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Academic Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find what perceptions did academic faculty have of student-athletes, if any, at a mid-sized Midwestern Division-I institution. The study addressed a gap in literature that existed of researched perceptions academic faculty members had of the student-athlete population as there was a lack of literature related to student-athletes through that lens. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Identity Theory for theoretical conceptualization of the data, the study was able to find tangible evidence for the existence of perceptions of student-athletes from academic faculty and what behaviors, exposure, and experiences related to student-athletes contributed to those perceptions. The study found that academic faculty have more positive perceptions of student-athletes when they understand the unique demands student-athletes have, when they can see the impact they make on an institution's campus, and when they are exposed to student-athletes outside of the classroom in settings such as academic faculty office hours. Additionally, it was found that female identifying student-athletes elicited more positive perceptions from academic faculty compared to their male identifying counterparts. Similarly, student-athletes who participated on nonrevenue generating smaller teams had more positive perceptions associated to them than their counterparts on larger revenue generating teams. Strategies for improving perceptions through collaboration and communication between student-athletes, faculty, and the institutions athletics department, and recommendations for future companion studies and research are discussed within the study.

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Jacob M. Mueller

Department of Counseling and Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find what perceptions did academic faculty have of student-athletes, if any, at a midsized Midwestern Division-I institution. The study addressed a gap in literature that existed of researched perceptions academic faculty members had of the student-athlete population as there was a lack of literature related to student-athletes through that lens. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Identity Theory for theoretical conceptualization of the data, the study was able to find tangible evidence for the existence of perceptions of student-athletes from academic faculty and what behaviors, exposure, and experiences related to student-athletes contributed to those perceptions. The study found that academic faculty have more positive perceptions of student-athletes when they understand the unique demands student-athletes have, when they can see the impact they make on an institution's campus, and when they are exposed to student-athletes outside of the classroom in settings such as academic faculty office hours. Additionally, it was found that female identifying student-athletes elicited more positive perceptions from academic faculty compared to their male identifying counterparts. Similarly, student-athletes who participated on nonrevenue generating smaller teams had more positive perceptions associated to them than their counterparts on larger revenue generating teams. Strategies for improving perceptions through collaboration and communication between student-athletes, faculty, and the institutions athletics department, and recommendations for future companion studies and research are discussed within the study.

Keywords: student-athlete, academic faculty, NCAA, perceptions, Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Identity Theory

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to three individuals that have been on my mind and in my heart throughout this life changing process and whom I love dearly.

To the late Pearl Mueller, my grandmother, you used to love reading my golf scores in the paper. I would love to think you would have enjoyed reading this thesis as well. I miss you every day, but I know you are always with me. I will see you soon enough and I hope I have made you proud.

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To Nikki Mueller, my mother, you gave me life, now I must take it and change the world. All my love.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Every academic year, new students arrive at their respective institution and embark on their collegiate journey. Some of those students, however, play a more nontraditional role within the college campus which greatly impacts their interactions with their respective institution. Student-athletes play an integral yet often controversial role within the modern collegiate experience. Unlike non-athletes, student-athletes must manage day-to-day activities such as practices or games, both on weekdays and weekends, extensive travel often resulting in scheduling conflicts with registered academic classes, potential injuries leading to unexpected outcomes, and mental strain or exhaustion (Comeaux, 2012). Student-athletes have a unique collegiate experience that creates sometimes unwinnable challenges because of the demand placed on balancing time, athletic identity, and academic expectations (Rankin et al., 2016).

Moreover, the demand and expectations for results on the field of play for student-athletes only creates a more nontraditional student experience. The cultural factors such as winning, especially in high revenue generating sports, often leads to lower academic expectations, standards, and results. These themes are unfortunately perpetuated by the coaches that play a pivotal role in the student-athletes' collegiate experiences (Bell, 2009). Coaches, while focused on winning, are tasked with being role-models for student-athletes and are one of the most powerful forces when it comes to ensuring that a student-athlete is equally as successful in the classroom as they are on the field (p.20). A lack of performance on the field and within the classroom creates

stereotypes of the student-athlete population that are instilled in, and perpetuated by, the larger campus community (Engstrom et al., 1995).

Previous research has been conducted around the relationship academic faculty have with student-athletes and the role academic resources and academic expectations have on the student-athlete experience (Baucom & Lantz, 2001, Gruber, 2003, Stokowski et al., 2016). Academic faculty interact with both student-athletes and non-athlete students within the classroom setting. However, these interactions may be different based on the demands, expectations, or knowledge that academic faculty have of the different classifications of students. Based on these differing interactions, academic faculty may make comparisons between non-athlete students and student-athletes and in some cases these comparisons have perpetuated a false stereotype that student-athletes are seen as “dumb jocks” (Baucom & Lantz, 2001).

If negative, perceptions that academic faculty have of both student-athletes and intercollegiate athletics may lead to conflicts and can potentially reduce the ability of student-athletes to meet academic goals (Stokowski et al., 2016). Most of the research and literature that has been published regarding academic faculty and their relationships with student-athletes has been centered around the negative perceptions academic faculty have expressed about the role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education and more directly, the student-athlete population. However, additional research has been done to address the positive impact academic faculty can have on student-athletes, both on the field and in the classroom (Bell, 2009, Comeaux, 2012, Ott, 2011). As intercollegiate athletics began its climb back to normalcy after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the understanding of perceptions towards the student-athlete population and the reasons

those perceptions exist may provide higher education, intercollegiate athletics, and academic administrators a playbook for creating a more well-rounded working relationship between academic faculty members and student-athletes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes at a midsized, Midwestern, Division-I public institution. Academic faculty interact with student-athletes in a classroom setting which makes up part of the academic structure of the institution. In this setting, where student-athletes engage with academic faculty only, they are seen as students first. However, non-athlete students, athletic event spectators, and even university administration that interact with the student-athlete population in other settings across campus may view the student-athlete population more as athletes first, rather than students first (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Various research has been conducted relevant to how key nonacademic university stakeholders perceive student-athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001, Simons et al., 2007, Winger & White, 2015). This study aimed to add to the literature regarding the perceptions of student-athletes from an academic faculty perspective, explore why those perceptions exist and address a gap in literature regarding academic faculty perceptions of student-athletes at institutions similar to the research site.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study aimed to provide clarity relating to the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes at a midsized Midwestern Division-I public institution. The following questions were used to guide the scope of this study:

RQ1: Prior to becoming an academic faculty member, what perceptions of student-athletes exist for faculty?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of current academic faculty members of student-athletes?

RQ3: How does exposure to student-athletes impact the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes.

RQ4: Do perceptions of student-athletes from academic faculty differ based on different demographic identifiers of the student-athlete?

Significance of the Study

As more research has been done around the student-athlete and academic faculty relationship, it has become clear that some faculty maintain prejudicial feelings toward the student-athlete populations (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). This study was significant because it added to the literature surrounding the student-athlete population, and specifically added literature specific to what perceptions academic faculty have of the student-athlete population, which is lacking. In addition, data collected in this study uncovered factors that impacted the perceptions that academic faculty have of student-athletes. By conducting this research, more information related to the working relationships of student-athletes, the athletics department, academic faculty, and the academic expectations and standards of the institution is now available to provide a clearer understanding for institutions of higher education regarding the relationship between academic faculty and student-athletes.

Limitations of the study

While the study aimed to identify perceptions that academic faculty have of student-athletes, there were limitations to the scope of the research. The first limitation of the study was the lack of institutional diversification. This study was conducted at one midsized public Midwestern Division-I institution. The data collected, and results gathered, may not be transferable to any other academic faculty sample at another institution. The results only reflect the shared experiences and interactions of the interviewed sample size at the researched institution. Another limitation was the assumed honesty of the participants. Interviewing academic faculty regarding the perceptions they have of a select student population of the campus they work at may have led to a sense of apprehension regarding what feelings, information, or stories they wished to share. This may have created unintentional trends, patterns, or significance when interpreting the data which could have limited the validity of the study.

Delimitations of the study

Participants selected for this study were academic faculty members who had taught at least one section of university sanctioned coursework that included an identified student-athlete. This allowed for the consistent examination and analysis of any common themes that were identified through the interviews with the participants of the study. Throughout the interview process, data collection and data analysis phase, and the writing of the results, all IRB protocols were followed to ensure confidentiality of the participants. This further protected the validity of the study and was intended to lessen the apprehension of honesty from the participants.

Assumptions

Within this study, the main assumption was that academic faculty would be able to identify or have identified who the student-athletes were within the academic classroom setting and would be able to recall interactions or experiences with this student population that affected their perceptions of the population.

Definition of terms

Academic faculty. Instructor, researcher, citizen, and scholar within departments, faculties, and the wider university community (Amundsen et al., 2005)

Intercollegiate athletics. Athletic sports played at the collegiate level for which eligibility requirements for participation by a student athlete are established by a national association for the promotion or regulation of college athletics (Legal Information Institute, n.d.)

NCAA. The National Collegiate Athletic Association - serves as the governing and regulatory body for intercollegiate athletics. (Gruber, 2003)

Non-athlete student. Students who report or have reported no such organized collegiate athletic activity. (Edwards & Froehle, 2023)

Perception. A belief or opinion, often held by many people and based on how things seem. (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.)

Student-athlete. A person who is a full-time university student, and who participates in athletics or plays at least one sport sanctioned by the NCAA. (Pato et al., 2014).

Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of the perceptions academic faculty may have towards student-athletes. It provided an examination of the student-athlete and academic faculty relationship in a broad context. Within this chapter, research questions were outlined that will help guide the study. The significance of the study and the limitations were also outlined to help conceptualize the nature of the study along with several key definitions. Chapter II will cover the relevant literature that was used to guide this study.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This chapter focused on previous research dedicated to providing information and clarification to the interconnected relationships of intercollegiate athletics, higher education institutions, academic faculty, and student-athletes. It focused on the role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education from a historical and progressive view, provided background information regarding the complex relationships' intercollegiate athletics and student-athletes have with their various campus partners. This chapter provided data regarding the perceptions that are prevalent of student-athletes from various populations within higher education institutions such as non-athlete students, institutional administrations and most importantly for the framework of this study, academic faculty.

History of Intercollegiate Athletics

Intercollegiate athletics within the United States education model is widely accepted as a staple of the college experience. Participation in intercollegiate athletics provides a vastly different and impactful opportunity for students who are able to participate in intercollegiate athletic activities (Osborne et al., 2020). Before the 19th century, American intercollegiate athletics were not as developed and organized as we see today (Eckenrod & Nam, 2021). The first true spectator sporting activity that took place was a rowing competition between Harvard and Yale in 1852 (Eckenrod & Nam, 2021). Intercollegiate athletics only expanded from there. Starting in 1906, with the formation of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) as a standard body

focused on the unification of collegiate event rules and regulations, the first resemblance of modern intercollegiate athletics was seen (Freeman, 1978).

