury they received once they got on-campus. Christian tore his PCL the first week of practice, whereas Ethan’s injury was more gradual, and his shin splints ended up turning into stress fractures as the season went on. So, even though he started practicing with the team, by the end of his first semester, he was not able to run with them at all, and that was really hard on him. Regarding the athletic transition though, Ethan shared,

My high school never really put a lot of money towards sports. I had a pretty good coach, but we only practiced about two hours a day [in high school], and a lot of stuff, I just did on my own. It was a bit of a culture shock for me because of the amount of time we spend doing supplemental stuff. We would spend an hour of running, an hour stretching/recovering, and an hour lifting. On Tuesdays and Fridays, we even had double practices, and we never did that in high school. There’s a pretty big difference in college… There’s a lot more competition at the collegiate level too, which I am getting used to that now.
Derrick was used to the competition. He came from a high school that was the best in their conference and they played a lot of big teams. He was prepared to play at the athletic level they needed him too, but doing that and keeping up with school, “was a little bit of a challenge” for him, but he said his second-year has gone better. Derrick explained, “I had to wake up early for weights, then go to class, and then go to practice, and [maintaining] my football schedule and class schedule were difficult the first-year.”

Finn, an athlete on the track team, said, “It was a big transition!” His team had optional weights and practice every day in high school, and everyone told him college practices were going to be extremely hard, and he thinks they are, “but because I always went to practice and did the optional weights, they didn’t turn out to be as hard as I expected them to be.” The hardest thing for him though was “trying to transition to a bigger shot and heavier implements,” he said, “that was rough,” and he is still working on it this year to see what throw (weight, disc, shot, hammer, javelin) he will be most successful at in the years to come.

Bryan and Derrick found the athletic transition to be very taxing on their bodies. Bryan, a pitcher on the baseball team, was not guaranteed a spot on the baseball team’s roster when he came to play at the college-level. The coaches wanted him to get his pitch speed up and gain almost twenty pounds before they would give him one, and Bryan said, “It took me a while for my body to get used to it [the athletic transition] and to adjust to it; With weights in the morning, class right after, and then trying to eat somewhere in the middle, it was rough.” Bryan said his high school baseball season was a lot shorter and they would only have about two hours of practice each day, but in college, they had weights at six in the morning on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays; They had conditioning on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and they would have three to four-hour practices on top of those; “I also had to get my study hall hours in each week, and I
also had to eat, and I had to sleep. Sometimes there was not enough time in the day.” He explained how the high expectation and intensity of it all was a lot for him, but he gained a roster spot, and said he would do it all over again. This was a new demand and different schedule for each of the participants that they had never seen or experienced before. There were also new expectations and commitments that came with being a Division I athlete.

**Transitioning socially.** All the participants agreed that being a part of a team on a college campus helped them transition socially. Derrick, a member of the football team, was the only student-athlete that did not have one of his teammates as a roommate when he got to the college, but he was matched with a teammate later on and he moved in with that person about halfway through the semester. He identified his roommate as a huge asset to his transition. The teammate that later became his roommate, introduced himself to Derrick early on in the new academic year, and that opened the door for Derrick to start talking and meeting the other men on the football team. Derrick said, “I really didn’t talk before I met him,” but after he did, “it went from there and it was a lot easier [to make friends with his other teammates].” Finn, a thrower on the track team, said that “it was scary at first because I came to college not knowing a single person,” but because he identifies as a very outgoing individual, “I would just knock on everyone’s doors [in the residence halls], introduce myself, and we all became really good friends [him and the other men on his residence hall floor].” They each identified that their teammates, and roommates specifically, made their social transition to campus a little easier.

Andrew, a pitcher on the baseball team, said “being a part of the baseball team is pretty nice because you automatically have your teammates as friends, and then you also get to meet all the people they know, which is helpful.” He also spoke about how it was helpful to meet new people and make friends in class because you have a different group of classmates in each
course. He was used to seeing the same people in every class in high school for four years, “but now you’re with different people in each class, and it’s pretty easy to make new friends. for the most part,” he said.

Christian said he came in thinking that football would run the school and it would be a big party school, but he was thankful when that was not the case. The university was a lot smaller and quieter than he expected, although “it has not been too bad of a transition to make new friends at,” but he will say, “there are very few of them [friends of his].” He said that at the end of the day, they are his teammates and they always will be, but he does not hang out with that many people on his team away from the field, “aside from a few real ones [friends] that he is extremely close with.” He and his roommate get along, but they do not spend time together outside of football. Andrew and Christian did not have trouble making friends and spoke about it being a fairly easy and smooth transition for them.

Ethan argued that it was a lot harder for him to make friends in college. He said, “Especially in your general education courses because those are your lecture classes, and no one really talks in them. They are there to learn and leave, and there really isn’t time to talk because the lecture is going on.” He said, because he was good at socializing with others, it was a pretty smooth transition, but that was at the beginning of the semester. Towards November and December, the end of the semester, he got injured and was put on crutches. That really hurt him socially for his first year on campus.

In the winter time up until basically the whole second semester, I struggled with shin splints. It got to the point where it was like basically a stress fracture. The reason it happened was because the difference in mileage. I started doing more miles and I guess it was just too soon for my body to react to it and it hurt. I was out from running for like
four or five weeks straight and that was really hard. I didn’t feel useful, I didn’t feel a part of the team. I wouldn’t go with them for any of the runs, I had to do all of my stuff on a stationary bike or swimming or an elliptical. I was not near them and I couldn’t do the stuff that they were doing. Mentally, and even socially, it really hurt me a lot because I just felt like freaking nothing.

