

“I don’t need to read, I’m gonna play football”
Male Collegiate Athletes’ Perception of Reading

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, Mississippi

May 2015

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I dedicate my research to all of my students- past, present and future. Thank you for teaching me that anything is possible with patience and passion.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my friends, family, professors, and co-workers for their unending support throughout this process.

To my friends, who put up with piles of papers and binders scattered across our living room, who kept me going with me when I had writers block, who read and edited sections when I needed it, and encouraged me to put off working on my thesis to play in the snow. I love you all.

To my readers, Dr. Andrew Mullins and Dr. Joseph Holland, for your time. I am so fortunate to have an incredible committee who are all passionate about their students and education. Your feedback, opinions, and support are incredibly appreciated.

I would like to especially thank my advisor, Dr. Melissa Bass, for your patience, dedication, advice, and above all, your time. From day one, you have supported me and my ideas. Thank you for believing in this project and seeing it through until the very end. It has been an incredible experience working with you.

I would like to thank Mr. Derek Cowherd in the Athletic Department for giving me permission to conduct this research.

To Angela Mirabito, for being my mentor and friend. Without you, none of this would have been possible. I hope one day my students look up to me as much as yours do to you.

I would like to thank my parents for their unyielding love and support throughout my life, and for reading to me every night before I went to sleep. This research opened my eyes to realize just how special those experiences were. I love you both.

Lastly, to all my students, for showing me that anything is possible with patience and passion. I dedicate this to you.

Abstract

The Collegiate Athlete Perception of Reading:
Male Student Athletes at The University of Mississippi
(Under the Direction of Dr. Melissa Bass)

My research is comprised of data collected from surveys and interviews to gain a better understanding of how college athletes, especially those from low-income backgrounds, perceive their past experience with reading. I surveyed ninety-three freshmen male athletes. I then narrowed my research to focus specifically on male freshmen athletes from all sports and football players of all years, since football has the highest percentage of athletes from low-income backgrounds. I then interviewed six student athletes on the football team. I found that whether or not a student athlete is read to as a child, enjoyed reading as a child, and continued to read and perform well throughout high school affect how they perceive their ability to read at a college level. This is evident especially when looking at the difference between low income and non low-income student athletes, freshmen football players and non-football players, and low income and non low-income football players. The lower income students are read to less, enjoy reading less, perform worse in high school-- despite how much they read-- and in turn, are more likely to feel like they are not reading at a college level than their more affluent peers.

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Chapter I: Introduction

I was born and raised in the suburbs of Houston, Texas by two loving and generous parents. All my life, my parents have instilled in me the value of a sound education and the importance of literacy. My father, a lawyer, was the first in his family to earn a college degree. Growing up, he constantly reminded me that knowledge is power. After a long day at work, he would tuck me into bed and read me my favorite book, *The Stinky Cheese Man* by Jon Sueska and Lane Smith. My mother, a kindergarten teacher, also played a profound role in my literacy education. She would constantly work with my brother and me on phonics, vowels, and reading comprehension. I watched *Sesame Street*, played educational computer games, attended great public schools, and lived an incredibly fortunate childhood. After conducting this research project at the age of twenty-two, I am finally beginning to grasp how privileged I was to have parents and teachers who taught me the importance of the most essential life skill ---- the ability to read.

As I grew older, sports became a significant part of my life. I began playing competitive soccer at the age of thirteen and intended to pursue a future in the sport. Soccer helped shape me into the person I am today. Looking back on my early high school years, however, I realize that I repeatedly placed soccer over all other commitments, including school. Both my parents and the rigorous curriculum at my high school kept me grounded academically; however, there were many times I let my schoolwork and reading assignments “slide” because of sports.

When I was a junior in high school, I decided to stop playing soccer after a series of injuries. After facing these injuries, I started to see school and reading in a different

light. I knew where my priorities had to lie if I ever hoped to attend a major university. I began to take school more seriously, completing every reading and writing assignment on time. I also worked with tutors and mentors to develop better study habits. With the support of my parents, I decided to attend The University of Mississippi.

When I was a sophomore, I saw an online advertisement for a part-time job. The athletics department was hiring tutors for the upcoming semester. I saw this as the perfect opportunity to combine my love of sports with my passion for education. I applied the next day and was hired two weeks later as a football study hall proctor.

The study hall was held every Tuesday and Thursday from 7:00pm to 9:00pm for football players who were at risk for failing or struggling in a specific subject. Although I had little experience and no idea what to expect, I arrived at my first night of work to see twenty young men, each weighing well over two hundred pounds, rambunctiously joking around with one another. I nervously said hello as each of the players introduced themselves. The academic counselors, Maulies Pettaway and Angela Mirabito, introduced themselves and explained the expectations of the study hall. My job was to walk around and provide assistance in any subject to whoever needed it.

As weeks went on, I continued to work in the study hall. Many of my students, with encouragement, were successful in the classroom. However, one student continuously refused to do his homework, study, and complete his reading assignments. One day, I sat down next to him and opened his textbook. He responded, "I don't know what you think I'm going to do, but I'm not going to read. I hate reading." I told him that I would sit with him until he had read the entire assignment. He looked at me with animosity and slowly began to read.

About a page in, as he slowly read through the chapter, sounding out words such as “democracy,” I realized why he didn’t like to study or read. This student was not reading at a college level. I recalled each instance when the student would laugh at others for completing their work or reading their textbook. I remembered his misuse of the context of their, there, and they’re. I now understood the look on his face when I asked him to read out loud. Not only did this student know he hated reading; he knew that he couldn’t read.

For the next few weeks, the two of us struggled each night to conquer his reading assignments. Oftentimes, he would get so frustrated we would have to take a break. We would walk to the water fountain in the hallway and talk about football, his day, or anything other than school. As our relationship grew closer, he started to open up more about his past academic experiences, including his experience with reading. One day, I asked him how he felt about reading in general. He responded, “it is like no one ever cared to tell me how important reading is... and now it is too late. I’m too far behind and I can’t catch up” (Suggs).

During the same time, I worked at the Leap Frog after-school program in Oxford, Mississippi. The program serves around forty-five underprivileged students from the Oxford-Lafayette area. Every Tuesday and Thursday, I worked with third grade students enrolled in the program. After my previous discussion with the student athlete, I began observing more closely my Leap Frog students’ attitudes towards reading. I noticed that some of the boys, particularly the ones who played football and basketball during recess, had a hard time completing their reading homework with a positive attitude. I even witnessed some students tell their tutors “I hate to read.” I started recording every

instance when I heard a student, male or female, say something negative or positive about reading. The responses varied from day to day, and were often more positive when a student reached his or her Accelerated Reader (AR) goal for the month.

One day, a student told me that he didn't need to read because he was "going to be a football player when [he grew] up" (Suggs). After I got in my car to drive home, I took note of his declaration in my phone. As I waited in traffic, questions, concern, and curiosity filled my head. Had someone told this third grade student that reading wasn't important? That football players didn't need to know how to read? That he didn't have to read because he was going to play football? I knew this young student was perfectly capable of learning to read, however, his attitude was preventing him from giving it a try. I realized that there might be a correlation between this young student and the student athlete I worked with in study hall. I asked myself, in ten years, would this third grader be the one to say that no one ever told him reading was important, and now he is too far behind to catch up?

The discussion with these students heightened my interest in learning more about how and why these students arrived at their conclusions regarding literacy. Did other college athletes, specifically football players, feel that literacy wasn't important? Was the importance of reading stressed to them as children? Do they like to read? Do they feel like they can read? If so, why do they feel this way? How were they taught to read? Who taught them to read? Like the third grade student, did they feel that literacy was unimportant at a young age? Were these students treated differently inside and outside of the classroom because they were athletes? Did this impact their perception of literacy? When and why did some of them fall behind? I ultimately arrived at my underlying

question: Overall, do student athletes have a negative or positive perception of their literary education? Furthermore, what is the relationship between their perception of their past experience and their perception of their ability to perform academically at a college level?