The formation of the NCAA was centered around player safety related to football injuries when then United States President Theodore Roosevelt raised concerns after a multitude of deaths right at the turn of the 20th century (Eckenrod & Nam, 2021). Smith (2011, as cited in Osborne et al., 2020) shed light on the progression of the NCAA after its inception. All institutions had the freedom to determine how each athletics department was run on their respective campus. This concept of execution had been seen in the NCAA for at least 25 years. In the later 1900's various other situational and policy changes came about. In the 1950's the NCAA shifted into a regulatory and enforcement organization centered around ensuring standard rules and regulations for all member institutions (Osborne et al., 2020).

With the passing of Title IX legislation in 1972, the NCAA fought hard to gain exemptions for revenue sports and fought to depict Title IX as a "quota system" (Gaston, 2003). Title IX had a dramatic impact on the NCAA and the women's movement within sport. The passing of the legislation brought new requirements for the NCAA, and they were forced to adapt policies, terminology, and create new opportunities for women as athletes, administrators, and coaches (Gaston, 2003). In more recent years, the NCAA has focused on amateurism, and how to keep it a core foundational piece while focusing hard on infractions from high-end institutions to protect the integrity of the organization and of intercollegiate athletics (Eckenrod & Nam, 2021).

Academic Faculty Perceptions of Intercollegiate Athletics

With the growth and popularity of intercollegiate athletics, and prior to the formation of the NCAA, there was documented apprehension and concern of university academic faculty regarding the role intercollegiate athletics would play within an academic setting (Osborne et al., 2020). This apprehension is still prevalent in the current relationship structure of intercollegiate athletics and academics (Sherman, 1988). However, the NCAA for years contended that participation in intercollegiate athletics provided positive benefits for its participants (Engstrom et al., 1995). This assertion is supported by various research initiatives (Engstrom et al., 1995; Orr & Hughes, 2021; Tucker et al., 2016).

Recent studies conducted by Osborne et al. (2020) and Orr and Hughes (2021), gathered data and showed that academic faculty believe that participating in intercollegiate athletics is crucial in providing an enhanced academic experience and that student-athletes who participated in intercollegiate athletics, found multiple benefits directly related to their participation. Highlighted benefits included access to higher education through potential scholarships, support throughout educational endeavors such as tutoring and academic workshops, and enhanced strength and conditioning programs. These benefits were found to be foundational to the fit of intercollegiate athletics in the current higher education culture.

Tucker et al. (2016) conducted a study that looked at the perceptions undergraduate students have of their student-athlete peers at a Division I institution, and found that while the benefits found relating to faculty by Orr & Hughes (2021) for student-athletes were the result of their participation in the sport, the benefits were also

be seen by non-athlete students as privileges awarded only to those on athletic teams which can lead to feelings of resentment towards athletic departments and student-athletes. The research did indicate that student-athletes were valued on the institutions campus as a part of the campus culture, however, a further dive into the data revealed that more than half the participants felt that student-athletes received special treatment from faculty members in the form of special privileges in the classroom (Tucker et al., 2016). This idea has been researched for over 25 years as Sherman (1988) had similar findings regarding faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics and athletic departments across the country. Data collected revealed that faculty perceived intercollegiate athletics to be important but nonessential to the collegiate experience and moreover, participants alluded to a lack of trust in the administration's motives and purpose regarding intercollegiate athletics (Sherman, 1988).

While broad general perceptions have been documented, context or experiences and interaction levels have also been examined from various populations on collegiate campuses to paint a broader picture of the perceptions that exist across campuses of intercollegiate athletics. Tovar (2011) conducted a study around the concept of contact and the role contact can play in manifesting perceptions of intercollegiate athletics both positive and negative. Academic faculty in the study shared positive perceptions of the overall campus athletic programs. Furthermore, academic faculty stated that they disagree strongly with the assertion that their respective institution does not run a clean athletics program (Tovar, 2011). When examining the level of contact or interaction that academic faculty had with the athletics department in any capacity, it was concluded that the less interactions academic faculty had, the higher the level of negative perceptions or

stereotypes they had towards the athletics department and those within it, especially student-athletes.

Similar research had also been done with populations that work directly with student-athletes and with athletics departments in an academic capacity. For instance, Stokowski et al., (2016) studied the perceptions academic advisors carried towards both student-athletes and athletics departments and found similar results to Tovar's research. Stokowski et al., (2016) studied Division I power 5 conferences and the Big East and found that of the 369 academic advisors who participated, the advisors had a slightly negative view of not only student-athletes, but the larger athletic programs at their institutions. In congruence with Tovar's findings five years prior, contact and exposure could be considered a correlating factor to the findings. Data showed a lack of advisor understanding of both NCAA rules related to eligibility and furthermore, uncovered a lack of involvement with the athletics department for participating academic advisors. (p.79).

One factor that contributes to perceptions of intercollegiate athletics is the time commitment associated with participating in a sport or being on a sports team. Academic faculty showed concern about time requirements outside of the classroom for student-athletes and believed it created more of a burden for those students as opposed to students who did not participate in intercollegiate athletics (Lawrence et al., 2009). Because of the structure of intercollegiate athletics during the academic year, student-athletes had little free time and had difficulty taking advantage of certain campus events and often waited to do career development until a less busy time in the year such as the summer (Gruber, 2003).

Another important concept to consider when looking at faculty and their perception of the role of intercollegiate athletics on college campuses, is what type of institution they are employed at. Cockley and Roswal, (1994, as cited in Lawrence et al., 2009), found faculty that work at Division I institutions where athletics play a bigger role in campus culture, often showed less satisfaction with intercollegiate athletics compared to employees at institutions residing in lower NCAA classifications. Previous research looked at the differences between perceptions of intercollegiate athletics as a program as well as the assumptions about student-athletes as individuals.

Academic Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes

On a large scale, student-athletes reported feeling stereotyped by their faculty members in multiple studies (Cooper et al., 2016; Engstrom et al., 1995; Winniger & White, 2015). The perception that student-athletes are academically inferior to their non-athlete student counterparts exists on college campuses from a variety of campus stakeholders including academic faculty. One third of student-athletes reported being perceived negatively by academic faculty members (Simons et al., 2007). When interviewed, student-athletes often divulged that microaggressions were present from both academic faculty and fellow students relating to perceived academic motivation and the priority of academics for student-athletes (Comeaux, 2012). Similarly, Simmons et. al (2007) reported that 60% of student-athletes had witnessed or heard academic faculty make a negative comment regarding student-athletes. This evidence supports previous data collected that shows academic faculty often perceive student-athletes more negatively than they do non-student athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995; Piper, 2020).

Engstrom et al. (1995) conducted research at a large Division I institution while Baucom & Lantz (2001) conducted similar research at a small Division II institution. The findings of both studies indicated evidence present that academic faculty expressed negative attitudes or perceptions towards student-athletes due to the fact they felt student-athletes received preferential treatment within the institution in a variety of expressed ways (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). The suspected preferential treatment included a less rigorous academic admissions process, greater financial support, and specialized academic services and expectations (p. 271)

Situationally, academic faculty tended to elicit greater negativity surrounding certain themes pertaining to student-athletes and academics. Evidence was published by Simons et al. (2007) that a male student-athlete witnessed before a test an academic faculty member stating “It’s an easy test. Even athletes can pass”. Themes such as scholarships and exam entrance scores also seemed to elicit more negative feelings from academic faculty who thought these things aligned with the assumptions of the special treatment student-athletes were given (Piper, 2020). These expressed perceptions can be cause for concern. In exploring academic faculty relationships with student athletes, Bell (2009) found that it was not until senior year that student-athletes felt a strong relationship towards or with an academic faculty member. Furthermore, the study found that most sophomores felt that they had not yet connected with one academic faculty member in their time at the respective institution (Bell, 2009).

Relationships that student-athletes establish with faculty and other peers outside of the athletic setting such as teammates, directly relate to academic success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). In looking at academic success for student-athlete through a conceptual

model, Comeaux and Harrison claim that relationships such as the ones academic faculty can have with student-athletes may provide opportunities for support and communication regarding personal and academic goals for the student-athlete. Additionally, positive relationships are seen to be beneficial with academic faculty for student-athletes as those relationships serves as a means of enhancing and promoting intellectual development (Umbach et al., 2006).

Role of the Dumb Jock Stereotype in Perceptions of Student-Athletes

The *dumb jock stereotype* is the perceived idea that student-athletes are not as capable of high academic achievement in comparison to their non-athlete student counterparts (Coakley, 2004). There is evidence suggesting student-athletes often experience prejudice and stereotyping which can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy centered around the dumb jock identity (Wininger & White, 2015). Wininger and White (2015) posed the question in their study, “If athletes feel a negative stereotype around them, why does this matter” (p.77), and studies have shown that this negative stereotype can indeed have a negative effect a student-athletes’ academic performance (Adler & Adler, 1985; Harrison, 2001).

The dumb jock stereotype can be perpetuated by academic faculty in the classroom leading to thoughts of student-athletes being of low intelligence and not academically driven, which often leads to the perception of undeserved privileges (Simons et al., 2007). Academic faculty who contributes to the dumb jock stereotype can harm a student-athlete’s academic identity overall while support from dedicated academic faculty and staff can instead increase academic performance in student-athletes as when

they begin to feel supported, it can lead to positive personal affirmations (Harrison et al. 2002).

There are many factors that contribute to the stereotype threat illustrated by the “dumb jock stereotype”. The degree to which one identifies in social groups such as gender, race, students, or athletic group are some identified in research conducted by Feltz et al. (2013). Athletic identity for student-athletes is often associated with negative academic perceptions or stereotypes (Feltz et al., 2013). However, the sole “student” identity is often associated with a positive academic perception from academic faculty (p.185). The role with which the identities are displayed or interpreted, may change the perceptions and interactions a student-athlete will have with an academic faculty member. A perceived strong athletic identity may make the negative perceptions associated with student-athletes more prevalent in the minds of the academic faculty members which can lead to differing interactions as opposed to if the more positively perceived student identity is more demonstrated by the student-athletes (Feltz et al., 2013).

Research has shown that stereotypes and expectations affect behavior which can sometimes lead to a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (Aronson & Steele, 2005). This self-fulfilling prophecy for student-athletes may manifest in less effort and motivation towards academic achievement. When a person or persons wrongly assess others or draws conclusions about another with little to no factual understanding or evidence of a person or persons, that is when stereotypes are created (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). This knowledge and definition of stereotypes helps to paint the larger picture of how stereotypes can be harmful to any student population, but especially, the student-athlete

population. It is plausible that student-athletes will engage in academically handicapping behaviors if they believe the “dumb jock” stereotype to be true (Winner & White, 2015).