His roommate was one of his best friends from high school too, and Ethan said, he was always there for them and they got along pretty well. He had friends and support in the beginning, but the injury hindered his ability to connect with and be around his team. Ethan said, “I will say that socially, although I had the team, there has been a lot of times that I have felt really lonely because they were religious, and I myself, am not.” Whether he was injured or not, he felt distanced from his teammates, but still identified himself as very outgoing and that he made friends easily on the college campus.

Bryan, a member on the baseball team, did not want to get overly involved because he said, “that’s what I did in high school and I just couldn’t live up to that standard anymore; I wanted to get involved when I came here, but I didn’t want to overload myself.” Bryan found his place with a religious organization off-campus. He said his coach asked him to be on an athletic committee and another teammate asked him to get involved in a religious organization on campus, but because he did not really know much about either of them and he did not know anyone in them, he decided not to. The one he was involved with off-campus, was really helpful for him with making friends and it played a huge part in his social transition to the university, even with the organization being off-campus.
Key Players Impacting Student-Athlete Transition

The participants were asked to identify people who played the biggest role in the student-athletes' transition and how the transition would have been impacted if that individual had not have been a part of it. These people were described to the participants as key players that had a major role in their transition and adjustment to becoming a college student-athlete. These participants identified if that person was not there, they articulated that they may not have stayed or left the university after their first year.

Three of the participants identified one specific person, but the other three males had two different people that impacted their transition. Finn, the thrower on the track team, described it as having his “off-campus key player” and his “on-campus person,” and spoke about how he needed them both. The participants identified roommates, parents, a coach, and Christ as their key players. These are detailed below in order of most mentioned to least.

**Roommate.** Four of the participants in the study talked about their roommate as being a key player during their transition. Andrew, a pitcher on the baseball team, said his roommate helped him a lot during his first year. When Andrew struggled with knowing where to find time outside of homework and baseball every day, he talked about how his roommate who was also a first-year student on his team stepped in. Andrew spoke about not feeling like he had much time, and how,

his roommate was just more put together. He was more used to doing things on his own at that point than I was. He had a job and all that, so he just knew more of what he was doing, which really helped me to understand how to manage my time better.

When the researcher asked how he thought the transition would have looked without his roommate, Andrew said, “I don’t know, I have no idea, it’s weird… I’m sure another teammate
would’ve helped me out, but it was nice that he was there.” Bryan, a teammate of Andrew’s, said his “freshman roommate was a big help too.” He shared how his roommate was there for him to talk to, to vent to, and that he was someone on campus he could really open up to.

Derrick, a tight-end on the football team, also identified his roommate as a key player in his transition. Derrick shared that when he first joined the team, he had a hard time connecting with other teammates, but then described a relationship with a fellow freshman on the team “who stepped out to him,” and later became his roommate. Derrick explained that he was very shy and did not talk to anyone when he first got to campus, but when that teammate came up to him, introduced himself, and started introducing Derrick to the rest of the team, it meant a lot to him. Derrick was asked to provide examples of how his roommate helped him, he said, “He was just helping me out with everything, helping me where I need to go, and helping me with what I need to do. He would just always help me out.” When asked how his transition would have looked without that teammate and roommate being there, Derrick said that “my transition would have been bad” if his roommate was not there. He did not know if he would still be here or not without him.

Finn, a track and field athlete, shared that his on-campus person was his roommate, which was also a teammate of his. He described how they would hang out, play video games, and watch movies together. Finn said he felt like he could go to him with anything and how his roommate helped get him through a really tough break-up the first couple months of school. Finn said his roommate “helped with meeting times, where academic buildings were, anything, and everything.” Finn stated, “if it wasn’t for him, I probably would’ve dropped out or got kicked off the team because I really didn’t know anything.” For each of these men, the roommate played an important role in their transition to college and the way they adjusted to a college campus.
Mother. Two of the student-athletes that were interviewed explained how their mother was a key player for them throughout it all. When asked, *who has been the one person that has helped you the most, in every area, and has been the key player throughout your entire transition?* Christian, a wide receiver on the football team, said, without hesitation, “Oh, my mom.” Christian continued, “I really didn’t like it up here at all, and she would be there to listen and tell me to do what I wanted to do.” When he was asked how it would have been if she was not there, he said that he definitely would not have stayed and he “probably would have just gone back home.” Finn said,

My mom. I wouldn’t have even done anything, I would have been too lazy. She made me fill out all the paperwork and made sure I did things when they were due. She kept me on my toes. If I ever have a question, I just call her.

They both stated that without their mother being involved, they probably would not be at the institution. To them, their mother was someone they could go to with questions, vent about their experience with, and someone who was there to lead them, guide them, and support them along the way.

Coach. Although the student-athletes spoke about their coaches throughout the interview, Ethan, a runner on the cross country and track team, was the only one to talk about his current college coach as his key player throughout his transition. Ethan said,

If I ever have problems with my roommate or people on the team, or if I have a question about her training, about how to do this or a stretch, housing, anything really. Money or school, I can text or call her about anything and feel completely comfortable… She has always been there for me, so I think she has always been that key player for me.
Ethan said, “it would be different [without her]. I probably wouldn’t be as happy. I can’t imagine being as comfortable around the team as well. That would be hard.” The researcher asked in what ways would it have been hard, and he responded with, “I don’t know, it wouldn’t have been as smooth, and it wouldn’t have been as fun.” Then, Ethan shared a story about his friend who went off to college and left after the first year because of the relationship they had with their coach, and then he said, “I feel like that would’ve happened to me, maybe.” In Ethan’s case, his coach was a key player for him, but the other participants did not identify their coach as that person.