Using the information gathered from my literature review as background, I conducted empirical research at The University of Mississippi that focused on how college athletes, especially those from underrepresented student populations and low-income families, assess their kindergarten through twelfth grade educational experience with literacy. My goal was to discover their current and past attitude towards reading and how it influenced their overall education. I wanted to find whether or not their past attitudes and perceptions of literacy affects how they gauge their ability to perform academically at a college level.

To answer these questions, I administered surveys to the majority of student athletes currently enrolled as freshmen and football players currently enrolled as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors at The University of Mississippi. I also conducted interviews with six football players at The University of Mississippi. I identified when, how, and where they were taught to read and their attitudes towards reading at a young age and as college students.

Over the past three years of working as an academic tutor, mentor and strategist with Ole Miss Athletics, I have come across a number of resilient student athletes who constantly persevere and work hard in and out of the classroom. Most of these students are reading at a college level. Some of them, however, are not. I hope that this research gives us a better understanding of these student athletes' thoughts, perceptions, and

feelings in regards to reading, and how these perceptions shape who they are inside the classroom. Moreover, I hope this research is used to address the difficulties student athletes face in the college classroom, as well as supply valuable information for implementing early intervention programs, strategies to address underprepared college students, athlete tutor and mentor training, and future research. We must ensure that all of our student-athletes receive the best possible education--- starting with the ability to read.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Defining Literacy and Illiteracy

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines literacy as “the ability to read and write” and illiteracy as “the state of not knowing how to read or write” (Merriam-Webster). However, there are many different components to consider when labeling a person as literate or illiterate. For example, a person may be able to write, but not using proper grammar. Is this person illiterate or literate? If a middle-aged person needs to slowly sound out words, is he literate?

Stanford Professor of Education Sean Reardon defines literacy as “the ability to access, evaluate, and integrate information from a wide range of textual sources” (Reardon). He explains the two components of reading. The first involves being able to decode letters and integrate the sounds into words. The second is knowledge-based literacy competency, also known as knowledge of words found in the text. Reardon states that reading is being able to combine and integrate these two components together. Other definitions go even further. The Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador defines literacy as “not only [involving] competency in reading and writing, but [also] goes beyond this to include the critical and effective use of these in people’s lives, and the use of language (oral and written) for all purposes” (Scherba de Valenzuela). The U.S. Workforce Investment Act of 1998 states that literacy is “an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society. This is a broader view of literacy than just an individual's ability to read, the more traditional concept of literacy” (Scherba deValenzuela).

For my research purposes, I will not specify a particular definition of literacy, but instead will collect students’ understandings of what literacy means in a college context.

Statistics Regarding Literacy & the Importance of Literacy

For my research, it is important to understand the basic statistics about literacy in the United States. Although my research will focus on student athletes' perceptions of literacy, objective statistics on reading ability provide important context.

The statistics are concerning. According to the 2009 NAEP Reading Test, “30% of 4th grade public school students [read] at or below the ‘Basic level’” and “26% of 8th grade public school students performed at or below the ‘Basic level’ ” (Reading is Fundamental). In addition, 21% of adults read at or below a fifth grade level, 19% of high school graduates cannot read, and overall, thirty-two million adults in The United State cannot read” (Hers). In the academic journal *Literacy Policy*, Haan argues, “the single largest barrier to student educational achievement is failure to become literate” and argues that literacy “unleashes each young person’s potential to make informed decisions, enrich his or her life, and empowers him or her to participate fully in society” (Haan, 2009). Through his research, Haan advocates for the Literacy Law, which mandates that students and teachers reach literacy attainment in all subject areas and in all grades. Reardon states literacy “is a prerequisite not only for individual educational success, but for upward mobility socially and economically” (Reardon).

Early Reading Education

Information regarding early reading education is an important factor for my research because I collected data from student athletes about their early childhood experiences with literacy. In the article *Early Reading Proficiency*, Lindsey Musen writes “reading improvement changes most dramatically in the early years and slower in the later years” (Musen). Musen states that by the third grade, students should know the fundamental components of reading and apply those skills across a broad curriculum. She writes “the shift from ‘learning to read’ to

‘reading to learn’ is extremely difficult for children who have not mastered basic reading skills” (Musen). She states, “74% of third graders who read poorly are still struggling in the ninth grade” (Musen). We as a nation have permitted our children to grow into adults without properly addressing the problems they face with literacy. Musen states “a generation ago, literacy skills... weren’t as important, as our economy was built on agriculture and manufacturing” (Musen). Because of technological advances, most jobs today require individuals to be proficient in reading. In not addressing this problem, Musen argues that we have hindered our ability as a nation to move forward, and contributed to the growing income gap between the upper and lower social classes. Musen suggests that “identifying and addressing students’ academic challenges early saves students years of struggle and isolation,” defending her position on improving early reading proficiency.

Reardon uses existing data to observe, analyze, and interpret the reading skills of elementary and middle school students. Reardon draws from the national and international assessments NAEP, LTT, and ECLS-K “to describe the development (growth) of different types of literacy skills over the past four decades, the variation in literacy skills and trends among subgroups of students, and the relative positions of U.S. students and those in other countries” (Reardon). The quantitative data is synthesized using a regression model to find that although almost all students can “read” by the third grade, students from low-income background have a very limited comprehension level. The literary comprehension of a typical low-income seventeen-year-old student is roughly that of a wealthier nine-year-old. The article concludes “many students have not achieved the sufficient literacy proficiency by the eighth grade to prepare them for success in high school, college, and the labor force” (Reardon). Reardon states “these disparities... [Specifically low income students’ inability to read at a proficient level] may

severely limit the U.S. capacity to function effectively as a participatory democracy and to compete in the global economy” (Reardon).

The Negative Impact of Low Literacy and Illiteracy

The negative impact of low literacy and illiteracy is an important factor in my research. This information could be applicable to students who feel that they were underprepared for reading in college.

According to an article in the Huffington Post, “The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading failure” (Hers). The One World Literacy Foundation reports, “More than 85% of juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate” (One World). The article “Choose Prison or School” states that “over 70% of America’s inmates read below a 4th grade level and 60% are functionally illiterate” (Prison Policy Initiative) while other data from the Do Something organization finds that two out of three of students who cannot read at a proficient level by the end of 4th grade will end up in jail or dependent on the welfare system (Dosomething).

Not only does illiteracy put individuals at a greater risk of facing negative social repercussions, but it also hinders their emotional and physical capacity to make decisions. Using information from the National Adult Literacy Survey conducted by The United States Department of Education, Melanie Walendorf’s article *Literally Literacy* indicates that reading has a substantial influence on an individual’s ability to listen, remember language meaning, and pay attention. The research also concludes that those with low literacy may be at risk for increased anxiety when making everyday decisions and suffer from an increase in health problems (Wallendorf).

The Role of Parents and Learning to Read

“Literacy is a learned skill. Illiteracy is passed down from parents who can neither read nor write” –dosomething.org

In my thesis, I will be inquiring about students’ past experiences with literacy and how their parents contributed to their reading experience as a child. Because I will be asking questions regarding parental involvement, it is important to consider research on the correlation between parental involvement and a child’s ability to read.

The LINCS Literacy Fact Sheet states, “the children who were read to at least three times a week by a family member were almost twice as likely to score in the top 25% in reading as were children who were read to less than 3 times a week” (LINCS, 2011). Statistics say “Fourth graders who reported having 25 books or more at home had higher scores on reading tests than children who reported they did not have that many books” (Reading Is Fundamental, 2013). In addition, “parents with higher literacy skills are more likely to read to their children several times a week and are more involved in their children’s schooling” (Musen). Parents’ ability to read, provide books, and encourage their children to read outside of the classroom can vastly improve children’s reading level and comprehension.