Role of Gender in Perceptions of Student-Athletes

Engstrom et al., (1995), gathered data that indicated that academic faculty members were more likely to have negative perceptions towards male student-athletes regarding academic performance. The study looked at perceptions and stereotypes of male student-athletes based on whether their respective sport was a revenue generating sport for the institution. The study indicated findings that were not limited based on the variable of revenue. The results confirmed that regardless of revenue generation, male student-athletes were left vulnerable to negative perceptions regarding academic competency (Engstrom et al., 1995). Baucom and Lantz (2001) found data in a future study that showed that not only were there more negative attitudes and perceptions outwardly expressed towards male student-athletes than towards female student-athletes, but these actions also manifested themselves across the entire institution and were not limited to a specific academic department.

One of the negative perceptions that is persistent when it comes to the gender of the student-athlete is the idea of male athletes cheating or engaging in academic dishonesty which has been studied in recent years. The assumption or questioning of academic dishonesty seems to have a large gender discrepancy as 14% of men reported having been suspected or accused of academic dishonesty as opposed to 1.4% of their female identifying counterparts in a study of 538 student athletes from a large Division 1 institution (Simons et al., 2007). There is also more literature overall that looks at the

perceptions key stakeholders within the higher education setting have of male-identifying student-athletes as opposed to their female-identifying counterparts. According to Baucom & Lantz (2001), male student-athletes face the often-misguided prejudice that they benefit from special academic provisions such as advanced or expanded tutoring assistance and full scholarships. This assertion has been echoed in previous literature dating back 30 years when fifty-five percent of faculty surveyed in a study of 1,000 college faculty believed that student-athletes, predominantly males, received benefits that other non-athlete students are unable to receive (Sherman, 1988).

Female student-athletes have seen more opportunity to participate in sports since the 1970's due largely in part to the passing of Title IX legislation (Person et al., 2001). With this has come the opportunity, in recent years, to study gender differences when it comes to the student-athlete experiences on college campuses. Adler and Adler (1985) found that female-identifying student-athletes tended to express a more positive academic environment and performed better academically than their male peers. Comeaux et al. (2014) used the previous research of Adler and Adler as a backdrop to look at campus engagement for student-athletes. While the information gathered from Comeaux's study is a firsthand account from female student-athletes and not from the lens of academic faculty, the data gathered is relevant as it illustrates that perceptions, if they exist, may change the educational dynamic between academic faculty members and student-athletes and that different perceptions do exist between male and female identifying student-athletes.

Academic advisors, when providing constructive feedback with female student-athletes about observed academic skills, abilities, and potential, seemed to have a positive

impact on that student-athlete's academic achievement (Comeaux et al., 2014). Furthermore, female student-athletes indicated having a more well-rounded and beneficial relationship with academic faculty leading to a more positive outlook of their campus climate (Hoffman et al., 2016). There is the perception of a charge for higher education professionals to advocate for female-identifying student-athletes to continue to help them grow in their overall development (Person et al., 2001).

The narrative surrounding previous literature when related to gender and perception has a very different tone to it when addressing male-identifying student-athletes as opposed to female identifying student-athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001; Engstrom et al., 1995; Simons et al. 2007). One hypothesis for such a difference could be a result from the discrepancy in amount of literature out there. Another potential reason could be that faculty happen to perceive female identifying student-athletes better than they perceive male identifying student-athletes.

Role of Race in Perceptions of Student-Athletes

Black student-athletes often recognize and report encountering negative stereotypical beliefs from peers and academic faculty regarding their academic ability and outcomes (Harrison, 2001; Melendez, 2008). The aforementioned "dumb jock" stereotype has associations to all student-athletes but has disproportionately applied to Black student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1985; Harrison, 2001). A common harbored stereotype from academic stakeholders including academic faculty towards Black male student-athletes is that they only choose to attend college to further athletic pursuits or interest and that educational development is not their priority (Engstrom et al., 1995; Sailes, 2017).

Black male student-athletes across all sports and divisions reported low positive agreement values with campus climate, feeling as if they had received differential treatment because of their athletic status (Cooper et al., 2017). These findings echo the findings of Simons et al. (2007), where it was discovered that only nine percent of student-athletes stated that they had been suspected of cheating. However, 26.2% of African American student-athletes reported they had been suspected of cheating, while only 6.2% of white student-athletes reported being accused or suspected of cheating. Other races only had 5.2% of their population report suspicion of cheating. Black male identifying student-athletes at historically and predominately white institutions are often and repeatedly met with more discriminatory behaviors surrounding their academics than white students (Cooper et al., 2016). However, the literature does address whether black student-athletes are as willing to report negative interactions with the higher education system as their majority peers.

Research supports that type of institution may also have an effect when it comes to perceptions of student-athletes across racial and ethnic lines. Comeaux and Harrison (2007) published a study that surveyed 1031 White and 739 Black identifying football and basketball players through two surveys. The first survey was conducted in 2000 when the participants were first-year students, and the subsequent survey was administered in 2004. The data collected revealed evidence and findings that suggest that Black and White male student-athletes did not benefit equally from their interactions with academic faculty (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007).

However, there have also been studies that provided evidence of race not playing a role in the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes. Carter-Francique et al.

(2015) found in their study at a predominately white institution in the southern United States, that among nine African American participants, four of whom indicated that they were doing well academically and five who indicated that they were not, all the student athletes shared that they had had positive experiences and relationships with their academic faculty at the institution. Similarly, Piper (2020), found in their study of (209 faculty at a division I, II, and III schools) that race did not impact perceptions of academic faculty toward student-athletes significantly which deviated from previous research done (p.65). This disagreement from the majority of published literature may be the result of when asked about their perceptions, faculty did not indicate any bias, but when looking at the effects and student perceptions, that bias was present.

While it is important to note that student-athlete and academic faculty interactions contribute to desirable collegiate outcomes for student-athletes, the relationship should be interpreted with caution (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). A study conducted by Comeaux and Harrison warns that the campus involvement including that within a classroom is often “grossly diminished” for Black student-athletes (p.241). It is thought that this is a primary result of a seemingly hostile campus environment towards racial minorities and low academic expectations from “significant members” of the campus community (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). It could be inferred that academic faculty members are a part of the “significant members” of the campus community as research with similar findings has been previously documented surrounding how Black student-athletes feel they are perceived academically (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Harrison, 2001).

Most research surrounding the experiences including perceptions of Black male student-athletes has been conducted at Division I predominately White institutions

(PWIs) (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). However, Cooper and Hawkins (2012) conducted mixed methods research of 48 varsity men's basketball and football players at a historically Black university (HBU) in the Southeastern United States in an attempt to identify factors that were associated with academic achievement and positive college experiences for those student-athletes. The study found qualitative data that showed when student-athletes made personal connections with academic faculty and academic support staff at the institution, it created greater feelings of trust, confidence, and motivation among the participants (Cooper & Hawkins, 2012). Furthermore, it was found that participants reported that their faculty members at the HBU had expressed a vested and genuine interest in the student-athletes holistic development as both a student and an athlete and not just an athlete (p.178). These findings differ from attitudes expressed by Black student-athletes at PWIs such as the data published by Carter-Francique et al., (2015). This difference may be a result of academic faculty and student-athletes demonstrating shared identities which perhaps changes the exposure and interactions levels of the groups with one another leading to different perceptions. In order to solidify that hypothesis, more data would need to be gathered and cross compared between relationships of academic faculty and student-athletes at PWIs and HBUs from both the academic faculty and student-athlete perspective.

To shed light on how to help racial minority student-athletes, especially Black male student athletes, Cooper (2016) uses previous theories and concepts applied to Black male students-athletes in his own unique approach called Excellence Beyond Athletics (EBA). This approach is a series of best practices and recommendations that

can help enhance and develop the academic achievement and overall holistic being of a Black male student-athlete at post-secondary institutions in the United States. (p.271). Cooper highlights one concept in his EBA approach that directly involves academic faculty and the fostering of a holistic approach with student-athletes. Cooper calls for the implementation of a more formalized faculty-student mentorship program that would be largely based outside of the classroom but focus on topics that are non-athletic to expand the student-athletes more holistic development (Cooper, 2016). This approach could create new exposure to and around minority student-athletes and this exposure may potentially lead to positive understandings from academic faculty of niche challenges that are faced by minority student athletes and specifically as research supports, Black male student-athletes.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the perceptions academic faculty may have of student-athletes, it is important to conceptualize that the behaviors and identities demonstrated by student-athletes have impacted the outcomes of experiences and interactions with academic faculty. This may have an impact on the perceptions that academic faculty have of the student-athlete as an individual or student-athletes as a student population. The Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Identity Theory provide a lens with which the findings from this study will be interpreted through examining the behaviors and identities of student-athletes and what perceptions exist from academic faculty towards student-athletes based on those behaviors and identities.

Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a widely accepted expectancy-value model that measures relationships among attitudes and behaviors, which has been used to often predict future behaviors (Conner & Armitage, 1998). The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is based on three primary factors: 1. An individual's attitude towards a behavior or action, 2. Norms surrounding the behavior, 3. Perceived control of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Using this theory, the attitudes, both positive or negative, towards a behavior can be examined when looking at academic faculty and their perceptions of student-athletes. The recognition of norms associated with the behavior, that is the amount of control over a specific behavior, impacts the perceptions that individuals have of someone demonstrating said behavior.

This theory can be applied when examining the perceptions of academic faculty towards student-athletes. If student-athletes are demonstrating behaviors in a specific manner, TPB will explain how the behaviors displayed by student-athletes in a classroom setting creates, challenges, or enhances the perceptions about student-athlete from academic faculty members. This theory allows for the interaction between the students' behavior and the perspectives and perceptions that may exist from academic faculty. The theory also helps to conceptualize how certain behaviors demonstrated by student-athletes may create or reinforce the perceptions that exist from academic faculty based on how those behaviors are acted out by student-athletes. This theory also provides a framework that questions whether the behaviors demonstrated by student-athletes stem from pre-conceived ideas that student-athletes have on how they are perceived by academic faculty though that question may be difficult to address within the nature of this

study. The theory of planned behavior will also help to articulate how perceptions perpetuated and held by academic faculty members towards student-athletes may impact the choices in behaviors that are acted out or engaged in by student-athletes both positive and negative.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory conceptualizes a person's identity regarding their membership in various social groups or categories and one's personal identification within those mediums (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). Identity is thought to be formed through the dynamics and interactions with individuals. Social identity theory suggests that people form identities based on social groups and those groups or affiliations may in turn, influence their behaviors (p.90). This theory can be applied to the idea of student-athletes and their existence within the classroom, and what perceptions may exist from academic faculty because of those displayed identities.