Christ. Bryan, a pitcher on the baseball team, was the only participant who shared his faith and relationship to Christ as being an important part of his transition. He said that, “Christ has been there the whole way. He [Christ] has been someone who knows the whole story, the highs, lows, [and] everything.” None of the other participants brought up their faith, religion, or spirituality impacting their transition, but Bryan said, “where a part of me is masked from my parents and a part of me is masked from my team, [Christ] was someone who I had that was with me through high school, and He knows who I am.” The researcher asked what he thought his transition would have looked like without Christ being there, and he said, “Oh wow. I don’t even want to think about it. He’s made it so fruitful and so awesome.” Bryan explained that a key player for him was not tangible or on-campus per say, but someone who he felt knew the whole story and was there to help navigate this new transition from high school to college.

**Resources Student-Athletes Use to Aid the Transition**

Participants were asked what resources they used to aid in their transition from high school to college, other than their key player. They spoke about the assistance they needed in different areas related to academics, athletics, and their social life. These resources ranged from
advisors and counselors to faculty and staff, from coaches and trainers to teammates and roommates, and three of them talked about their parents being a resource to them throughout their transition.

While many opened up about the resources they used on and off-campus, a few of the participants shied away from the answer because they said they do not always like to ask for help and think of it as needing a resource. Bryan, a pitcher on the baseball team, said,

I just didn’t really need to rely on the resources here. Even if I need help, there are a lot of times that I’m too scared to go get help because growing up, and even with coaches today, it’s a part of that double-edged sword of how I was raised. I was taught that I’m supposed to figure it out on my own, I don’t need help, I’m a big boy, and can take care of this.

Finn, a thrower on the track team, also mentioned those same thoughts and feelings about the athletic training facility on campus. He agreed and said,

I don’t really go in there. Even if I’m hurt, I don’t want to have to go through treatments and stuff because then they will write my name down and say that I have an injury and I don’t want to see myself with an injury. I will just work through the pain until it’s gone.

Each sport and athlete seemed to vary in what they relied on, but they all identified the key resources they typically utilize. From the most common resource mentioned to the least talked about, the student-athletes said they used their roommates/teammates the most, their advisors, the trainers, their parental guardians, their coaches, and one of them mentioned how the faculty and staff have also been a resource for them to go to.

Roommates/Teammates. Roommates and teammates go together because for all of the participants, their roommate was a teammate of theirs. Not only their roommate though, the
student-athletes mentioned how the upperclassman were a huge help to their transition socially and their athletic success.

Andrew and Bryan, pitchers on the baseball team, each shared that their roommate was one of their key players in the transition. They spoke about them being a resource for them and someone who impacted their college experience in a large way. Bryan said, “my roommate has been awesome. Him and I weren’t close until about November December… And even though we were obligated to be with someone, it was good. I came into school having to make friends, which became my teammates.” Andrew identified that his roommate was a lot more put together than him and that his roommate helped him manage his day more effectively, so he had more time to do things than just baseball and school.

Derrick, a tight-end on the football team, said that the “upperclassmen make a big difference, whether you feel like you can look up to them or go to them for things.” He spoke about his roommate being the key player in his transition earlier, as well. Derrick did not want to think about what his transition would have looked like without him being a part of it. Christian, a teammate of Derrick’s, told a couple stories of how his teammates helped him out, “and a couple of them were upperclassmen, but a lot of them were the freshmen in my recruiting class.” Christian said his freshmen class is extremely close, and they do a lot of things together. Both of these football players had a roommate who was also on the team with them, and they agreed that it was helpful to be on the same schedule as them. Christian joked and said, “Especially when it comes to waking up for morning weights!”

Ethan, a distance runner on the cross-country team, had a roommate he knew from high school. He said this was extremely helpful for him because he “felt like he could talk to him when he couldn’t talk to the rest of the team.” They were both runners, had history with one
another, and got a long really well. “Like any other pair of roommates, we had our share of
difficulties, but I was always lucky that I knew him for so long because we probably got along
better than anyone else did.” Ethan relied on his roommate as a resource when he was going
through a really rough transition from running and being able to compete, to then getting injured
and having to sit out. When Ethan was pulled from practicing with the others, he also stopped
going to eat with them and traveling with them because his injury led him to feel ashamed and
embarrassed. Throughout it all though, “he was always there for me,” Ethan spoke about his
roommate. Finn talked a lot about his roommate as being the on-campus key player throughout
his transition. Again, he said, “If it wasn’t for him, I probably would’ve dropped out or got
kicked off the team because I really didn’t know anything.” Roommates and teammates,
consistently, made up a significant part of the student-athlete coming to college and transitioning
well throughout that first year, academically, athletically, and socially.

Advisors/Counselors. All of the men mentioned the academic support services provided
in athletics. Four of the participants had an athletic academic advisor that was identified as a key
resource in their academic success. They see this advisor on a weekly basis, if not daily, because
they are required as incoming freshmen and transfer students to get study hall hours during their
first semester at the institution. They spoke about how they personally interacted in this space.
For every sport the hours may vary, but they all had experiences in the center, with the athletic
academic advisor, and the student-athletes spoke about how they may or may not have utilized
that resource provided to them.

Andrew, a pitcher on the baseball team, said he “typically just kind of did his own thing”
in this space. He went to class, took the notes he needed to, but other than that, he did not need
much help from the academic support office. Ethan, a distance runner on the track team, said, “I
never really needed the advisors or the center, but because I had to go, I feel like it did help me because I always felt like I had somewhere to study.” Ethan identified several resources offered academically at this university, he said, “if we need help, we can even ask for tutoring in here, our teachers are always there, and the advisors are really useful. The resources are amazing.” Ethan explained how the student-athletes have academic tutors provided to them most nights of the week.