The article “Early Reading Proficiency” indicates, “between birth and age five, the cognitive development of the child is shaped by early experiences within the family and in early childhood education settings” (Musen). Students coming from low-income circumstances are less likely to have parental support in literacy at home (Hall, 2007). In the *Washington Post* article “Poverty Strains Cognitive Ability,” Brady Dennis says, “picture yourself in an all-nighter, being poor is like that every day” (Dennis, 2013). Living with less, or not enough, is emotionally, physically and mentally straining (Mullainathan, 2013). According to Cheng and Furman and their quantitative analysis of childhood cognitive ability, “social class of parents has

been found to affect the educational level achieved by children” (Cheng, 2012). It is plausible that many parents of low-income students lack the cognitive, emotional, physical, and other resources to positively impact their child’s ability to read.

Young Men and Literacy

“The rise of women, however long overdue, does not require the fall of men”

–Christina Sommers

Through my personal experience working with third grade students at an afterschool program, I have seen the lack of interest of low-income students, especially male students, in reading. Many of these boys, especially those who seem to be interested in sports or play sports during the mentoring hour, have no problem finishing their math homework. When it comes to reading, however, these same students shut down. Many cry, while others simply refuse to pick up a book. Why is this?

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1996 average reading scores for girls were higher than for boys in the United States, with girls scoring 545 and boys scoring 535 on reading benchmark exams. According to The United States Department of Education, boys consistently score worse than girls on standardized reading tests (NCES). Eighth grade boys are 50% more likely to be held back due to their reading level than girls (NCES). Furthermore, nearly two out of three of special education students in high school are male (NCES). According to a 2002 CBS news report on Hannover High School in Massachusetts, “The school's advanced placement classes, which admit only the most qualified students, are often 70 percent to 80 percent girls. This includes calculus. And in AP biology, there was not a single boy” (Kuhn). Furthermore, while middle class males are not as far behind as those of low income, they are still not up to par with their female peers. University of Alaska Psychology professor Judith Klienfeld

researched the reading skills of high school aged white males from college-educated families, finding that 23% of all these boys scored below basic in comparison to 7% of their female peers. Klienfeld writes, “This means that almost one in four boys who have college-educated parents cannot read a newspaper with understanding” (Sommers).

So why are these young men falling so far behind in school? In the *New York Times* article “The Boys at the Back,” Christina Sommers argues for equal education for both males and females, demanding that we reassess the components of our education system which have depleted boys’ ability to learn and achieve at the same level as their female peers. She writes, “As our schools have become more feelings-centered, risk-averse, collaboration-oriented and sedentary, they have moved further and further from boys’ characteristic sensibilities” (Sommers). Moreover, according to an article published by the University of Florida:

Brain research has shown differences in male and female brains that can affect preferred learning styles and communication,” says Mary Ann Clark, UF associate professor of counselor education and principal investigator. “It has been suggested that public school curriculum may not be teaching ‘to the boys’ and that teaching styles are more suitable for girls.” (Rogers)

On the other hand, Michael Thompson, a school psychologist, suggests that the parents, specifically fathers, and not the school environment, are what is impacting young males’ perception of education and their ability to perform in the classroom. He states, “If your father only shows up for town soccer and town football and never goes to PTA meetings, well, duh, doesn't take too much to figure out what your father values” (Kohn). He further states, “Every small town in Texas turns out on Friday night to watch boys play football, and it's lacrosse in Maryland, and it's ice hockey in Minnesota and Massachusetts. Boys are demagogued, but not

for their academic work” (Kohn). Thompson also writes “Girls are being told, 'Go for it, you can do it. Go for it, you can do it.' They are getting an immense amount of support,”(Kohn). Boys on the other hand, are encouraged to excel in athletics. He states, “Boys hear that the way to shine is athletically. And boys get a lot of mixed messages about what it means to be masculine and what it means to be a student” (Kohn).

Black Men and Literacy

Research shows that boys in general are falling behind their female classmates, but minority boys are falling even further behind than all of their peers. The statistics are most daunting for black males. In the article “Are Schools Failing Black Boys?” Fremon and Hamilton state, “Eight percent of the children in America’s public school are black boys, yet their representation in the nation’s special education classes is nearly twice that: 15 percent” (Fremon). In the *New York Times* article “Proficiency of Black Students is Found to be Far Lower than Expected,” Trip Gabriel reports, “Only 12 percent of black fourth-grade boys are proficient in reading, compared with 38 percent of white boys” (Gabriel). According to the PBS article “Fact Sheet: Outcomes for Young Black Men,” Tamika Thompson writes “On average, African American twelfth-grade students read at the same level as white eighth-grade students” (Thompson). In high school, African-American boys attain scores averaging 104 lower on the critical reasoning portion of their SAT than their peers (Gabriel). Furthermore, “the twelfth-grade reading scores of African American males were significantly lower than those for men and women across every other racial and ethnic group” (Thompson). In fact, today black females are nearly twice as likely to earn a college degree as black men (Thompson).

In an article published by the University of Georgia, Celeste Fremon and Stephanie Renfrow Hamilton discuss how schools are failing black male students specifically because of

the low expectations teachers set for them. They discuss a study conducted in the New Orleans public school system that found “while eight out of ten black parents believed their sons expected to go to college, only four out of ten teachers believed their black male students would receive a higher education” (Fremon). When surveying students in the area, the study found that “58% of the 5,423 black boys who responded said they believed that their teachers should push them harder, and 34% said their teachers didn’t set high enough goals for them” (Fremon). The study cites student stories like Keith’s, an elementary school student who once told his teacher, "I want to be an engineer or a podiatrist." His teacher replied, "Why don’t you go out for sports?" (Fremon).

Spencer Holland, the director of a mentoring and academic support program in Washington, D.C., says "We’ve got to get to these boys while they’re still young-five to eight years old... otherwise they may look at classroom learning as a “feminine thing” that they want no part of" (Fremon). He goes forward to encourage the recruitment of adult males as mentors, teachers, and educators as a way to change the perception of young black males. He states, "White men are just as effective in these mentoring programs as black men. Young black boys won’t see color, they’ll see a nice, caring man" (Fremon).

The National Collegiate Athletics Association and College Athletes

Because I will be conducting my study by surveying, interviewing, and convening focus groups with student athletes, it is important to define the term student athlete and who is considered a student athlete. It is also important to understand the qualifications all student athletes must meet in order to receive athletics aid. A section of my literature review will focus on NCAA academic rules and regulations.

According to *Athlete Connections*, “a student-athlete is defined as an enrolled student who participates in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the college/university in which he or she is enrolled” (Athlete Connections). The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) writes that because these students are considered student athletes, they must “therefore, be students first” (NCAA). The NCAA website explains “College-bound student-athletes first entering an NCAA Division I college or university on or after August 1, 2016, will need to meet new academic rules in order to receive athletics aid (scholarship), practice or compete during their first year” (NCAA). To be considered a full qualifier (or “a college-bound student-athlete [who] may receive athletics aid (scholarship), practice and compete in the first year of enrollment at the Division I college or university” (NCAA)), the individual must meet the following requirements: completion of sixteen high school core courses, a minimum core-course GPA of 2.3, graduate from high school, and meet the compensation sliding scale requirement of GPA and ACT/SAT score (NCAA).

In order to understand the perception of college athletes regarding their literacy, it is important to recognize the specific admission requirements and standards set forth by National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Information for this section were found in Mary Willingham’s thesis *Academics & Athletics- A Clash of Cultures: Division I Football Programs*.