The identity of intercollegiate student-athletes is often formed and sustained with the teams they play on, their friends, and the larger academic institution including the classes they take (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). Student-athletes are involved in two distinct social identity groups as they are both students and athletes at the same time. However, they may find themselves, based on the situation, identifying more as students in certain situations and more as athletes in another. These differing identities can lead to different perceptions being perpetuated towards the population as non-athlete students may not have the same conflicting identity dichotomy as student-athletes. For non-athlete students, they are students first regardless in a classroom setting, however student-athletes, may not be viewed or view themselves as students first depending on how they

are interpreting or showing their identity. This difference, if noticed by academic faculty may cause their perception of the student-athlete to change or be altered due to the behaviors being displayed by the student-athlete. Understanding how academic faculty socially group the students may allow for the recognition of some of the sources of faculty perceptions and assumptions about these students.

Summary

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that has informed this study. Literature reviewed provided data on the ongoing struggle within higher education related to intercollegiate athletics, the role intercollegiate athletics plays on the college campus, and most importantly how the student-athlete population has been characterized academically in the past by key university stakeholders including academic faculty. Literature surrounding the dumb jock stereotype is included and provides evidence to support the idea that if perceptions or stereotypes exist from academic faculty towards student-athletes, it may negatively impact the ability of the student-athlete to succeed academically. Literature related to the theory of planned behavior and social identity theory are also outlined and will provide a lens for interpretation of data in Chapter V.

CHAPTER III

Methods

This phenomenological study explored the relationships and interactions that academic faculty have with student-athletes and the perceptions of the student-athlete population that have arisen from these encounters. The study examined the perceptions that academic faculty have of student-athletes specifically at a midsized Midwestern Division-I institution. This chapter provides the description and procedures of the methods that were used within the study. Specifically, information regarding the design of the study, sample and participants, the research site, the instrumentation used, and the collection, analysis, and treatment of data will be outlined in detail.

Design of Study

This study was a phenomenological study that was intended to explore the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes within the academic setting of a midsized Midwestern Division-I institution. Zoom interviews of academic faculty were used to gather data for the study. To be eligible, participating faculty needed to have taught more than one section of university-sanctioned coursework that included an identified student-athlete. This study sought to capture the interactions and experiences academic faculty have had with student-athletes. This study used a qualitative approach to gather the descriptive narratives each academic faculty member could provide based on their interactions with student-athletes. A thematic analysis of the data gathered was conducted to identify important themes articulated by the participants. This approach and design allowed for the interactions that shaped the perceptions of academic faculty regarding student-athletes to be examined and for the impressions or perceptions that

arose from those interactions to be described and discussed with the intent to examine how they had impacted the academic faculty's perception of student-athletes at the researched institution.

Participants

Participants of the study were four academic faculty members who instructed courses with identifiable student-athletes enrolled in them at a midsized Midwestern institution. The researcher utilized university email to invite potential participants to interview with the researcher. During the Fall 2022 semester, the researcher employed a targeted strategy with the help of the university athletics department to find instructors that fit into the desired participant pool. The researcher collected data from academic faculty that instructed various courses on campus that included a high percentage of student-athletes enrolled. It is important to note in the participant demographic breakdown that participants responded differently when reporting the number of student-athletes in their courses with some using a percentage of student-athletes taking a class and some using the percentage of classes that contained student-athletes. This data is disseminated below. Additionally, for contextual purposes in conceptualizing responses it is important to note that all four participants were non-athlete students as undergraduates.

Participant One

Participant One identified as a White female. She teaches roughly eight courses in a typical academic year and estimated that five to ten percent of the student population she teaches are student-athletes. Participant One teaches courses within the College of Sciences at the institution. She has been an instructor at the research site institution for 15 years and previously taught courses at a community college.

Participant Two

Participant Two identified as an African American male. He teaches roughly 3 courses each semester or 6 per academic year and stated that he believed that 75% of those courses contained student-athletes. Participant Two teaches courses within the College of Arts and Sciences and has been an instructor at the research site institution for 18 years and has never taught courses at any other institution.

Participant Three

Participant Three identified as a Black male. He teaches at most four courses a semester and stated that the number of student athletes present in each course varies on the class. Participant Three stated they teach courses in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and has been an instructor at the institution for roughly 19 years. Participant Three also has taught courses at three other 4-year institutions.

Participant Four

Participant Four identified as a White male. He teaches four to five classes each semester for a total of no more than ten in an academic year. Participant Four shared that it depended on the course how many student-athletes would be in each course but that he has had at least one student-athlete in every course he has taught. Participant Four teaches in the College of Business and has been an instructor at the institution for 17 years. Participant Four had previously taught at one other 4-year institution.

Research Site

The study was conducted at a midsized Midwestern Division-I institution with a total student population of approximately 8,000 students as reported by the institution in Spring 2022. For athletics purposes, the institution is a part of Division-I FCS (Football

Championship Series) football and is considered a mid-major Division-I athletics institution for all other university sanctioned sports. According to data gathered from the U.S. Department of Education, the research site has 19 NCAA sanctioned athletic teams with a total of 477 student-athletes (Equity in Athletics, n.d.). The reported graduation rate all of students from the institution is 57% while the graduation rate specifically for student-athletes is over 80% according to the 2022 NCAA Graduation Success Rate. The student to faculty ratio within the classroom for the research site is 14:1.

Instrument

Semi-Structured Interviews

To gather data, semi-structured interviews were conducted, either virtually using the Zoom software platform or in person based upon the participant's preference. If so desired at the request of the participant, an in-person interview was conducted in a location chosen by the participant to provide privacy for the interview. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participant. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol (see Appendix A) designed to generate data relevant to addressing the study's research questions.

Data Collection

Data was collected between the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 semesters utilizing semi-structured, individual interviews. Interviews took place virtually via Zoom or in person. Participants were instructed to find an identified comfortable space that they would be able to participate in an interview of approximately 45-60 minutes. Participants were given a copy of an electronic consent agreement prior to the interview being conducted so they could review, and the consent form information was verbally

confirmed with them once they entered the zoom call or once the in-person interview was set to begin. Participants were asked to verbally consent to participating in the study after the informed consent agreement had been reviewed and all questions had been answered to the participant's satisfaction. The participant was asked if they gave their permission for the interview to be recorded, the participant was reminded of strict confidentiality on behalf of the researcher, and the interview began.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and stored in a password protected drive. To improve the credibility of the research, each participant was provided with a copy of the transcription of their respective interview to confirm accuracy in a process referred to as member checking (Guba, 1981). Each participant was able to confirm that the transcript had captured and reflected their intentions from the interview. The final approved transcript was then analyzed. A thematic analysis was used to codify the data. Thematic analysis is a flexible method of analysis that focuses on interrupting patterns that allow a researcher to generate codes that act as the building blocks for larger concepts that can be identified in the data known as themes (Clark et al., 2015). This method was appropriate for qualitative research and was the preferred method for this study due to its flexibility and applicability to research questions, sample sizes, and data gathered through lived experiences of the participants (Clark et al., 2015).

Once transcribed, the transcriptions were analyzed using descriptive coding. Descriptive coding is a method that uses words or phrases that when identified will assist in summarizing the data which will allow the researcher to find common themes among participants (Saldana, 2013). Each transcript was read and coded individually to find

themes. Themes were compared across transcripts to find the most common or most occurring among the participants. All analyses were conducted with the conceptual framework and research questions of the study in mind to assist in guiding interpretations. All important and relevant themes or schemas are reported in the results section of the study.

Treatment of Data

The data gathered from the study was handled, stored, and protected as prescribed by the research site's IRB protocols. All participants were assigned a pseudonym for the study to protect the participant's identity. All data collected was stored on a password protected drive that only the researcher had access to. All data will be kept for three years in accordance with IRB policy. Once that time has passed, all data will be destroyed in the means relative to the data storage.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology that was used for the study. This chapter reviews information on the participants and how they were identified and selected for participation. The data collection, treatment, and analysis were also covered and explained. Chapter IV will provide the responses of the participant interviews.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter summarizes the data obtained from four semi-structured interviews and reports the findings through a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was used to interpret responses and correlate them to the corresponding research question. The interviews were conducted to find and understand what perceptions, if any, exist from academic faculty towards the student-athlete population at a mid-sized Midwestern Division-I institution.

Research Question #1: Prior to becoming an academic faculty member, what perceptions of student-athletes exist for faculty?

Two major themes arose from participant responses that impacted their perceptions of student-athletes prior to their current careers as academic faculty members. These themes were the unique demands student-athletes face and the perceived differences regarding rules and favoritism directed toward student-athletes.

Unique Demands on Student Athletes

All four participants recounted experiences where they had witnessed the demands student-athletes face that non-student-athletes did not. They shared that these experiences shaped their perceptions of the student-athlete population. Participant Two spoke about gaining a level of respect for what student-athletes deal with when it comes to media notoriety.

You know the regular students; we weren't dealing with sports writers trying to chase us down for quotes and stuff like that. So, I wound up kind of having a level

of respect for the kinds of things they were going through because it's really not easy.

Participant Two also shared their awareness of the pressure that was on student-athletes that was not on non-student-athletes. Additionally, they shared how hard they witnessed student-athletes working because of the additional demands placed on them that were not placed on non-athlete-students.

Participant Three shared that before witnessing the scheduling and demands to balance their time firsthand as their own children became student-athletes, they thought student-athletes generally did not have to work as much or as hard as non-student-athletes.

Before I taught, I thought that the athletes generally didn't have to work as hard as much and that perception changed, not because I started teaching them, but because I had two kids of my own that were athletes and that changed my perception about everything.

Participants One and Four explained how their perceptions arose from seeing student-athletes be highly motivated and driven by being able to balance complex schedules through good time management skills. Participant One shared experiences they had with friends that were student-athletes when they were in college.

Before becoming a faculty member, the student-athletes that I knew, and ones that I was like even friends with, they were always busy and active, and they seemed like they were really go-getters because they were juggling athletics plus their schoolwork.

Participant Four spoke specifically about how their experiences with student-athletes as a student himself, highlighted the need for them to manage the demands of balancing their different schedules effectively.

My perception of student-athletes prior to becoming a faculty member is that they were very good at time management. They had to be to be able to balance the load between academics and their training, practice, and competing schedule.

All four participants were able to remember and describe instances where they witnessed the demands that student-athletes faced that were not encountered by non-student-athletes such as media attention, practice time, training and game scheduling, and academic balance. They described a sense of respect and acknowledgement that the different balancing needs for student-athletes compared to non-student-athletes was significant. Participants also shared that these demands, and the balancing skills that accompany them, created a different experience for student-athletes that was not present for their non -athletic peers.