Christian and Derrick, football players, and Finn, a thrower on the track team, spoke about being really close with their high school guidance counselors. They shared how that person helped them out a lot. Derrick and Finn’s mother were both really good friends with their high school counselors. Derrick said they would help their family “get stuff done” when it came time to getting ready for college. In college, this was not any different. Christian described the athletic advisors as “helping him stay on top of things,” and Derrick said, “coming into the academic center is what helped him stay on top of his academics.” They worked with different advisors but got the same outcome from each of them. Finn said, “My advisor could always point him in the right direction. They would do whatever they needed to do to get me through.” Each of the participants had the option to use their advisors, and when they did, they saw them as a positive resource to their academic transition.

**Athletic Trainers.** The athletic trainers got brought up in almost all of the interviews. The baseball, football, and men’s track and field team all use the same training room facility, but the football team has a different head trainer than the men’s track and field and baseball team. With the increased lifting, high intensity workouts, and rigorous training schedule, injuries are bound to occur for Division I athletes. Amongst the participants, there were different reactions in how they spoke about the athletic trainers they encountered. Bryan, Christian, and Ethan used the
trainers the most due to athletic injuries in their first year of college, whereas Derrick and Finn did not have too many interactions with them.

Each participant had a different reason for working with a trainer. Bryan used them more to be proactive and address any aching or sore pain in his arm from pitching; Christian used them after he tore his PCL during his fall football camp; and Ethan had to when his shin splints got so bad, they turned into stress fractures. Bryan said, at first, “I didn’t know what to do, where to go, or how to use it at first, but after a trainer stepped out and helped me out, I felt a lot more comfortable,” and he had a really good experience after that. Bryan said,

She would ask me how my elbow was feeling, and I would tell her it’s a little sore, and she would say, “Ok, come in for some treatment and we can do this and this for it.” So, then I was like “Ok!” and I was more confident, and I could go in there and feel good about it. I didn’t like going in there and not knowing what to do or not knowing any of the trainers, because when you walked in there, it felt like everyone knew what they were going to do, all the athletes, they may not have been, but I felt like there were so many upperclassman athletes who had a routine and knew they were going to do this, this, and this.

He did not make it into the training room until the second semester of his freshman year, but it is something he will not hesitate to do now if pain arises.

Christian spoke of how the trainers did not help him or take him seriously, “the only reason I would transfer from here is for new medical facilities.” Ethan expressed that they have been as helpful as they can be, but “I feel like a lot of people, including myself, have been really frustrated at times because they feel like we are not getting the attention they need.” He went on to explain that it is a small facility, with a lot of athletes, and not enough trainers. There are
several students in a program to become athletic trainers, which he appreciates that they get the opportunity to help in the training room, gain experience, and learn from working with the student-athletes, but

when it comes down to it, we don’t want students treating our injuries. I mean, who knows how much they know or how much they don’t know. They have been as helpful as they can though. But when you are injured or hurt, you really want someone to take you step-by-step, and I feel like you don’t get that kind of treatment here because there aren’t enough people in the room. There’s just too much stuff going on. There are all types of sports going on at the same time, like football is the same time as track. And I think soccer and cross-country kind of mix. So, it gets kind of hectic sometimes.

Christian said that whenever he has interacted with them, they were always helpful. He did not suffer an injury his first year though, so he did not use the training facility as much as the others. Finn said he always tried to stay away from the training facility. He does not want to be hurt, feel hurt, or let others know he is hurting. So, if he absolutely needs a bag of ice, he will go get that, but then leave as soon as he can. Finn said when he was playing football growing up, “he was kind of a wuss, so when he sat out, all of the upperclassman would make fun of him, and it turned him into a different person.” Now, “he won’t tell anyone about the injury or anything, he will just work through the pain until it’s gone.” There was an array of responses, but there could be several different reasons for this. The baseball, football, and men’s track and field teams all have different student workers in the athletic training program that work with them, and these students may change on a semesterly basis, which could impact their overall experience and results in positive or negative responses.
Parents. All of the participants lived with a parent in high school, and all lived on-campus their first-year which impacted their transition to the college campus. After leaving home, two of the participants still spoke about how their mom was one of their biggest resources during their transition. Finn, who identified his mom as his key player, said “my mom was my biggest resource. I call her every night and she calls me every morning.” Whether it be financial aid, academic related, or going home on the weekend so she can do his laundry, Finn said he can always rely on his mother. Finn spoke about how his dad has not been supportive of him going on to compete at the collegiate level, and that has been pretty hard on him.

A member on the football team, Christian, said his mom has always had really high standards for him and pushes him the most academically. He said, “my mom and my dad have helped in a plethora of ways,” and he joked, “My mom would slap me if she knew what grades I got first semester.” So, he said he wants to “step it up and start going to his classes this year.” They both have the support on and off-campus and have used their parent(s) as a resource even while being physically away from them.