As reported in Willingham’s thesis, in 1986 freshmen athletes were not able to participate in Division I sports unless they scored at or above a 700 on the SAT and earned a high school GPA of a 2.0 or higher in at least eleven core courses (Willingham). As of 2009, students had to complete at least sixteen hours of core course work in high school. The GPA and SAT scores were both on a ‘sliding scale,’ meaning that if a student lacks a certain score in one area, such as the SAT, he or she must meet a higher GPA requirement (Willingham 21). The sliding scale was

introduced in 2005. Willingham reports that with the sliding scale, “If a student has a 3.55 grade point average, and a SAT combined of 400... they can be eligible to play DI football or any other sport” (Willingham 23). Willingham also argues, “College admission standards have risen significantly in the past one to two decades, leaving the NCAA requirements for admission clearance behind by several hundred SAT points” (Willingham 10).

Gender, Race and College Athletes

According to the United States Department of Education, “Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance” (Fast-Facts). Since Title IX was established, female enrollment and participation in collegiate sports has increased significantly. According to the NCAA Gender Equity Report 2004-2010 As of 2010, there was roughly an equal ratio of male to female athletes participating in Division I sports (277.5 men and 232.5 women) (NCAA). With regards to the gender gap, Catherine Rampell writes “the difference in GPA’s between female athletes and non-athletes is relatively small. Male recruited athletes, however, generally have lower GPA’s than their non-athlete counterparts on average” (Rampell). Regarding graduation rates Michelle Brutlag writes “African-American male student-athletes graduate at a rate 9 percentage points higher than African-American males in the student body (49 percent vs. 40 percent), while African-American female student-athletes outpace their student body counterparts by 13 percentage points (62 percent vs. 49 percent)” (Hosick). The evidence suggests that although minority male athletes are coming in to college with lower GPA’s, their chances of graduating are higher than minority males not involved in college athletics. However, this evidence also suggests that the gender gap is prevalent in college athletic academics as female athletes continue to outperform their male peers inside the classroom.

Willingham writes “race plays a major role in the culture of college athletics, as minority students make up more than 40% of the football and basketball teams” (Willingham 18). She reports that after Proposition 48 was enacted in the 1980’s, which required all college athletes to meet certain academic requirements in order to play, “85% of those that lost eligibility . . . were African-Americans” (Willingham 18). In a recent report published in 2013, however, the NCAA states “The [graduation] rate for African-American student-athletes has gained 11 percentage points” (Hosick) and further states “the overall federal graduation rate for student-athletes remained steady at 65 percent. It is important to note, however, that standards for athletes differ from those of regular students. Willingham points out “the minority average SAT Verbal Score as reported by the College Board is 456 (2008)... more than 100 points higher than the NCAA clearinghouse requirement for initial eligibility” (Willingham 20).

In relation to Division I academics, “The NCAA developed the Academic Progress Rate (APR), a system that provides a snapshot in time for each academic term, allowing schools to intercede and help academically challenged student-athletes. The rate is team-based and accompanied by a penalty system that includes sanctions for teams falling below a prescribed benchmark” (NCAA).

According to Kao, racial and ethnic patterns are more apparent at the highest levels of athletic achievement (Kao, 2006). In relation to college athletes, *USA Today* reports, “Ultimately, less than 2% of college football players end up in the NFL... For the other 98%, a meaningful college degree is more valuable than any other payment they might receive” (Jones, 2012). According to an Associated Press article, “graduation rates for all Division I athletes remained at 58 percent” (Sunheim, 2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “the 2012 graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began

their pursuit of a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2006 was 59 percent. That is, 59 percent of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2006 completed the degree at that institution within 6 years" (US Department of Education). This data shows that although student athletes have a lower graduation rate than the national graduation rate, it is not significantly lower.

Many efforts have been made to improve collegiate athletes' overall performance in the classroom. The NCAA even granted waivers to teams that officials said had demonstrated a commitment to improving their athletes' academic performance (Sander, 2012). The question still remains unanswered as to why some athletes soar on the field, but lag behind in the classroom.

In James Michael Rifenburg's thesis *Pens, Paper, and Football Plays: A Case Study Involving Student Athlete Literacy*, Rifenburg "explores the complexity of a football play, illustrates how it is learned and then suggests how these learning strategies can be better implemented into the writing classroom" (Rifenburg). He followed three male freshmen football players through their college English course. He found that one of the three students had trouble "breaking into the discourse community espoused by his composition course and realigning his view of writing to adhere to his cognitive abilities developed for football" (Rifenburg). He states that the player is not able to connect the work he does in the classroom with the work he puts forth on the football field. In his conclusion, Rifenburg writes:

It is not a simple solution of implementing peer review, encouraging a variety of media in the construction of a text, instructing students toward a deeper level of metacognition and mimicking real world writing. Instead, I suggest we need to display a more acute awareness of the high level of literate activity that swirls

around football.

He suggests, “we need to continue to explore making writing contingent upon these social and collective resources of learning” (Rifenburg, 2009).

Rifenburg’s research is extremely beneficial to my thesis. Although my aim is to determine college athletes’ perception of their literacy, Rifenburg’s research provides a basis for the concern that football players are well able to exhibit intelligence on the field but struggle to be successful in the classroom. I also used his interview questions as a reference when creating mine.

The University of North Carolina Study

Although this thesis is focused on college athletes, my research is not focused on the ability of student athletes to read at a college level nor their educational ability overall, but rather how these students *perceive* and *feel* about their past education and their academic ability. However, it is important to consider major current events being discussed regarding college athletes and academics.

It is important to note that college campuses around the country, specifically Athletic Academic programs, provide tutors, mentors, learning specialists, and a wide variety of academic advisors to ensure that their students have the tools they need to be successful inside a collegiate classroom. Although some students arrive at college underprepared for college class work, these resources help these students grow academically during their time as a student athlete. Many collegiate athlete academic programs are beneficial to these students and consistently follow all NCAA rules.

In 2011 at The University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, Mary Willingham, a staff member in the university’s academic program for athletes, released information regarding 183

academically “at-risk” student athletes from 2004 to 2012, 85% of which were football and basketball players. Willingham told the executive vice chancellor and provost of the university “60% of the athletes she had studied had from fourth to eighth grade reading levels. About 10% read below a third grade level” (Barrett). She went on to state “about 24% [of the 183 students] had UNC GPAs under 2.0, thus putting them at risk of academic disqualification” (Barrett) Willingham, also known as the UNC ‘whistleblower’, also released information regarding phony “paper classes.” These paper classes included the professor sending out paper topics, giving grades and assigning no meeting times. CNN reports “Wainstein [the investigator] did find that five counselors actively used paper classes, calling them "GPA boosters," and that at least two counselors, one in football, suggested... the grade an athlete needed to receive to be able to continue to play” (Ganim). Given that both athletes and non-athletes enrolled in these courses, North Carolina Governor James Martin states, “This was not an athletic scandal... it was an academic scandal” (Barrett).

Although Willingham’s study is under further investigation, Willingham stands behind her belief that “we weren’t serving the kids. We weren’t educating them properly. We were pushing them towards graduation, and that’s not the same as giving them an education” (Barrett). Many other universities have faced controversy in the past regarding student athletes and academics, including Florida State and The University of Memphis, both of which had victories vacated by the NCAA. Regardless of the corruption found in some universities, others still continue to search for ways to improve collegiate athlete performance inside the classroom, and help athletes acquire skills that will assist them in their future endeavors.

Ole Miss Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act Report

Because my investigation involves athletes, specifically football players, from The University of Mississippi, it is important to include information specific to the university's athletic program. The information only pertains to the main campus in Oxford.