Perceived Differentiation of Rules and Favoritism

Three out of the four participants were able to share instances where they perceived different rules or favoritism given to student-athletes. However, the majority of recounted events that were shared were hearsay or rumors. By-in-large, participants did not share firsthand accounts of witnessing a different set of rules for athletes or actual examples of favoritism. Rather, participants shared feelings they had towards the idea of whether favoritism existed for students who were student-athletes, perceptions they had towards the rules and policies that affected student-athletes or rumors they had heard regarding the student-athlete population on campus as it related towards the academic

rigor they faced. Only Participant One was able to share any experience that could be considered a firsthand interaction with different rules that student-athletes faced, and that was not a rule that appeared to give any kind of benefit that other students lacked. Participant One shared an experience they remembered regarding rules student-athletes needed to follow within a classroom setting.

In a lot of cases, when I was in school, I think a lot of student-athletes were required to sit up front in the front row by their coaches. I recall that that's something I remember and stands out from back when I was in school.

While Participant One was the only one to share a firsthand example of additional rules that were imposed on student-athletes, other participants offered responses that highlighted undertones of their perceptions of student-athletes and rumors or stories they had heard that alluded to more of a perceived favoritism towards student-athletes.

Participant Two recounted hearing stories about preferential treatment for student-athletes of the football and basketball programs, both at their undergraduate and graduate institutions. While Participant Two talked about hearing stories of such treatment, they clarified that they personally did not witness the preferential treatment that had been described to them. Participant Two shared that the institutions they attended for those degrees both are athletically aligned with a large athletic conference.

I went to two schools that both played in the Southeastern Conference and football was king and basketball was a close second. And you know, I would hear stories, but my personal interaction was never, you know, kind of as weird and the as the stories you would hear.

While Participant Two alluded to rumors of preferential treatment, Participant Four shared their personal feelings that led to a perception of differing academic requirements for student-athletes.

Participant Four shared that due to their choice of major at their undergraduate institution, there were not many student-athletes enrolled in their classes. Participant Four shared that during their time as an undergraduate student, they felt like student-athletes were favored and that those enrolled in the same or similar courses, had different academic requirements.

I do remember feeling like student-athletes were sometimes favored a little bit or that the course requirements for them were not necessarily the same as what they were for me as an undergraduate student.

Contrary to Participant Two, this feeling of preferential treatment was only expressed by Participant Four during their time as an undergraduate student as they did not have the same perceptions of feelings as a graduate student. Participant Four also shared that they had feelings or thoughts regarding preferential treatment from one faculty member on more than one occasion.

I do remember, or I can recall, one or two instances specifically with a particular faculty member that I thought, or I felt like that because a student was a student-athlete, there was favoritism.

Participant Three did not disclose or mention any feelings or perceptions they had gained regarding student-athletes other than a perception regarding the status of one individual student-athlete on campus. Participant Three was able to recall a student-athlete that attended their undergraduate institution and mentioned that he was a big guy on campus

referring to the individual as “famous”. Apart from acknowledging this individual, Participant Three did not share additional information regarding interactions or personal perceptions they developed regarding the student-athlete.

Perceptions of preferential treatment or favoritism and the existence of a different set of rules for student-athletes existed among three of the four participants. Participants shared perceptions and stories they had heard regarding the student-athlete population. These perceptions were the result of feelings the participants shared regarding the way they perceived academic faculty members’ relationships with student-athletes regarding course work and classroom expectations. Participants shared that they heard stories about student-athletes receiving preferential treatment or having different rules but other than Participant One, no firsthand evidence was shared by any of the participants that would support the perceptions that student-athletes were receiving preferential treatment, or the student-athletes had a different set of rules from academic faculty members that non-athlete-students did not.

Research Question #2: What are the perceptions of current academic faculty members of student-athletes?

When exploring the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes, two themes were identified based on the experiences the participants shared. The first theme was the perception that student-athletes provide a substantial positive impact on the campus culture of the institution. The second theme was that current academic faculty members believe and perceived that student-athletes engaged with the classroom materials and setting adequately, effectively, and in a predominately positive manner which resulted in a positive impact on education.

Substantial Positive Impact on Campus Culture

All four participants in the study shared that they feel that student-athletes have a positive impact on campus culture. Participant Two shared that they have seen non-athlete students rally around student-athletes and athletic teams due to their accomplishments and achievements and how that can have a positive impact on the campus community. Participant One shared similar feelings and referenced the sense of belonging that student-athletes and athletics can bring to an institution.

Very positive. It gives just a sense of belonging again, that way you could have the athletes and then the ones that are cheering them on. You know it's a big part of just being a college, you know, having the various teams.

Similarly, Participant Four shared that because of student-athletes and the existence of intercollegiate athletics, non-athlete students can embrace a key part of the college experience.

I think that's a really neat part of a college experience, and I still think it's a positive impact on culture because for students that do tend to embrace athletics, you get a good experience going to those football games, basketball games, softball games, whatever sport it is. That's still a neat part of culture to be a part of, and if we didn't have student athletes then we definitely wouldn't have that culture.

Participant Three talked about how having student-athletes on campus allows the institution the chance to compete. Participant Three shared that those athletic competitions allow for times for the larger campus community to come together.

Athletes impact the campus very much. Without the athletes, we cannot compete. It's just not only in the classroom. Saturdays and whenever there are games to schedule, it also helps the campus to get together and it's a way to pull the campus together behind some activity. The most famous institutions in this country have become famous, partly because of what happens with athletics at those universities. Small colleges that you've never heard of having a name for themselves because they have produced an athlete, or because of athletic event.

Participant Three also shared their perspective on the financial impact of having student-athletes and athletics on campus.

They explained that through their research and expertise they have seen the financial impact that student-athletes can have on the recruitment and retention of other students to campus. Participant Three shared that this recruitment can greatly impact the campus culture due to the number of students it may attract to the institution and the financial benefits that this can bring to an institution as well.

Studies done in the United States at major colleges, the big ones, state that for every athlete that comes to the university, football players I should say, there are six students that come. These are the major universities. I am not certain that's the case here at this institution but that's a significant statement. It's significant because one for six you are drawing, so six students that otherwise could have gone, could have been not certain, but could have gone someplace else chose to come here and the revenue that comes with that is significant. That's very important.

All four participants were able to articulate their perceptions that student-athletes, and the role they play within the institutional framework, provide a substantial positive impact to the campus culture of the institution. Participants spoke about student-athletes and competition creating a sense of belonging on campus and how it can be seen as a point of pride for those non-student-athletes who embrace athletics. Participants also mentioned the impact that competition has on campus culture and that without student-athletes to compete in intercollegiate athletics, that opportunity may be missed. Finally, the financial impact that student-athletes bring to campus was discussed in relation to recruitment and retention efforts. The financial impact on campus culture was also expressed in the participant's response.

Classroom Participation and the Resulting Impact

Participants of the study shared their experiences related to the classroom participation habits of student-athletes. Some participants were able to share concrete examples of students actively participating in class and cited that their status and experiences they had as a student-athlete contributed positively to the conversation or the academic space for other students. Participant Three was able to share an example that often takes place in the sports economics class they instruct.

Those students who take my sports economics class, and happen to be athletes, are very well informed. They're very thorough on certain statistics and though that's not what I teach there, I give them the opportunity in the class to share through the way it is designed. I teach it like a seminar, and students self-identify themselves as experts in baseball or basketball or football by the way they speak and by the way they present information. So, what happens is that I can always

rely on a student who is very well informed about the NFL, let's say, what is your input on this? So, I get to draw from them and there are students who are not interested in NFL, and so they get to learn from them, and vice versa. So, in that way, they (student-athletes) have been very, very helpful.

Participant Two also shared information regarding the nuanced perspective that student-athletes bring into an academic space. They were able to provide a positive experience that included a conversation around diversity.

Occasionally they (student-athletes) will bring in a perspective that other people may not necessarily have. Again, a quick example, I'll talk about in terms of civil rights. I'll talk about how there's a provision in the Civil Rights Act called Title IX that requires equal treatment and opportunity in sports, and I said, here's a problem with say like college athletics. There's no female sport equivalent to football. And so, a school like us, we've got a football team. We've got 60-65 players on the team, so other male sports, we may not have those so that we can offer equal opportunity to women. And you know, that generates a lot of discussion back and forth.

Participant Two went on to outline how the contributions of the student athletes enriched the conversation they were having.

One semester I had a young man who was on the football team, and he said, well, yeah, but think about the attention that we get and think about the work that we put in and those kinds of things. It helped that conversation to have his point of view there. The flip side was, I had a young lady that was on the track team here, and she talked about how hard it was for her coming out of high school to get

scholarships because when people think student-athletes, they automatically think men and they automatically are thinking about the high-profile sports and not necessarily thinking about track and field. She stated they're not thinking that women play or participate in an equal degree to men. And so, she talked about her experiences trying to find scholarships, a team that you want to play for, a coach that you want to be coached by, and those kinds of things. Those kinds of perspectives made that a much better conversation. It helped me as an instructor, and I think it definitely helped the students.

Participant One shared that the presence of student-athletes in their labs enhanced the non-athlete student experience due to the level of training and physical shape student-athletes are in. They stated that this involvement in the lab was a great positive for them as an instructor.

I teach some anatomy related classes and there are days where we have labs where we will test heart rate, respiration rate, etc. and compare before and after exercise. I always try to get some of the athletes involved and, I can always tell that they're trained, and we compare our general population of non-athlete-students to them when it comes to the fact that they (student-athletes) are a great example of what a healthy individual looks like, again, with their heart rate, their respiratory rate, their blood pressure, and you know, I might even throw in my data. Again, they're always willing to help out and again, that's a great experience that I can remember and in all my labs, I usually try to get student-athletes involved.

Adversely, Participant Four shared their feelings towards how student-athletes can impact the classroom if they do not have adequate levels of classroom participation or are here to be an athlete solely and not a student-athlete and how that differs from those students who are well balanced student-athletes.

Just like anything else, it just depends on the student. If they're a person that is really wanting to get something out of their education and their degree and their time here and they're a good student, they're going to positively impact that program and that course. If they are a student that is more here for their sport and they they're getting a degree because you have to get a degree while you're here, then they maybe have a little bit more of a negative impact on that classroom.

Whether their interaction was positive or negative, faculty members perceived that student athletes were able to impact the classroom environment both for themselves and the other students present.

Research Question #3: How does exposure to student-athletes impact the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes.

When addressing research question three, two themes emerged from the data on how exposure to student athletes impacts faculty perceptions. The first theme was that academic faculty members have various ways of being able to identify which students are student-athletes. The second theme is that attendance at faculty scheduled office hours impacts how academic faculty members perceive student-athletes.