Coaches. Two of the participants spoke about their coaches and how they have helped them during their transition. Derrick, a tight end on the football team, did not speak directly about his relationship with his coach, but he said he knew how important the role of a coach plays in a student-athletes transition, “a coach can impact one’s transition greatly,” and he said he learned that early on. In high school, his basketball coach helped him out a lot. He ended up playing football in college, but his basketball coach was there to help him to get ready to play football at the collegiate level and answer any questions he may have had about the transition, regardless of the sport.
Andrew, one of the pitchers on the baseball team, said that his “college [coaches] knew a lot more than our high school coaches, so that has actually helped me get to where I wanted to be.” He talked about how his current coach is a lot more knowledgeable than the coaches he has had in the past and has already helped him immensely in his first-year of being here alone. Finn, who spoke about his roommate and his mother, also mentioned his position coach and said, “she helps me if I ever need anything. She’s like a second mom here.” He identified feeling comfortable going to her with whatever he may need assistance with. Whether it be a head coach, assistant coach, positional coach, or one that has played a coaching role to them in the past, coaches influenced and impacted these student-athletes’ transition in one way or another.

Professors/Faculty/Staff. Bryan was the only participant to bring up his professors and the faculty/staff in his interview. He acknowledged that as much as he would want to, “it has been extremely hard to try and make office hours, with practice and stuff, work.” He said, for him, it has not even really been an option because his schedule has always conflicted with his professor’s schedule. This was a big reason he was very thankful for all of the other academic resources he spoke about. Continued though, he said “[A different academic building on campus] has been very helpful” for him. Bryan met with a staff member there his first-year on-campus, and he enjoyed working with that individual and received a lot of help from them. Although, because of their conflicting schedules this year, he has not had the opportunity to make another appointment with them yet. The student-athlete’s schedule, in this study, prevented them from having time to interact with and reach out to faculty as their fellow students may.

Summary

Participants were asked to elaborate on their transition from high school to a college campus and spoke about how they loved their new independence, but each of them had a
different perspective and unique challenges that impacted their first year as a student-athlete at the Division I level. All of the participants spoke about how the transition was academically, athletically, and socially.

Academically, three of them thought that things were a lot easier in high school and two thought that college was a lot harder of a transition. Each of them though, at the end of their first year and the start of the second, were beginning to become aware of the things they needed to do in order to be successful on a college campus. Athletically, for most of them, there was a lot higher expectation for them. Practices, weights, and film were no longer an option for some, but they were mandatory, and there would be punishment if anything was ever missed. Socially, the transition went really well for the participants. An injury set one of the participants back, but it was not until that injury that he felt isolated from his teammates and friends.

They also identified one or more individuals that were a key player for them throughout their transition. Four of the participants named their roommate as the key player in their transition, two of them said their mother, one of them said their head coach, and another one said Christ. A lot of them could not have imagined their first-year on campus without the person they named their key plater, and really, they did not want to have to. Aside from the key players, the participants were asked what other resources they used to aid in their transition from being a high school student-athlete to a Division I student-athlete. The participants said they used their high school counselors, college academic advisors, coaching staff at both levels, roommates, trainers, faculty, and also parents as their other resources to aid in their transition.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand how high school student-athletes are managing the transition to becoming college student-athletes at the Division I level. The researcher looked at how student-athletes are describing their transition, who are the key players impacting their transition, and what other resources are being utilized to assist in their transition along the way. This chapter outlines the final conclusions made from this study and the future research that is suggested in light of these results. These were derived from interviewing six different second-year student-athletes and gaining insight from their personal stories. The findings presented in this chapter will address the similarities and differences from previous research that has been done and will build off future research that should be done to better understand the research topic.

Discussion

To understand the transition from the role of high school athlete to college athlete Schlossberg's (1984) Transition Theory was used to help guide the development of the interview questions and analyze the data collected. Schlossberg breaks her theory down to four parts: Self, situation, strategies, and support. This was necessary because it framed the student-athlete in their unique situation and provided a way to look at what kind of strategies they used in this transition, and who they had as support to help aid them through the transition. Essentially, it helped to understand how they described the transition, who the key players were, and what resources they were utilizing.

Description of the Transition. This research study found that most of the participants thought highly of their new independence on the college campus. Even though they were on
different sports teams with different seasons, there were several things in common as they spoke about the transition. Many described it as overwhelming at first, but it ended up being so much better than anticipated. Andrew said he was worried about having to take busses everywhere and not being able to find his classes, but after being on campus and learning the buildings, it was much easier for him to get around. He also feared that he would not be able to manage his academic and athletic schedule. Andrew thought he would not have time for himself or his social life, but after going through it, he figured out it was much more structured and scheduled out, so he was able to spend his time wisely. Derrick and Christian spoke about this, and how they want to start going to class more. They missed so many classes their freshmen year that it really impacted their GPA and said how they are determined to do better in that this year. Bryan knew that he wanted to take a heavier course load in the fall, so when his season comes around in the spring, he could take a lighter load and more online classes, so he would not miss as much while traveling for competitions. They took the first year to understand how school and athletics worked together and made necessary changes to be more successful in their second year and future years to come.

Most high school athletes have never had to compete year-round, in the same sport before coming to the collegiate level. Also, it is important to note this study was representative of the overall population; There were two Black male participants, three White males, and one Hispanic male. The diversity of the participants shows that, despite any racial and ethnic differences, their overall experiences are extremely similar. This is impactful because each had a unique transition, unique experiences, and a unique story to share, all while seemingly going through the same thing: transitioning from being a high school student-athlete to now competing
at the college level as a Division I student-athlete at the same institution. There are several areas that influenced the participant transition and they are discussed further below.

**Academics,** The academic transition for the participants in this study were as unique as each of the student-athletes. Three of them thought high school was a lot harder academically, two of them disagreed and said college seemed a lot harder, while another did not mention it at all. Christian talked about feeling like he was not pushed in high school and did not have to write many papers or do a lot of homework assignments, but now papers and homework ruled their college coursework, and they felt underprepared and equipped. Christian said that his biggest reason for not excelling in the classroom was because he was not managing his time well on top of trying to balance it with his athletic schedule. The one that did not talk about his high school rigor, did however speak about how it was hard for him to stay motivated academically when he got injured and could not participate in athletics. So, his academics suffered because of it. It was not that the coursework was hard, but he just did not have motivation to do it because he could not do anything else at the time.