Student Population:

Student Population: 15,411	Student Athlete Population: 391
Male Student Population: 6,917	Male Student Athlete Population: 242
Female Student Population: 8,494	Female Student Athlete Population: 149

Division I Athletic Teams:

Men Only	Men & Women	Women Only
Baseball	Golf	Volleyball
Football	Track and Field	Soccer
	Tennis	Softball
	Basketball	Rifle

Number of participants:

Men:	Women:
Track & Field: 107	Track & Field: 114
Basketball: 16	Basketball: 13
Tennis: 9	Tennis: 9
Golf: 11	Golf: 9
Baseball: 36	Rifle: 9
Football: 123	Soccer: 25
	Softball: 20
	Volleyball: 16

Revenues:

Football	\$43,992,194
Basketball (Men + Women)	\$7,535,012
Baseball	\$3,477,425
Soccer	\$202,002
Tennis (Men + Women)	\$167,860
Golf (Men + Women)	\$114,223
Volleyball	\$77,816
Track & Field (Men + Women)	\$62,014
Rifle	\$8,408

Why Football?

It is important to note the significance of the football team in the athletic program at The University of Mississippi. Members of the football team make up 31.45% of the entire student athlete population and 51% of the male student athlete population. Football revenues make up approximately 80% of revenue generated from men's athletics. Football is the highest grossing sport at the university by \$36,457,182.

Considering I compared freshmen football players' perceptions of literacy with that of other freshmen male college athlete and conducted all interviews with football players, this information is important with regards to why I chose to narrow my research to football players--- they make up the greatest percent of male college athletes and are the highest grossing team by a large margin.

Conclusion:

I used all of the previous information found in the literature review as a basis for conducting my empirical research at The University of Mississippi. After gaining a better

understanding of the key factors affecting one's literacy level, I was able to formulate survey and interview questions. My research focused on how college athletes, especially those from underrepresented student populations and low-income families, assess their kindergarten through twelfth grade educational experience with literacy. I inquired about literacy levels, educational strategies in and out of the classroom, sports, demographics, and perceptions of literacy. I asked questions regarding financial background, parent involvement, GPA, K-12 educational experience, and overall experience and perception of reading. My goal was to discover the student athletes' current and past attitude towards reading and how it influenced their overall education as well as find whether or not their past attitude and perception of literacy affects their ability to perform academically at a college level. In the future, my research can contribute to further exploration in the areas K-12 education and reading, higher education and college students' literacy levels, and college athletics academic programs.

Chapter III: Methodology

There are many factors that play a role in an individual's perception of their literacy education and their reading ability. I chose to gather my own data because I became curious about how college athletes feel about their ability to read and their reading education. Through my work at the FedEx Academic Support Center, I was able to get a sense of athletes' ability to read, however, I was never able to get a sense of their own perception of their ability to read. As I read the existing literature, I realized that there was no data specifically regarding athletes' perceptions. In order to gather this data, I administered a survey to all freshmen student athletes playing fall sports (except basketball) at The University of Mississippi, surveyed football players of all years, and conducted interviews with football players.

Survey: Section I

Selecting a Population

I decided to administer a survey to all University of Mississippi student athletes to gain a better knowledge of the relationship, if any, between the students' sport and their perceptions of literacy. In May 2014, I approached Derek Cowherd, Director of Athletic Academics, with my idea. He suggested I administer the survey at the Student Athlete Academic Orientation on August 24, 2014. All female and male first year student athletes were present at the meeting, with the exception of freshmen football players and basketball players who had prior team obligations.

Creating a Survey

Before creating the survey, I utilized online resources regarding formulation of survey questions so I had a base knowledge of how to ask specific questions the right way. I used an existing survey developed by Gabrielle Bariantos as a framework. Although her survey was

conducted with a different population and for a different purpose, it helped me to write questions to identify low-income background and race/ethnicity, and assess qualitative components. I also referenced the Purdue Owl Online Writing Lab to help create fair, reasonable, and unbiased questions. There were no existing surveys specifically created for my topic, which left room for creativity.

During the summer of 2014, I completed three drafts of survey questions. I consulted with Dr. Melissa Bass multiple times to insure the wording of the questions was clear and concise. I emailed my survey to Ms. Angela Mirabito, Academic Counselor for Football and Volleyball at the FedEx Academic Success Center for feedback. Next, I emailed my survey to Mr. Cowherd for his approval. Finally, I submitted the survey for IRB approval, and then prepared the survey for administration.

The first section contained basic questions regarding race, background, socioeconomic status, and high school and home environment. The second section inquired about the students' early memories of reading before, during, and after elementary school. The third section included questions pertaining to the students' athletic career: when and where they began playing sports, and how sports influenced their perception of reading. The fourth section asked about their high school education and if/how they read in high school. The last section inquired about their current perception of reading and how they believe their reading affects their ability to perform academically.

Administering the Survey

After receiving IRB approval, Mr. Cowherd had the surveys printed and stapled. On the day of the Student Athlete Academic Orientation, he stood at the front of the room, introduced the survey, and then asked that every athlete participate. Five academic counselors then

distributed the survey. When students finished, they turned their papers over to be collected by the academic counselors. The survey took approximately eight minutes to administer and complete. Eighty surveys were completed that day. After the counselors collected the surveys, they placed them in an envelope, which Mr. Cowherd then handed to me. To ensure that the athletes remained anonymous, I did not open the envelope until two weeks later. Because the football players were in practice and missed the meeting, Ms. Angela Mirabito kept roughly 70 copies of the surveys in her office. Over the course of two months, she had football players of all years fill out the survey in her office. After they completed the survey, she placed them in an envelope. At the end of October, she gave me 59 completed football surveys.

Post-Survey Administration

Two weeks after the Student Athlete Academic Orientation, I began synthesizing this batch of survey data. First, I separated the surveys into piles based on sports. After acknowledging a trend I will further discuss in my Results section, I decided to focus on the largest and highest grossing sport, men's football. After narrowing my focus to one sport in particular, I was able to synthesize my data to address the questions I wanted to answer.

Limitations

The largest limitation of the survey is that not every college athlete at the university was able to take the survey during the Student Athlete Academic Orientation. The meeting was limited only to freshmen. Male basketball players were unable to attend the meeting and were not included in the survey population. Football players were unable to attend due to practice obligations. Because the football players did not take the survey at the same time and in the same setting as the other student athletes, this may have led to different answers.

Interviews: Section II

Creating Interview Questions

Before creating the interview protocol, I referenced the book *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* by Bruce L. Berg. I focused specifically on the chapter “A Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing” and modeled my interview schedule after the sections The Interview Schedule, Schedule Development, and Question Order, Content and Style. I watched YouTube videos of interviews conducted by Oprah Winfrey, Barbra Walters, and Diane Sawyer. I focused on their interviews with men about sensitive situations. I took notes on their body language, how they responded to questions, and how they spoke to the men they were interviewing. I also referenced the Purdue Owl Online Writing Lab to create fair, reasonable, and unbiased questions. There were no existing interviews specifically created for my topic, which left room for creativity.

I formatted the questions using an identical model to the one I used in my survey. During the fall of 2014, I completed two drafts of interview questions. I consulted with Dr. Melissa Bass multiple times to insure the wording of the questions was clear and concise. I emailed my questions to Ms. Angela Mirabito for feedback. Then I consulted with Dr. Joseph Holland of the Public Policy Department for feedback. After I had received feedback from all three of them, I practiced my interview questions with two friends. Finally, I submitted the questions for IRB approval and began preparing for the interviews.

Selecting a Population

After receiving IRB approval, I met with Angela Mirabito to discuss the interviews. Because she is the Academic Counselor for the football team, she was able to set up interviews with seven players from different states, ages, backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and race/ethnicity. She chose individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds to broaden the

responses and perspectives. She selected five African Americans and two Caucasians. Three were freshmen, one was a sophomore, one was a junior, and two were seniors. Further, she selected students she personally knew would be willing to participate and provide solid answers to my interview questions.