Identification of Student-Athletes

All participants were able to share that there were various ways with which they identify that a student is a student-athlete. Participants shared the ways that they engage

with student-athletes and how those interactions and what takes place in those interactions helps the academic faculty member to identify the student-athlete.

All of the participants talked about the mandatory forms that student-athletes are required to provide to their faculty members that are used to alert faculty members to the athletic schedules and the expected demands of the student-athletes that may conflict with the classroom attendance, assignment deadlines, and overall participation. Participants shared how those forms are turned into academic faculty members and what those interactions may look like.

Participant One shared that most student-athletes approach them right away with some form of documentation that is used to alert the faculty to what the student-athlete has going on schedule wise as an athlete. Participant Two talked about how the communication for them can oftentimes come from the athletic department in addition to the student-athlete and how the athletic department may alert the faculty to other check-ins throughout the academic term.

I usually get an email the first or second day of class from the athletic department saying, 'This is a student who is on the baseball team or whatever, and we want to monitor their attendance and their grade in the class.' That is typically how I find out.

Participants Three and Four shared similar thoughts to the notice they received and added that in addition to the mandatory signing of the paper and the tracking of the student-athlete through the athletic department, student-athletes may provide a full travel schedule to them at the beginning of the semester. Participant Three shared that it is their understanding that the athletics department, and more specifically the coaches, are often

the ones that tell their student-athletes to alert their professors to the additional schedule requirements. It should be noted that Participant Three also shared that sometimes student-athletes do not share the information and that the faculty have to rely on the information they receive from the institution's athletics department.

Three of the four participants of the study also shared that the attire often worn by student-athletes is an easy way that they identify that a student within their class may be a student-athlete. Participants shared that while this may be considered an assumption, they usually are correct and through their interaction with the students they are able to identify whether or not their assumption is correct. Participant Two shared the following: "now sometimes, I pick up on that somebody (student-athletes) will walk in, and they'll have on institutional gear such as soccer and I'm like, oh, you're on the soccer team." Participant Four shared: "this is a little bit of stereotyping I guess, but the clothing might be a dead giveaway." Participant One's response was very similar to that of the other Participants. While the participants all talked about how they were able to identify student-athletes in their classrooms, none of them directly addressed whether the way that they found out had any impact on their perceptions of the student-athlete or the population of student-athletes as a whole.

Attendance of Faculty Office Hours

Three out of four participants mentioned that student-athletes had attended their scheduled office hours to stop by and talk about content related to the course and that these interactions were overall positive in nature. Participants shared that these interactions with student-athletes help them to get closer with the students and showed to them, as academic faculty members, that the student-athletes were taking an interest in

the topics and curriculum discussed in class. Participant Three shared that these interactions, while limited, help them to gain a more well-rounded perspective of student-athletes.

Student athletes are very busy. They attend my class and show up at my office hours. Those are limited kinds of interactions. If I see them in the hallway, I recognize them very quickly. They recognize me. I would tell you that of the total students at this university, the politest, the most well behaved, the most considerate, the most adjusted, well, perhaps not so much on the adjustment, are the student athletes. I can relate to them in conversation. They're very, very good at updating me, whether they're going to attend class, miss class, because of travels and so forth. My interaction with them outside of the classroom and my office space is sort of limited except when I see them in the hallway.

Participant Two shared that their experiences were very similar to that of Participant Three. Participant Two shared that while they agree that their interactions are limited, that student-athletes do attend their office hours occasionally to discuss, refer to, or ask questions about material that is discussed in class. They acknowledged that the student-athletes wanted to talk to them outside of the classroom setting to gain more information about the content discussed in class. Participant Two went on to share that a student's status as a student-athlete does not impact the way they approach the interaction as an academic faculty member.

Participant Four shared an interaction that they had with a female student-athlete at the institution relating to the attendance of their office hours and that this interaction had a positive impact on their perception of this particular student-athlete.

I'll use the example of the female who was in here all the time last semester and that was just great. I taught a challenging business statistics class last semester online. I had a student athlete enrolled in that course, that was a female, and she was the only student I ever saw for physical, face-to-face office hours for that class. She came in every single week. And it's not because I wouldn't even say it was necessarily because she needed help. It was because she wanted to understand that material at a higher level and make sure that she was doing it correctly. So, I mean, her level of responsibility, and interest in her own personal education, outweighed that of most traditional students, but certainly stood out amongst athletes as well.

Research Question #4: Do perceptions of student-athletes from academic faculty differ based on different demographic identifiers of the student-athlete?

When examining the data from participants related to research question four, two themes became apparent. The first theme is that there is a difference in the way that academic faculty perceive male and female student-athletes. The second theme is that the type of sport a student-athlete participates in impacts the types of perceptions academic faculty members have towards those student-athletes.

Male vs. Female

Three of the four participants within the study shared responses that alluded to their perceptions of student-athletes based on their different gender identities. Participants perceived female identifying student-athletes to be more serious within the classroom. Participants shared their feelings and observations that led to those perceptions.

Participant Two shared that while this is their perception, it pained them to be honest about it.

I feel bad for saying this. I've noticed that a lot of my female student-athletes are a little more serious. I mean, it's not that the, the male athletes aren't serious, but, you know, guys are guys, and they're sort of goofing around and doing stuff like that. The female athletes are much more grade conscious. They are the ones that will contact me before the athletic department will and want to make sure they have got everything covered. Stuff like that.

Participant Three shared similar sentiments. Participant Three shared that they notice a difference in the level of attention that female student-athletes give inside the classroom in comparison to their male identifying peers.

Female student-athletes are more focused in the classroom when they're there. I don't know what they do outside, but I sense that they're paying attention to what I'm saying, how I'm teaching the course, what I'm talking about, and why they are in the classroom as opposed to the males. Male student-athletes most of the time take a nap in the classroom. It may be because of my teaching or because they have been partying alone or that's where they sleep.

It is important to note that Participant Three also shared that this is a mixed response and there could be other factors outside of identified gender that could contribute to the actions of student-athletes within the classroom.

Participant Four shared information related to their perceptions of student-athletes based on perceived gender differences. Participant Four relayed that while they acknowledge that male student-athletes are very good students and do a great job

navigating the nuances of time management and time balance, they tend to see that female student-athletes score higher on assignments and other academic work than their male student-athlete counterparts. Participant Four elaborated on that by saying:

I feel terrible saying this but it's truth. It's not stereotyping, it's statistics. Our female athletes tend to be, if we're statistically looking at them, by and large, they tend to be really good students. Our male athletes, in a lot of programs, tend to be pretty good students. In two of the programs, there might be more of a likelihood that they don't perform as well, but I am not saying or implying that that is a guarantee.

Three of the four participants shared their perceptions of female student-athletes performing better than their male student-athlete counterparts. The participants also made it clear that their perceptions were not ones that they were necessarily proud of, but that their perceptions were rooted in observation, statistics, and interaction with the overall student-athlete population. The only participant to not share information related to this concept was Participant One who did not distinguish between male identifying and female identifying student-athletes within their responses.

Types of Sport

Two participants shared responses that show that there may be different perceptions for student-athletes based upon their specific sport. Participants shared their perceptions but were sure to air on the side of caution when applying their experiences and perceptions to the idea of a generalization of the entire profession or to the entire sport or student-athlete population they were referring to.

Participant Three shared numerous differences they had noticed related to the performance of student-athletes based on the different sports that they played.

I think baseball students arrive in class on time. Football students, they're 20 minutes late or people, I think, are playing football. Track students miss once in a while, but they're there on the spot on the hour. Maybe it's from their individual requirement of the sport. I don't know. Swimmers tend to miss classes, but they're smarter. This generalization may not be a good one, but that's my impression. Basketball players are kind of lackadaisical on schoolwork, on assignments, in general, in responding to things they don't see the urgency of things in the classroom. This is just a general feeling.

Participant Three also shared that sometimes, based on the sport, they perceive that certain sports, or student-athletes within those sports, do not take certain classes or at least that they have not seen many student-athletes from those sports in their class.

Participant Four talked about how the size of the sport program and the level of attention that is able to be given to the student-athlete is something that they perceive as a reason that can be contributing to whether or not student-athletes perform well academically.

I think especially with the smaller sporting programs, there is more individualized attention to those student athletes from their coaches and so they actually may sometimes perform a little bit better in the course...I think in our smaller sports a lot of times those students, sometimes those students, are the better students in the course or at least at least there's a likelihood that they could be.

Contrary to the other participants, Participant Two stated that their perceptions of student-athletes success in the classroom was not based on the sport they played.

Participant Two did state that academic classification such as sophomore or senior status plays a role in their perception, but sport does not. Participant Two shared: “I couldn’t say the football players are great and the basketball players are terrible. I see a bigger difference between like seniors and sophomores.”

Summary

This chapter provided the results of the semi-structured interviews that took place to gather data related to academic faculty’s perceptions of student-athletes. Within this chapter themes were identified based on the participant’s responses were analyzed and presented. Participants addressed their various interactions with student-athletes prior to becoming academic faculty members, what perceptions of the student-athlete population currently exist for academic faculty members, how exposure to the student-athlete population has impacted their perceptions, and whether specific demographic information related to the student-athlete plays a role in the perceptions that exist. In chapter five, the findings will be examined, conceptualized, and recommendations will be made regarding future development and research strategies for student affairs professionals regarding the student-athlete population.

Chapter V

Discussion, Implications, Recommendations

This qualitative study collected data and added to the literature surrounding the perceptions that academic faculty have of student-athletes and the factors that contribute to those perceptions. Data was collected from four academic faculty members at a midsized midwestern institution through a set of individual semi-structured interviews. Participants were asked interview questions related to the following four research questions: 1. Prior to becoming an academic faculty member, what perceptions of student-athletes exist for faculty? 2. What are the perceptions of current academic faculty members of student-athletes? 3. How does exposure to student-athletes impact the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes? 4. Do perceptions of student-athletes from academic faculty differ based on different demographic identifiers of the student-athlete? This chapter will discuss the findings, interpret the implications of the results, and provide recommendations for higher education and the opportunity for future research.

Discussion

Through a thematic analysis of the data collected, four key findings were discovered. First, faculty had very realistic perceptions of the unique demands of student-athletes and their level of exposure to student-athletes impacted those perceptions. Second, faculty members had clear perceptions of the way student-athletes impacted both the campus culture and the classroom in positive ways. Third, interactions with student athletes outside of class, such as during office hours, positively affected their perceptions of these students. Finally, faculty held more positive perceptions of both female student

athletes and members of smaller teams and individual sports regarding academic work than their male peers and those on larger, more 'popular' teams.