The biggest struggle the participants in this study faced was learning how to manage their time as a student and as an athlete. Some student-athletes are coming to college not fully being academically prepared to be here, regardless of the sport they are in or the season the compete during. They all have varying levels, depending on the high school they went to, their parents support, or their own drive to succeed, but each of them are learning to use the resources that are put in front of them by faculty, coaches, and/or the athletic academic support center. Some of them take advantage of them right away, and others may never fully understand how to navigate the transition and overall college experience. This could be a result of the lack of academic support students have in high school, and not knowing how to utilize all of the academic support
and resources available to them at the college level. The impact a head coach/assistant coach could make by sitting each player down individually and learning how to prioritize their time and schedule, rather just assuming they have the tools or understand how, could be a gamechanger for the remaining years of their college athletic and academic responsibilities.

**Athletics**, The participants in this study spoke about how much more competitive college athletics were for them compared to high school sports. In high school there was typically a low time expectation, that is typically no more than three hours a day required. This was also all at one time. However, in college the time expectations were much different with them having to report sometimes multiple times a day to athletic facilities to work-out, study, practice, and/or play. They now were expected to juggle getting up early for weights, going to class, getting assistance in the training room, making it to practice, keeping up with their homework, and then finding time to shower, eat, and socialize. Christian, a player on the football team described it as, “a lot to manage and very difficult at times.” Bryan, baseball player said that his first semester was pretty easy, but when he got to the spring semester, he said, “I didn’t know how to manage school with the season yet,” so that was a learning curve for him at first.

They also spoke about how the lifting increased, the expectation for performance was heightened, and the physical rigor was intensified. Two of the participants, Bryan and Ethan, spoke about how the athletic transition was extremely taxing on their bodies and it took them a while to adjust to it. Participants were also concerned with the perception of their ability to perform and spoke about they were afraid to be seen as injured. The biggest athletic concern found in this research study though, from several of the student-athletes, was the fear of not being able to compete and participate in the sport they love. This goes hand-and-hand with the use of the athletic trainers. This is important because, more than likely, most high school student-
athletes do not have an athletic trainer or an athletic training facility in high school. The importance of having the conversation of the role athletic trainers play at the collegiate level, why they are there, and how the athletes can utilize them, is essential. Two of the interviewees even spoke about how one of them did not want to use the trainers because they did not want to feel like they were hurt, and the other did not really know how to use them or where to start.

With college athletics, there is a change in pace with the lifting, practices, and expectations, which all the participants spoke about in their interviews. The athletic trainers become a critical person that can be used as a resource towards one's ultimate performance, rather than an enemy they want to steer clear from. The student-athletes are there to go to school and compete in the sport that they love, if they get hurt and are unable to do so, both of these things will be impacted, and if serious enough, their social lives can be impacted too.

*Social,* Brint and Cantwell's (2010) theoretical framework of time use for a college student is useful in understanding the student-athlete experience because it looks at it from three different uses: scholarly versus non-scholarly uses of time, active versus passive uses of time, and uses of time that connect students to or separate students from campus life. Per NCAA, student-athletes are required to be full-time students, so they should be in a minimum of about 12 hours of class a week. While in season, they have approximately 20 hours of practice and competition time, but this time will lessen in their off-season. When student-athletes are not practicing or going to class, they may have to find time to get treatment from their athletic trainers, they may have to go to meetings, watch film, or they may be required tutoring or study hall hours. After that, they get to choose how they want to spend other active and passive time and if they want to stay on campus or involve themselves in other ways off campus. This may include volunteering in the community, getting a part-time job, or visiting home on the
weekends. Student-athletes have a strict schedule laid out by their professors and coaching staff, but they have the independence and flexibility to decide and choose how they best want to utilize the rest of their time on campus.

The findings show, with these participants, that when athletics are going well for them, their social life is also going well, which results in academics typically going well too, but not always. When athletics are not going well, typically academics are not either, and this usually impacts their social transition as well. Also, when academics are not going well, typically athletics may not be either, so this could impact their social life. This research study shows all three areas for a student-athlete are, in most cases, intertwined. Knowing and understanding this is important to helping the student-athlete as they transition to college.

Institutions need to have monthly meetings, bridging the academic services and athletic resources gap, to speak about the student-athletes, their progress, their behavior, and their performances. The importance of this is crucial because their academic expectation, athletic rigor, and social well-being, were shown to be extremely intertwined; When one is going well, or another is going poorly, the other areas are impacted. When there are athletic coaches and academic advisors talking about the players and students in the same room, checking-in and checking-up on them, they are more likely to catch any red flags and be proactive before an issue becomes bigger.

**Key Players.** This study has shown how important mentors are in a student-athlete's life, and how they are constantly gaining them, whether they realize it or not. In this study the participants were asked to talk about people who played a key role in their transition and who they would identify as a key player in their experience. This was done to intentionally avoid using the word mentor because it can mean different things to the students. There have been
studies done on the importance of strong coach and student-athlete relationships, so it was no surprise that one of the participants identified this as well (Ohio University, 2018). Ethan shared a story about how a friend of theirs left a university because they did not get along with their head coach. He said he felt like that could have happened to him if he was in the same situation; however, his coach ended up being the one of the biggest key players throughout his transition to college.