Interviews

Angela Mirabito had scheduled the interviews for the week of November 10-13 at the FedEx Center for Academic Success. The first night, I set up in Angela's office with my recording device (cell phone). Student #1 came into the office; Angela introduced us, and then left the room. The two of us talked off the record for a few minutes. I told the student about my history with sports, injuries, reading, and school. I assured him that I was not there to judge him, rebuke him, or share his story with anyone. I made sure he understood my motives, goals, and passion about the subject. My aim was to gain his respect and trust before I started asking him questions.

After we finished talking off the record, I turned on my recording device and asked the student to acknowledge that he was being recorded. I then began asking the questions. I took a few notes throughout the interview, but as time passed I found I was able to be more attentive to the students' answers and body language if I just listened without taking notes. The interview lasted roughly thirty-five minutes. I interviewed two more individuals that evening. Both interviews followed the same protocol.

The next day, I arrived at the freshmen football study hall at 7:30am to interview two more students. Both interviews followed the same protocol as those from the night before. The following day, I interviewed two more students. Both of those interviews also followed the same protocol.

Post Interview

After conducting the interviews, I uploaded all the recordings onto my computer. I listened to each recording three separate times during a three-week period. Each time I listened to the recordings, I took notes and wrote down exact quotations to use in my research.

Limitations

The sole limitation of the interview portion of my research was that I only interviewed football players and no other student athletes and the students who I interviewed were not chosen at random. After administering the surveys, I had narrowed down my research to the largest, highest grossing sport because of a trend in the data. If I had the time, resources, and a personal contact, such as Angela Mirabito, in another sport, I would have interviewed more athletes outside of football. I would have liked to see if the perspectives that the non-football players shared in an interview were consistent with those shared in the survey. Also, I would have liked to see how their perspectives compare to those of the individuals on the football team.

Chapter IV: Survey Results

After administering my survey to both freshmen college athletes and football players of all different ages, I found that the data I collected from freshmen female athletes was consistent with all existing data regarding the gender gap. There was less variation among economic background and in perceptions of literacy. Given that I wasn't going to be able to contribute any new findings to the existing research, I eliminated women from my research. This left me with two sets of data: Male freshmen athletes from all sports (except basketball) and football players of all ages. I label the first set of data All Freshmen Male Athletes and the second set All Football Players. Freshmen football players are included in both sets of data.

All Freshmen Male Athletes

In this section, I will discuss the survey data from the fall freshmen athletics meeting and follow-up survey of freshmen football players. The following graph displays the overall percentage and number of participants who took the survey.

Male Athletics Overview¹:

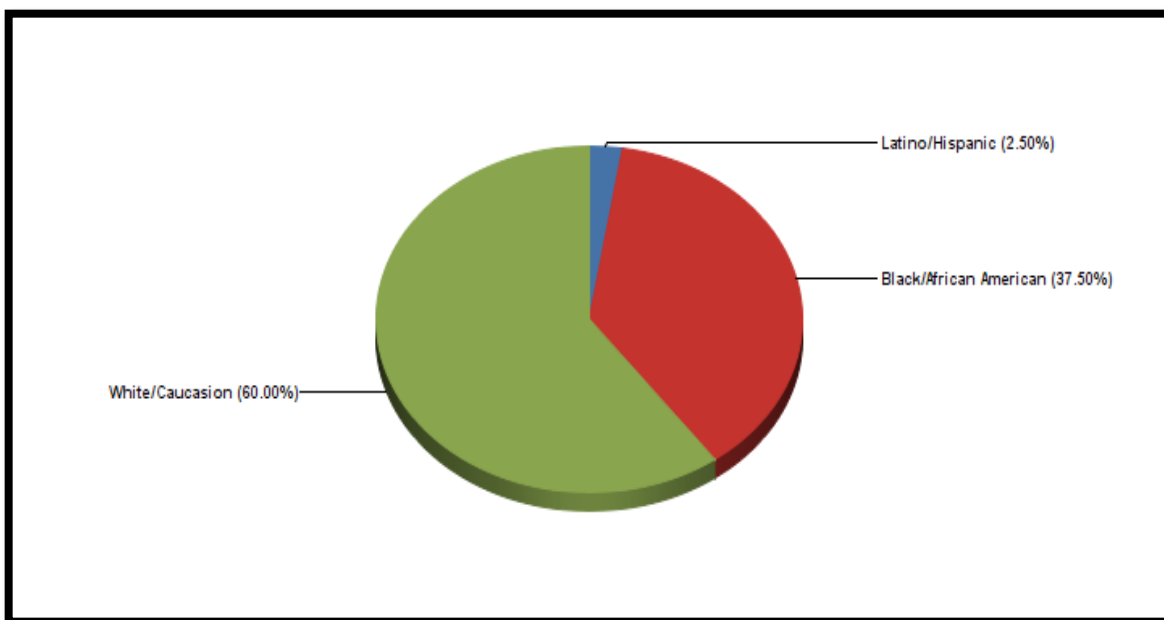
Sport	Number of players on the team	Number of freshmen on team	Number of freshmen players surveyed	Percent of freshmen players surveyed
Football	135	52	18	34.6%
Other Sports	179	28	20	71.42%
Total Athletes:	314	80	38	47.5%

¹ Other sports include track & field, tennis, golf, and baseball. No basketball players were surveyed.

Overall Freshmen Male Athletes

It is important to notice the racial make up of all freshmen male athletes when considering the data. Approximately 60% of the men surveyed identified as Caucasian, 38% African American, and 3% Latino/Hispanic. In addition, the entire golf, tennis, and baseball teams' freshmen members identified as Caucasian. Thirty-three percent of track/field members identified as African American as did 83% of the freshmen football players.

Ethnicity and Race



Parents' financial background and education play vital roles in a child's ability to read. According to the surveys collected, 25% of the students surveyed qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch while in high school, 60% did not, and 15% of students chose not to respond. Sixty-five percent of students surveyed said their mother had a college degree, while 25% said their mother had some college education. Only 8% said their mother attended or graduated high school, with no further education. Fifty-eight percent of students surveyed said their father had a

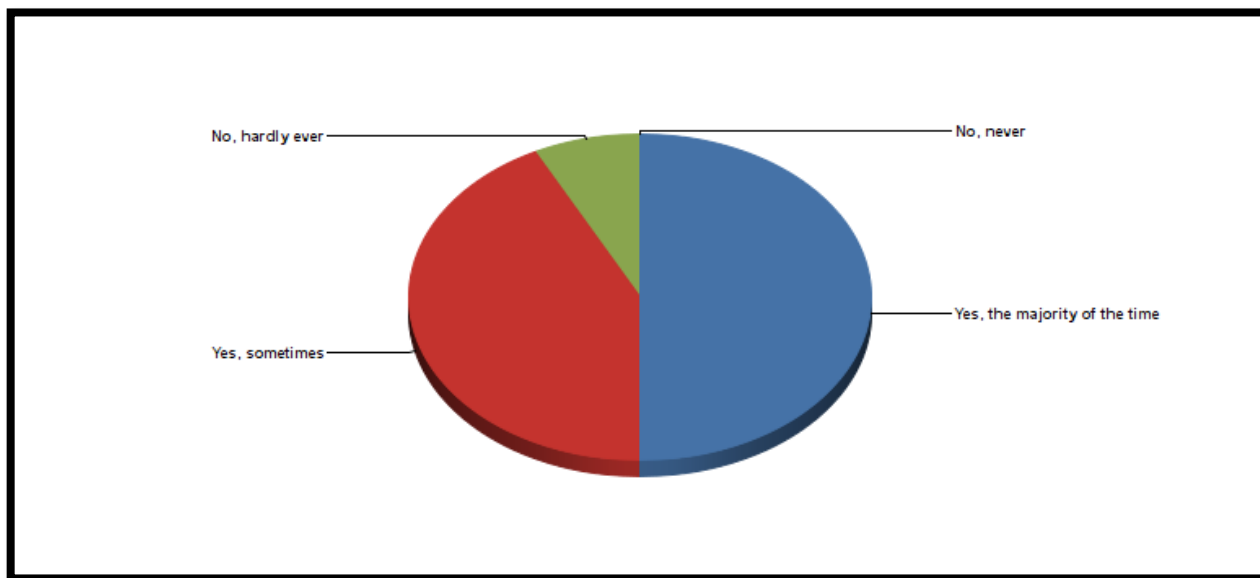
college degree, 15% said their father had some college education and 18% said their fathers had a high school diploma.