Understanding of Unique Demands Impacts Perceptions

It was clear that academic faculty members understand some of the unique demands that student-athletes face that non-athlete students do not. Academic faculty members talked about their realization of the unique scheduling demands related to travel and competition for student-athletes. Faculty members understood the challenges student-athletes face being more in the public eye as opposed to their non-athlete student counterparts. Additionally, faculty members shared that they perceived student-athletes to be hard workers, time centered, and committed to their success both in the classroom and in the field of competition. Those realizations and understandings allowed for academic faculty members to highlight positive perceptions they have of the student-athlete population. However, there was a shift in their perceptions of athletes when participants were asked about whether or not those unique demands resulted in special treatment for student-athletes.

While the participants were not able to provide firsthand examples of any witnessed preferential treatment for student-athletes, all of the participants provided stories they had heard about student-athletes receiving preferential treatment and that belief of preferential treatment taking place had a negative impact on their perceptions of student-athletes. One participant talked about hearing stories of preferential treatment towards student-athletes, but it was not until their children became athletes that they fully understood the unique demands that student-athletes face. This shift in exposure changed their perceptions of student-athletes from a negative perception to a positive one. This

shows that understanding and exposure to the unique demands' student-athletes face is directly related to the perceptions that academic faculty have of the student-athlete population.

Even though academic faculty members claimed that they knew how hard student-athletes had to work, they still provided evidence related to the negative perceptions they carried with them. It was not until they were able to firsthand witness the unique demands placed on student-athletes that those previous perceptions were able to be changed. Faculty members who are not exposed to student-athletes or if they fail to see the unique demands that affect student-athletes, will tend to rely on hearsay evidence to guide and impact their perceptions of this population. Based on the evidence gathered in this study where all participants shared negative perceptions of student-athletes that was shaped by rumors or hearsay, it is clear that if academic faculty members do not engage with student-athletes or are not exposed to student athletes, it will lead to the perpetuation of false perceptions and narratives of the student-athlete population as a whole which will negatively impact the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes across campus.

Impact on Classroom and Campus Perceived Positively

When academic faculty members are exposed to student-athletes and can identify them in an academic setting, they perceive that the student-athletes positively impact both the classroom and the campus culture as a whole. Student-athletes often bring different viewpoints and knowledge to classroom discussions and those viewpoints and knowledge create a deeper and more well-rounded educational opportunity for all students within the class. Academic faculty enjoyed the participation and perspectives that student-athletes

brought to the classroom and the engagement from student-athletes helped faculty to perceive them in a more positive light.

Faculty are aware of the monetary impact student-athletes can have on a campus culture and that awareness also impacts their perceptions of these students. Having intercollegiate athletics on a college campus impacts the campus atmosphere, school spirit, and it also impacts who may or may not be attending the institution. If all academic faculty better understood these impacts or were made aware of some of the evidence that was shared by the participants of this study, the positive impacts of having student-athletes on campus may be more recognized and academic faculty may then perceive student-athletes and their impact on campus culture as being a good thing.

Academic faculty perceiving student-athletes impact in the classroom and around campus positively is a significant finding. The theoretical framework of this study outlined the Theory of Planned Behavior which states that if someone believes that they are perceived to act, or it is expected they will act in a certain way, then they will in fact, act in that manner. Applying this theory to the evidence this study gathered allows us to see that if student-athletes were aware that academic faculty members perceived them to positively impact the classroom through their participation and contributions, then those student-athletes would be more likely to actively participate in the classroom and continue to share their knowledge in order to keep being perceived in a positive way. This awareness can be as easily applied to the larger campus for other interactions academic faculty have with student-athletes just as it has been applied within the classroom setting.

Impact of Out of Class Interactions

Academic faculty members had positive experiences with the student-athletes who stopped by and took advantage of their scheduled office hours. Academic faculty members shared that these experiences impacted their perceptions of the particular students and the student-athlete population as a whole in a positive way. Academic faculty members were able to learn more about the student-athletes as individuals and this allowed them to have greater understanding of the student-athlete. Understanding the unique demands of these students through firsthand experiences creates a greater likelihood for student-athletes to be perceived in a positive light by academic faculty.

Since academic faculty members shared how the attendance of student-athletes at their office hours impacted their perceptions of student-athletes in a positive way, then academic faculty need to ensure that the access to their office hours is an equitable experience for the student-athlete population. It is clear through this study that exposure to student-athletes, both inside and outside the classroom, directly impacts the positive perceptions that academic faculty have of the student-athlete population. It is important for academic faculty members to work with student-athletes, the intercollegiate athletics department, and their faculty department chairs to provide opportunities and options that give these students the opportunities that their non-athletic peers have with their less structured schedules and responsibilities.

Faculty office hours are a great way to do this as found in this study. These spaces helped academic faculty interact with student athletes more which created more positive perceptions of these students. Academic faculty can use this time to further expand on course materials or to take a personal interest in the student's classroom and academic

experience which will help lower the stigma that exists for student-athletes around their motivations within the academic setting. If academic faculty are to be equitable instructors for both non-athlete students and for student-athletes alike, and if continuing to broaden their interactions with student-athletes will positively impact their perceptions of the population, then academic faculty must provide spaces such as office hours that student-athletes can attend at non-traditional times including evenings and weekends to accommodate their scheduling demands and traveling schedules which often provides obstacles to attending during normal hours. The impact that scheduling demands and travel schedules have on a student-athletes ability to engage with their education is something that academic faculty need to be aware of, and they need to provide the spaces, such as office hour times and locations, that allows student-athletes to engage with academic faculty members to show their commitment to education while also providing academic faculty members insights into the complex nature of being a student-athlete.

Different Perceptions Among Different Populations of Student- Athletes

Academic faculty have a higher positive perception of female identifying student-athletes as opposed to male identifying student-athletes. This finding is not to say that academic faculty perceived male student-athletes negatively, rather they simply perceived female athletes more positively. These perceptions existed due to the performance of female student-athletes academically and the demonstration of more time management skills compared to that of male student-athletes. Participants shared that female student-athletes were more likely to be engaged in the classroom setting and that contributed to faculty having a better perception of that population. Additionally, communication

seemed to be much more efficient from female student-athletes which academic faculty members appreciated and contributed to their higher perceptions.

Student-athletes that participated in individual sports or smaller team sports were also perceived more positively than student-athletes who played on larger sports teams. Again, communication and overall engagement in the academic rigor of the institution seemed to be the guiding force of these perceptions. One participant stated that they believed student-athletes on smaller teams are better at the aforementioned skills because there is a higher level of expectation and accountability of student-athletes from the coaches of these teams due to the more personal nature of their relationships with their student-athletes.

It is important to note that it is because of the actions of the female student-athletes and the athletes on smaller sports teams that there was a more positive perception. The perceptions did not exist based on identifiable sex or gender characteristics. The communication levels, timeliness, and overall investment in academics from the female student-athletes compared to the males were the causes of these perceptions. While there was a clear distinction between the two populations, this study focused on the perceptions academic faculty members have of student-athletes and how their behaviors impact those perceptions.

The data collected in this study related to male and female student-athletes and how they are perceived differently by academic faculty echoes previous literature highlighted in this study. In order for the perceptions of male student-athletes to improve; they need to be encouraged to invest more in how they engage within the classroom and other academic settings. Academic faculty members must also be receptive to the shift in

behavior when demonstrated by the male-student athletes. As this study's data has pointed out, if student-athletes are more engaged and academic faculty are more exposed to them in an academic conversation, classroom, or space, then the student-athlete will be perceived more positively.

Using the evidence in this study that exposed the factors that contribute to the perceptions that academic faculty members have of student-athletes, faculty members should focus on ways to engage with male student-athletes to challenge the negative perceptions they hold and shift those perceptions in a positive way through understanding and exposure. Academic faculty members and athletic staff should encourage all student-athletes, especially males, to attend office hours, participate in class regularly, and demonstrate better time management skills. Unfortunately, the stigma that is attached to male student-athletes has led to the self-fulfillment and perpetuation of stereotypes like the "dumb jock stereotype" which has contributed to certain negatively viewed behaviors that influence the perceptions academic faculty members have of male student-athletes. Academic faculty members must work to reduce the impact of this stereotype and encourage male student-athletes to engage with them as it will be mutual benefit for both groups.

In an attempt to help facilitate a new understanding, coaches and other athletic support staff from larger teams can invest more time into communication in with academic faculty members regarding their student-athletes progress and make a pointed and intentional effort to incorporate academic success expectations into their coaching philosophy. Their student-athletes will begin to see the needed increased communication all across the board related to their academics which can improve the perceptions that

academic faculty have of student-athletes that play on larger athletic teams. This triangle of communication will help to lessen a lack of understanding and increase exposure to larger sports team student-athletes for academic faculty members and help coaches and other athletic support staff to directly influence their student-athletes academic engagement. This newfound engagement along with the new exposure and understanding from academic faculty members will improve the perceptions they have of larger sport student-athletes.

Implications

The findings of this study can be used both for professionals working with student-athletes and by academic faculty members to gain a deeper understanding of the important role they play in the lives of student-athletes. The findings help academic faculty see the perceptions that do exist from their co-educators and provides context and insights as to the experiences and factors that contributed to the perceptions that exist of these students from academic faculty members' perspective. This data is important as it allows for academic faculty members to evaluate their own lived experiences and engagement with the student-athlete population, and creates a dialogue of what perceptions exist, how those perceptions came to be, and how actions taken both by academic faculty and student-athletes can impact the perceptions that exist around this population.

Using the Social Identity Theory outlined in the study, it is important to understand that identities and how those identities are viewed can play a large role in the formation of perceptions. Social Identity Theory as it applies to student-athletes reminds those working with them that student-athletes are battling two separate identities at the

same time. They are seen as both students and athletes while non-athlete students do not face those conflicting identities. The conflicting identities cause student-athletes to face different perceptions from academic faculty members about their commitment, academic ability, and overall reasons for attending college. Academic faculty members that view student-athletes as athletes first or do not perceive that certain populations of student-athletes are engaging with their identity as a student, will have more negative perceptions as it relates to their academic efforts. On the contrary, when academic faculty are engaged with the student-athlete population and see the display of the academic identity from student-athletes, it greatly improves their perceptions of the population.

This study and the evidence collected should be used by intercollegiate athletics departments when establishing the academic success plans for their teams. Athletics departments should work with coaches on effective communication plans that will allow the coaches to stay more engaged with the student-athletes academic success, provides another person of authority to hold the student-athlete academically accountable and provides insight into the different and unique demands that are experienced by student-athletes. Intercollegiate athletics departments should also use this information to set forth expectations for how student-athletes conduct themselves within the academic setting which will increase the student-athletes participation level which should lead to more positive perceptions of student-athletes from academic faculty.