Four of the participants spoke about their roommate as a key player in their transition to a college campus. They referred to them as a person that had a similar schedule to them, someone they could talk to about academics and athletics, and someone that was always there for them. Each of them had a roommate that was their teammate on the sports team they competed on; however, one participant started out with a non-athlete roommate and when that did not work out, they moved in with a teammate. Initially, coaches or housing professionals may not think it matters whether a student-athlete has a teammate as their roommate or not, but for these participants it was critical. The study reinforced, for the participants in it, that their teammate as a roommate made a positive impact on their transition to the college campus.

There are many people who play a key role in the student-athletes’ transition to college. Two others spoke about their mom, one mentioned their coach, and another mentioned Christ, and it is not just one person with all the power. Student-athletes are going to rely on different resources, depending on who they are, what support they have had in the past, and what kind of interactions they have once they get here. Providing them with many points of contact is important. This research study shows that roommates, parental figures, coaches, and a spiritual figure are just some of those key players student-athletes are seeking to support and guide them through their college experience.
**Other Resources.** The participants also spoke about using their roommates, teammates, and upperclassmen on their team as resources. They also all mentioned the academic support services provided to them, their athletic trainers, coaching staff, parents, and one mentioned a faculty member. For these six participants they utilized the resources that were most necessary for their academic as well as athletic success. It is important to understand that they also spoke about the challenges of using resources available to all students.

Harrison, Comeaux, and Piecha (2006) spoke about how important student-athlete and faculty member relationships are in their study, but in this study, only one of the six participants mentioned a faculty member they used on campus. Their study focused on men’s basketball and football players on campus, and even with that, the athlete who mentioned using a faculty member as a resource their first year of college was a baseball player. Bryan went on to discuss that he was not able to meet up with this faculty member his second semester because of their conflicting schedules. A suggestion would be, instead of having office hours during a normal work day when students with full-time jobs, commuters, veterans, and other special populations like student-athletes cannot attend them, virtual office hours could become very useful. With technology becoming such a prevalent part in our everyday lives, Skype, FaceTime, and other forms of mobile communication can be helpful for students who need extra help or have a question they were not able to address during the day.

Many people across the campus do not always think about the special populations that may need flexibility in addressing their needs. So, they may do what they think is convenient but should really think about the various populations they are working with and seek to understand what their experiences and daily routines may be like. This is a large reason why the athletic academic support services seem to be so useful for athletes because of the availability when
other times/resources are not available. Fortunately, the institution where this research study was conducted had this type of academic support services provided to their athletes, and all of the participants had a positive experience with them.

Implications

The goal of this study was to find out how college student-athletes are describing their transition, who is impacting their transition, and what other resources they are using to assist them with it. It is important to know these areas, so student affairs professionals, academic support services, and athletic support services can all be working as a team in supporting the students. If they do not understand how the student experiences the transition, what is easy and hard about it, and how they are beginning to navigate it, it would be impossible to help them transition. Participants in this study did not identify just one person, or a person in a specific position that had the greatest impact on the student’s transition, and it was different from person-to-person. This is important for the head coaches to know, as well as the assistant coaches, the Athletic Director, the athletic academic advisors, because they all need to work and support the student and not assume that someone else is making the impact for that student. Faculty, academic advisors, as well as student affairs staff play a significant support role to the student. It would be important for the athletic staff, perhaps the director and academic support staff to share information with faculty and staff across campus about the student-athlete experience and provide insight about their schedules, workloads, and personal needs so they can get the support from anywhere on campus. The athletic staff also needs to build relationships and collaborate with others across campus because it may lead to them developing a stronger support network for students.
When freshmen advisors understand the sport season the student-athlete they are working with is in, they can better work with them in picking the right classes. Advisors would be able to advise them to adjust their academic schedule around their first-year sports season, while maintaining academic eligibility through the NCAA standards. For example, as one of the baseball participants noted, it would have made more sense for him to take his class that required a lab in the fall instead of during his spring season. He was not aware of all the traveling and time he would spend in his athletic role in season, but his freshmen academic advisor may not have been either. This advisor, typically, is the one they are matched with for their official visit on campus and is a big part of how their transition will end up after their first year. They are the one helping them know which professors to take, how to sign up for classes, and which classes they should be in depending on their major or prospective major. Creating a more seamless transition, with academic affairs and the athletic department will create an easier transition for the student-athletes early on. Also, with addressing those easy and foreseeable issues earlier on, this could increase retention for student-athletes at an institution.

Retaining students can come from housing arrangements as well. When coaches are aware of the importance of matching up a prospective student-athlete with a future teammate, it may be the difference between whether that student-athlete leaves or stays at the university. Rooming assignments at the college level are always important, but with student-athletes, there is a deeper importance. Student-athletes with the same lifting schedules, practice times, and study hall requirements, will help spur one another on together, in the classroom, and on the field/pool/arena/court. It is important for coaches to intentionally think about which athletes are compatible with the other because this research study has shown that when their roommate is a
teammate and friend of theirs, they can use one another to navigate the transition, and have an overall better experience.

This study has shown how much academic success, athletic success, and social well-being go together, and when the Athletic Director at the university is aware of that, they may want to enact changes that reflect that. For example, implementing monthly meetings with coaches, advisors, and faculty/staff would be an easy way to get everyone in a room at the same time, and see how their freshmen student-athletes are transitioning. A coach may notice a change at practice or in competition, and it may or may not be related to how school is going or what their roommate situation is like, so if those things are caught early on, it could help the student-athlete transition better and increase their knowledge of on-campus resources earlier on. Whether the Athletic Director wants to be in the meetings or not would be up to them, but when you are connecting two different departments on campus, it creates synergy, an alliance, and an open-door when concerns arise. The Athletic Director is the leader of the department, therefore, when he voices concern or raises awareness or an issue, others will follow, listen, and start being more aware too. Athletics, academics, and a student-athlete’s social life, in most cases, go hand-in-hand, so the departments that are dealing with those should be closely connected and intertwined as well.