The majority of these young men began playing sports before or during elementary school: 50% began playing sports before elementary school and 30% began during elementary school. In inquiring about all freshmen male athletes' childhood experiences with reading, I found that 50% said that they were read to outside of school on a regular basis by a parent, sibling or friend. Forty percent said they were read to sometimes and 10% said they were never read to outside of school. Twenty-three percent said they enjoyed reading as a child, 17% said they sometimes enjoyed reading, and 40% said they did not.

Regarding high school, 53% said they never read outside of high school while 33% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, 13% said they read almost everyday, and 3% said everyday. Ninety-five percent said they rarely or never used the library. Seventy-eight percent of freshmen athletes maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 48% of male freshmen surveyed described their childhood experience with reading as "average," 40% said it was fairly positive to positive, and 13% said it was fairly to extremely negative.

In regards to reading today, 38% of male freshmen students surveyed report that they never enjoy reading, 38% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 23% said they enjoy reading. Slightly over half (53%) say they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks. Fifty percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 43% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level, and 8% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Do you feel that you are reading at a college level?



Freshmen Student Athletes- Were you read to as a child?

Overall, 50% of all freshmen male student athletes said they were read to often as children. Eighty percent of the men who were read to as children identified as Caucasian, 15% African American, and 5% Latino/Hispanic. According to the surveys collected, only 40% of the male students who were read qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch.² Eighty percent of students surveyed said their mother had a college degree, while 15% said their mother had some college education.³ Eighty percent of students who were read to said their father had a college degree, 15% said their father had some college education and 5% said their fathers did not graduate high school. Ninety percent of students said they grew up in a two-parent household. The majority of these young men (85%) began playing sports before or during elementary school.

In inquiring about freshmen male athletes who were read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 40% said they enjoyed reading as a child while 40% said

² 10% answered not available when asked if they qualified for FRPL.

³ 5% said their mother graduated from trade school

they did sometimes, and 20% said they never enjoyed reading. Regarding high school, 40% said they never read outside of high school while 35% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week and 20% said they read every day. Ninety percent maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 35% who were read to as children described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” 65% said it was fairly positive to extremely positive, and none reported their experience as being negative.

In regards to reading today, 16% of male freshmen students who were read to as children report that they never enjoy reading, 58% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 26% said they enjoy reading. Half said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks. Sixty-five percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 30% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level, and only 5% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 40% of freshmen male student athletes said they were sometimes read to as children. The majority of the students who stated they were read to sometimes as children were freshmen football players. Fifty percent of the men who were sometimes read to identified as Caucasian and 50% were African American. According to the surveys collected, 31% of the male students who were read to sometimes qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch.⁴ Fifty-six percent of students surveyed said their mother had a college degree, while 31% said their mother had some college education, 6% said their mother attained a high school diploma and 6% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Forty-four percent of students who were read to sometimes said their father had a college degree, 6% said their father had some college education, 31% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 19% said their fathers did

⁴ 10% answered not available when asked if they qualified for FRPL.

not graduate high school. Seventy-five percent of students said they grew up in a two-parent household. The majority of these young men (82%) began playing sports before or during elementary school while 16% began playing sports during or after middle school.

In inquiring about freshmen male athletes who were sometimes read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 31% said they sometimes enjoyed reading as a child and 69% said they never enjoyed it. No one said they enjoyed reading. Regarding high school, 75% said they never read outside of high school while 25% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week and no one said they read every day. Twenty-five percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 75% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 63% of male freshmen students who were read to sometimes as children described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” 13% said it was fairly positive, and 25% said it was negative or extremely negative.

In regards to reading today, 69% of male freshmen students who were read to sometimes as children report that they never enjoy reading, 13% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 19% said they enjoy reading. Sixty-nine percent of the male student athletes that were read to sometimes as a child say they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks. Thirty-one percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 56% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level, and 13% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 10% of freshmen male student athletes said they were never read to as children. The only athletes that indicated they were never read to as children were football players. All of them were African American. According to the surveys collected, 75% of the male students who were never read to qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch. Twenty-five

percent said their mother had a college degree, while 50% said their mother had some college education. No students said their mother attained a high school diploma, however, 25% said their mother did not graduate from high school. None of students who were never read to said their father had a college degree, 50% said their father had some college education, and 51% said their father attained a high school diploma. None said their fathers did not graduate high school. Fifty percent of students said they grew up in a single parent household. Fifty percent began playing sports before elementary school and 50% began playing sports in high school. None reported beginning sports during elementary or middle school.

In inquiring about freshmen male athletes who were never read to as children and their childhood experience with reading, 25% said they enjoyed reading as a child, 50% said they sometimes enjoyed reading as a child and 25% said they never enjoyed it. Regarding high school, 25% said they never read outside of high school while 50% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week and none said they read every day. Seventy-five percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 25% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 50% of male freshmen students who were never read to as children described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” 25% said it was fairly positive, and 25% said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 25% of male freshmen students who were never read to as children report that they never enjoy reading, 50% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 25% said they enjoy reading. One hundred percent of the male student athletes that were not read to as a child say they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks. Fifty percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 50% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level.

All Freshmen Athletes- Enjoy Reading as a child?

Overall, 23% of freshmen male student athletes said they enjoyed reading as children. Seventy-eight percent of those who enjoyed reading as children identified as Caucasian, 11% identified as African American, and 11% identified as Latino/Hispanic. According to the surveys collected, 22% of the male students who enjoyed reading to qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch.⁵ Seventy-eight percent said their mother had a college degree, while 11% said their mother had some college education and 11% said their mother attended trade school. Eighty-eight percent said their father had a college degree and the other 11% said their father had some college education. Seventy-eight percent of students who enjoyed reading said they grew up in a two parent household. Fifty-five percent began playing sports before or during elementary school and 50% began playing sports in middle school and high school.

In inquiring about freshmen male athletes who enjoyed reading as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 89% said they were read to often as children and 11% said they were never read to. No one said they were sometimes read to. Regarding high school, only 11% said they never read outside of high school, 33% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, 44% said they read three to six times per week and 11% said they read every day. Eighty-nine percent said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 56% of male freshmen students who enjoyed reading as children described their childhood experience with reading as extremely positive, 33% said it was fairly positive, and 11% said it was average. None of those who enjoyed reading as children described their experience as negative.

In regards to reading today, 63% of male freshmen students who enjoyed reading as children report that they enjoy reading today, 38% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and no

⁵ 11% answered 'Not Available' for the question regarding whether or not they qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch

one said they never enjoy reading. Fifty-five percent of the male student athletes who enjoyed reading as children say they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks and 44% said they sometimes have trouble. Eighty-nine percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 11% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 38% of freshmen male student athletes said they enjoyed sometimes reading as children. Forty-seven percent of those who enjoyed reading as children identified as Caucasian and 53% identified as African American. According to the surveys collected, 33% of the male students who sometimes enjoyed reading qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch.⁶ Fifty-three percent said their mother had a college degree, while 40% said their mother had some college education and 6% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Forty percent said their father had a college degree, 20% said their father had some college education, 13% graduated from high school, and 27% did not graduate from high school. Seventy-three percent of students who sometimes enjoyed reading said they grew up in a two parent household. Eighty-seven percent began playing sports before or during elementary school and 14% began playing sports in middle school or high school.