Additionally, this information is important to share with all individuals working in the academic setting of an institution who interact with student-athletes. It is important for academic officers to understand that there are negative perceptions that academic faculty members have of certain student populations such as student-athletes from

cultural concepts and false narratives. It is important to recognize how these perceptions impact the classroom and the student experience and work to correct them. One of the many roles of an institution of higher learning is to provide a quality education to the students enrolled in courses there. Faculty should want to provide an equitable educational learning environment and need to be aware if their perceptions are negatively impacting a student's academic experience so they can work to ensure this is not the case. In this study, all of the participants used their role as an academic faculty member to work with their student-athletes and sought to be good and fair educators of all students regardless of their student's status. And while that may not be the case at every institution, it cannot either be assumed that all faculty hold negative perceptions about student-athletes. It is by improving communication, contact, and the quality of interactions that allow faculty to have honest perceptions of the students they teach.

Recommendations

There is a multitude of research centered around how non-athlete students perceive student-athletes and how student-athletes perceive other student-athletes but there is a surprising lack of research related to the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes. In a post COVID-19 higher education system, it is important for those in higher education to revisit certain areas that look especially different post pandemic. Intercollegiate athletics and the role it plays on college campuses is an area that has shifted. Student-athletes now have more years of eligibility if they were affected by the pandemic (Smith et al., 2022). Name, image, and likeness agreements have been made and now some collegiate student-athletes could be getting paid on top of additional scholarship benefits, they were already receiving (Moorman & Cocco, 2023). All of these

new developments are external factors outside of the classroom, but they could have an impact on the perceptions academic faculty members have of student-athletes within the classroom related to the idea of preferential treatment or additional benefits that non-athlete students do not receive.

This study was done at one midsized, midwestern, mid-major institution. This limitation could be a reason for the evidence that was gathered from this study. This study could be replicated at various campuses of different size and athletic organization to compare with the data gathered within this study and provide new data that would allow for a deeper understanding of the perceptions that academic faculty have of student-athletes. Below are five recommendations for future research which could be conducted to further advance the conceptualization of academic faculties perception of student-athletes.

- A more focused study conducted on faculty perceptions centered around a student-athlete's academic classification (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, etc.)
- A study on the perceptions of academic faculty towards the members of specific sports teams (i.e., baseball, basketball, volleyball, etc.)
- A study conducted on the perceptions first year academic faculty members have of student-athletes.
- A study conducted on the perceptions academic faculty members have of high-profile student-athletes.
- A companion study conducted on student-athletes perceive academic faculty attitudes towards them.

Conclusion

The study found that academic faculty members did have perceptions of the unique demands' student-athletes encounter but that those perceptions were greatly impacted by the level of firsthand exposure that they had to individual student-athletes. Academic faculty have positive perceptions of the impact student-athletes have on the classroom and to the campus culture as a whole. Additionally, the study found that attendance at academic faculty office hours and other out of classroom exposure increased the positive perception the academic faculty members had of that student-athlete. Finally, it was discovered that female identifying student-athletes and student-athletes that play on smaller teams or compete as individuals have a higher positive level of perception from academic faculty members than that of male identifying student-athletes and student-athletes that play on larger sports teams.

This research highlights the perceptions that exist from academic faculty members towards the student-athlete population, and it draws attention to why these perceptions are important to be mindful of when correlated to the educational outcomes and engagement of academic faculty with student-athletes. Academic faculty must be mindful of what causes or contributes to their perceptions of the student-athlete population and the role with which they play in interacting with, and understanding, the student-athlete population and their experiences as students on a college campus. The topics discussed in this study provide both a framework for understanding where perceptions may originate from for academic faculty members and provides strategies and recommendations on how to limit negative perceptions and expand on engagement and exposure that will

foster and promote positive perceptions of student-athletes from the perspective of academic faculty.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Begin by welcoming participant to the interview and thank them for their time. Review the informed consent agreement with the participant and have them electronically sign the document. Answer additional and final questions participant may have. Ask for permission to begin the recording and start the interview.

Part 1: The following questions will be asked to gather demographic information about you as a participant. The information will not be used to personally identify you.

1. What is your self-identified gender?
2. How do identify racially?
3. What pronouns would you like me to use today?

Part 2: The following questions are being asked to gather information about your role within the institution.

4. How long have you been teaching at this institution?
5. How many courses do you typically teach in a year?
6. What college do you teach in?
7. What other institutions have you taught at?
8. How many classes that you taught would you estimate that you had student athletes in, either number or percentage?

Part 3: The following questions are being asked to gather information related to your experiences and perceptions of student-athletes within the institution.

9. Did you yourself play sports in college? If yes, please elaborate on the sport and your role on the team.

10. As an undergraduate student, can you describe what it was like to have student athletes in class with you?
11. Before becoming a faculty member, can you tell me about your experiences and thoughts regarding student athletes in general?
12. Can you describe any interactions you have had, if any, with the intercollegiate athletics department?
13. Can you describe any interactions you have had with a coaches or athletics staff regarding student progress in your courses?
14. Can you describe your interactions with student-athletes outside of the classroom?
15. How do you feel student-athletes impact the campus culture?
16. In your own words, how would you describe a student-athletes academic/athletic schedule balance?
17. Can you describe any communications you have had with student-athletes in the academic setting?
18. In your experience, have you observed the ways student-athletes use academic resources provided to them from this institution? If yes, how have they done so?
19. Can you describe how you know that a student is a student-athlete in your class?
20. How do you feel student-athletes impact the classroom?
21. Can you describe the level of classroom performance of student-athletes within your classes?
22. Have you ever had a specific experience with a student-athlete in your classes that stands out for any reason? Can you tell me about that experience?

23. Have you observed any differences in the kinds of athletes in your classes and how they performed in their academic work?
24. Have you observed different strategies or trends academically based on the different kinds of athletes in your classes?

Appendix B

Consent To Participate in Research

Academic Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jacob M. Mueller and Dr. Jon K. Coleman, from the Department of Counseling and Higher Education at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a faculty member who has instructed student-athletes in your courses.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions academic faculty have of student-athletes at a mid-sized, Midwestern, Division-I public institution. Academic faculty interact with student-athletes in a classroom setting which makes up part of the academic structure of the institution. In this setting, where student-athletes engage with academic faculty only, they are seen as students first. However, non-athletes, athletic event spectators, and even university administration that interact with the student-athlete population in other settings across campus may view the student-athlete population more as athletes first, rather than students first (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Various research has been conducted relevant to how key nonacademic university stakeholders perceive student-athletes (Baucom & Lantz, 2001, Simons et.al, 2007, Wininger & White, 2015). This study aims to add to the literature regarding the perceptions of student-athletes from an academic faculty perspective and explore why those perceptions exist.

- **PROCEDURES**

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

Participate in a semi-structured interview that lasts between 45-60 minutes where data will be gathered about your perceptions of student-athletes. You will have the option to complete the interview either virtually or in-person. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for data coding and analysis purposes. You will be assigned a pseudonym prior to the start of the interview to ensure confidentiality. Upon completion of the interview all data and files will be stored on a password protected USB drive that only the principal researcher has access to. In accordance with IRB protocol, the information will be destroyed after three years.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no anticipated risks with this study.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

As more research has been done around the student-athlete and academic faculty relationship, it has become clear that some faculty maintain prejudicial feelings toward the student-athlete populations (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). This study will be significant because it will help to add to the literature surrounding the student-athlete population, and specifically will add literature specific to what perceptions academic faculty have of the student-athlete population, which is lacking. In addition, data collected in this study may uncover factors that impact the perceptions, if any, that academic faculty have of student-athletes. In conducting this research, more information related to the working relationships of student-athletes, the athletics department, academic faculty, and the academic expectations and standards of the institution will provide a clearer path forward for institutions of higher education in its relationship between academic faculty and student-athletes.

- **INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION (*Optional*)**

No incentives will be offered for this study.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a password protected USB drive that only the principal investigator will have access to. All interview transcripts, coding, and informed consent documents will be stored on the USB. Data collected and coded will be shared with the principal investigators thesis advisor when drafting and finalizing the results section of the thesis. Any audio and visual files will be stored on the same USB drive that is password protected and only accessible by the principal investigator.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

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

Principal Investigator:

Jacob M. Mueller

Graduate Student – College Student Affairs
Jmmueller2@eiu.edu

Faculty Advisor
Jon K. Coleman
Faculty – Department of Counseling and Higher Education
jkcoleman@eiu.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

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

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

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

Appendix C

Request For Participation Emails

First Email

Hello – My name is Jacob M. Mueller, and I am a second-year graduate student in the College Student Affairs program here at EIU. I am writing today to request your participation in a study I am conducting to meet the thesis requirement of my program.

My study is entitled “Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes”. The study aims to identify what perceptions, if any, exist at a mid-sized midwestern division I institution such as [institution]. You have been identified as someone eligible to participate in the study based on a listing provided by the [institution] athletic department as someone who has student-athletes enrolled in your courses. I hope that your experiences with the student-athlete population will help in gathering substantive data.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at jmmueller2@eiu.edu and we will work together to schedule either a virtual or in-person interview. The interview will take 45-60 minutes to complete.

Thank you so much for your time, consideration, and assistance in this study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Jacob M. Mueller

Second Email

Hello – My name is Jacob M. Mueller, and I am a second-year graduate student in the College Student Affairs program here at EIU. I am writing today to again request your participation in a study I am conducting to meet the thesis requirement of my program.

My study is entitled “Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes”. The study aims to identify what perceptions, if any, exist at a mid-sized midwestern division I institution such as [institution]. You have been identified as someone eligible to participate in the study based on a listing provided by the [institution] athletic department as someone who has student-athletes enrolled in your courses. I hope that your experiences with the student-athlete population will help in gathering substantive data.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at jmmueller2@eiu.edu and we will work together to schedule either a virtual or in-person interview. The interview will take 45-60 minutes to complete.

Thank you so much for your time, consideration, and assistance in this study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Jacob M. Mueller

Final Email

Hello – My name is Jacob M. Mueller, and I am a second-year graduate student in the College Student Affairs program here at EIU. I am writing today, one final time, to request your participation in a study I am conducting to meet the thesis requirement of my program.

My study is entitled “Faculty Perceptions of Student-Athletes”. The study aims to identify what perceptions, if any, exist at a mid-sized midwestern division I institution such as [institution]. You have been identified as someone eligible to participate in the study based on a listing provided by the [institution] athletic department as someone who has student-athletes enrolled in your courses. I hope that your experiences with the student-athlete population will help in gathering substantive data.

If you are willing to participate, please email me at jmmueller2@eiu.edu and we will work together to schedule either a virtual or in-person interview. The interview will take 45-60 minutes to complete.

Thank you so much for your time, consideration, and assistance in this study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Jacob M. Mueller