**Future Research**

This study intentionally looked at the male student-athlete perspective, however this study should be replicated with female student-athletes. In doing such a study, one could determine the differences and similarities between genders, and identify ways to provide greater support. This study also directly looked at baseball, football, and men’s track and field, so it should be replicated among different sports teams on a college campus. The researcher looked at
a fall sport, a spring sport, and a year-round sport, but if one study was done to look solely at fall
sports, another for spring sports, and third one for year-round sports, and how those student-athletes transition looked specifically, one could determine who and what was impacting their transition depending on the sports season they were in.

Also, this study also was done at a midsized, Division I institution in the Midwest. It should be replicated at Division II and Division III universities in the same area, with about the same population. Division II universities are unique in the fact that they are typically just as competitive as several Division I schools, but they do not have the athletic fund that a Division I school does. Research shows that Division II offers more of a holistic approach with their student-athletes, while still offering financial aid through athletic and academic scholarships. Division III, on the other hand, does not offer athletic scholarships and puts a lot higher emphasis on academic success. Noting these differences throughout Division I, II, and III universities may impact the transition of that student-athlete, and one could determine any similarities or differences across them at the collegiate level.

Another recommendation would be to look at student-athletes in certain sports seasons. Football, volleyball, soccer, and field hockey all compete in the fall; baseball, softball, and lacrosse compete in the spring; while track and field and swimming are year-round sports. Researching if these sports teams describe their transition, similarly, have the same key players, and use the same resources based on the season they are in, would be important to better understand. Although football, soccer, and hockey are in the same season, their schedules, athletic demands, and expectations may differ. This may help in understanding athletes who are active in different seasons but that we need to study more to see if there are connections within that.
Lastly, a recommendation would be to narrow the study down to the impact that a student-athletes roommate has on his or her transition. This ended up being a large part of the findings and would be relevant to dissect further. Most likely, before the student-athletes are on-campus, they are already talking to their soon-to-be roommate and they do not really stop until their first year is over with. The roommate assignment is an integral part to the transition for a college student, and makes a large portion of the academic, athletic, and social transition to a college campus for student’s specifically, but especially student-athletes.

Conclusion

Schlossberg’s transition theory was used to help better understand how student-athletes describe their transition, who the key players were in it, and what resources they were utilizing throughout it. Schlossberg helps frame the student-athlete and provide a way to look at what kind of strategies they used in this transition and who they had as support to help aid them through the transition using her four dimensions: Self, situation, strategies, support.

The student-athletes ended up describing their overall transition into three different parts: academics, athletics, and social life. With academics, the biggest struggle the participants in this study was learning how to manage their time as a student and as an athlete. Many of them have never had the kind of academic support or the resources they are now provided with on a college campus, so this is something that needs to be learned overtime. Athletically, they spoke about how everything was intensified at the collegiate level. The competition increased, the practices were longer, the expectation was higher, and the weights were heavier. Overall, they again, had to learn how to manage it all and give their bodies time to adjust physically to their new normal. When injuries arise with first-year student-athletes, this study found that they were not always aware of how to use the athletic trainers. Like academic support, they may not have had a trainer
in high school or understood what they were there for, so this is important to address early on in the transition, so the athletic trainers are properly used and understood. And socially, the research study found all three of these areas to be intertwined. The findings show, with these participants, that when athletics are going well for them, their social life is also going well, which results in academics typically going well too, but not always. When athletics are not going well, typically academics are not either, and this usually impacts their social transition. Also, when academics are not going well, typically athletics may not be either, so this could impact their social life. When academic affairs, student affairs, and the athletic department better understands this, they can begin to better help a student-athlete transitioning through their first-year on a college campus.
References


Appendix A
Interview Protocol

1. Talk to me about your high school experience
   a. How was it academically? Did it come easy for you?
   b. Athletically? Did you do really well?
   c. What role did your parents play during high school?

2. What resources did you use in high school?
   a. Were they beneficial/helpful to you – If not, how come?

3. What was your recruiting process like?
   a. How often did you visit the college?
   b. How often did you talk to your coach(es) throughout it?
   c. Did you meet any future teammates during it?
   d. If you visited the campus, did you meet with an advisor or faculty member?
   e. What led you to decide to attend this institution and be a student-athlete here?

4. Tell me about your transition from high school to a Division I college campus
   a. What did you like about it?
   b. What was challenging for you?
   c. How was your experience compared to what you were told it would be like?
   d. Socially, athletically, and academically

5. What resources do you use now that have helped you transition to being on a college campus?
   a. Are they beneficial/helpful – If not, how come?
   b. What provided you with the greatest support? How?
   c. In what ways did you feel challenged as a student?

6. Who has been a “key player” throughout your transition?
   a. Tell me more about them
   b. Do they talk to you about your academics? Athletics? Both?
   c. In what ways have they impacted your transition?
   d. How do you think your transition would have looked without them?

7. What else would you like me to know about you? Your transition specifically?
   a. What expectation did you have coming in – How has it lived up/not lived up?
   b. Have you ever thought about transferring – Why or why not?
   c. What did you think I would ask you about that you wanted to share, or you wanted me to know?

8. In light of what we talked about today, what will you do differently this year, that may not have worked last year?