In inquiring about freshmen male athletes who sometimes enjoyed reading as children and their overall childhood experiences with reading, 53% said they were read to often as children, 33% said they were sometimes read to, and 13% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 40% said they never read outside of high school, 53% said they read outside of school only one or twice a week, 7% said they read three to six times per week and no one said they read every day. Twenty-seven percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 73% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 7% of male freshmen athletes

⁶ 13% answered 'Not Available' for the question regarding whether or not they qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch

who sometimes enjoyed reading as children described their childhood experience with reading as extremely positive, 40% said it was fairly positive, and 47% said it was average. Only 7% of those who sometimes enjoyed reading as children described their experience as negative.

In regards to reading today, 27% of male freshmen who sometimes enjoyed reading as children report that they enjoy reading today, 60% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 13% said they never enjoy reading. Twenty-seven percent of these young men also said they sometimes have trouble understanding college textbooks, 60% said they hardly ever have trouble, and 13% said they never have trouble. Fifty-three percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 47% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 39% of freshmen male student athletes said they did not enjoy reading as children. Sixty-three percent of those who did not enjoy reading as children identified as Caucasian and 38% identified as African American. According to the surveys collected, 19% of the male students who did not enjoy reading qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch.⁷ Sixty-nine percent said their mother had a college degree, while 19% said their mother had some college education, 6% said their mother attained a high school diploma and 6% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Fifty-six percent said their father had a college degree, 13% said their father had some college education, and 31% said their father attained a high school diploma. Eighty-eight percent of students who did not enjoy reading said they grew up in a two parent household. Eighty-eight percent of these young men began playing sports before or during elementary school and 13% began playing sports in middle school and high school.

In inquiring about freshmen male athletes who did not enjoy reading as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 25% said they were read to often as children, 69% said

⁷ 19% answered 'Not Available' for the question regarding whether or not they qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch

they were sometimes read to, and 6% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 88% said they never read outside of high school, and the other 13% said they read once or twice a week outside of school. Twenty-five percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 75% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, none of male freshmen students who said they did not reading as children described their childhood experience with reading as extremely positive. Only 6% said it was fairly positive and 69% said it was average. Twenty-five percent of those who did not enjoy reading as children described their experience as negative.

In regards to reading today, none of the male freshmen athletes who did not enjoy reading as children report that they enjoy reading today, 19% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 81% said they never enjoy reading. Fifty-six percent of the male student athletes who did not enjoy reading as children say they hardly ever (or never) have trouble understanding college textbooks while 44% said they sometimes have trouble. Twenty-five percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 58% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level, and 19% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading on a college level.

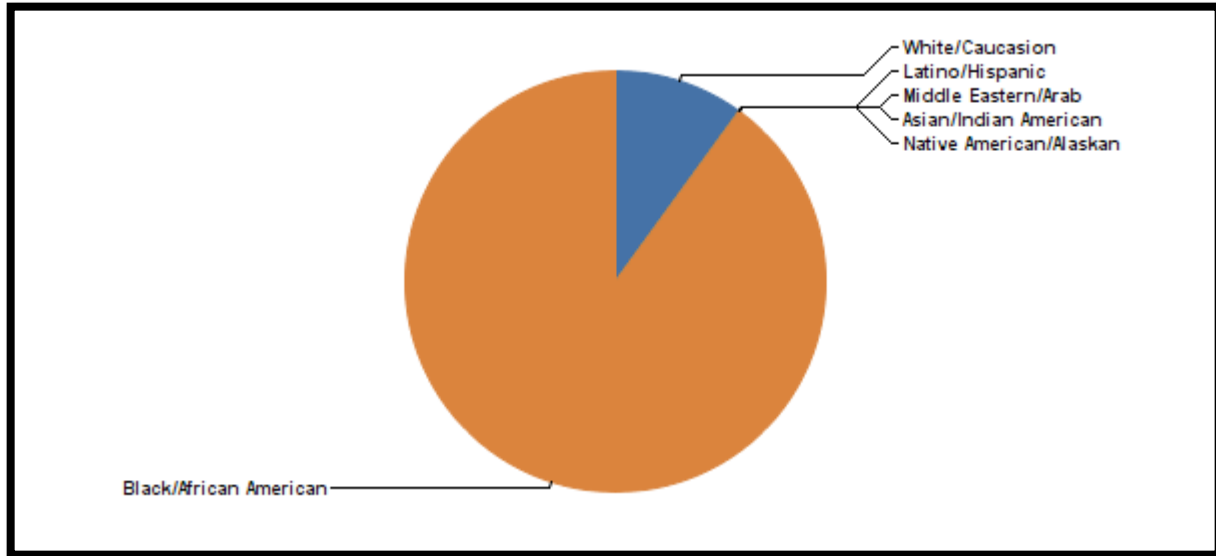
Reading and Low-Income Freshmen Student Athletes

For my research purposes, I classify any student who said that he qualified for free or reduced price lunch in high school (FRPL) as low income. These students will be classified as FRPL students, while non-low income students (students who said they did not qualify for FRPL) will be classified as non-FRPL students. Twenty-five percent of the male freshmen athletes surveyed said that they qualified for free or reduced price lunch (FRPL). Ninety percent of the students who qualified for FRPL were on the football team⁸ and 90% identified as Black/African American. Fifty percent of FRPL student athletes said that they did not begin

⁸ The other 10% of student athletes qualifying for FRPL were members of the Cheerleading team. For my research, I did not include the cheerleading team because it is not categorized in the Ole Miss Equity in Athletics Report as being a varsity sport.

playing sports until during or after middle school. In comparison, 63% of non-FRPL student athletes said they began playing sports before elementary school.

Race/Ethnicity of FRPL Recipients:



Regarding parent education and background, 30% of the FRPL students said the highest level of education attained by their mother was a college degree while 50% said their mothers attended some college. Twenty percent stated that their mother had not finished high school.⁹ Thirty percent of FRPL students reported that their father had a college degree or attended college. Forty percent said their father had graduated from high school, and 30% said their father did not finish high school. Fifty percent of freshman FRPL students grew up in single-parent households. In comparison, 75% of non-FRPL students said their mothers had attained college degrees, 71% of their fathers attained college degrees, and only 4% grew up in single parent households.

Regarding the respondents' childhood reading experiences, 20% of FRPL students reported they were read to often throughout their childhood, 50% said they were read to

⁹ No one reported that their mother had a high school diploma

sometimes, and 30% said they were never read to as a child. Furthermore, only 20% said that they enjoyed reading as a child, 50% said they sometimes enjoyed reading, and 30% said they did not enjoy reading. In comparison, 67% of non-FRPL students reported being read to often as children, 29% said they were sometimes read to and only 4% said they were never read to. Twenty-five percent said they enjoyed reading as a child, 33% said they sometimes enjoyed reading, and 42% said they did not enjoy reading.

While in high school, only 10% of FRPL students said they read every day outside of school, 10% said three to six times, 40% said they read outside of school once or twice a week, and 40% admitted to never reading at all outside of school. Sixty percent said they maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher, while the other 40% said they had a GPA between 2.0 and 2.99. Overall, 20% of FRPL students rated their childhood experience with reading as positive, 60% said it was average, and 20% said it was negative. In comparison, 13% of non-FRPL students said they read everyday outside of school, 33% said they read 1-2 times per week, and 54% said they did not read outside of school. Ninety-two percent of non-FRPL students said they had a GPA of 3.0 or higher in high school. A majority of non-FRPL students (54%) reported they had a positive childhood experience with reading, while 38% said it was average and only 8% said it was negative.

With respect to reading in college today, 30% of FRPL students said they enjoy reading today, 40% reported they sometimes enjoy reading, and 30% said they never enjoy reading. Seventy-percent of FRPL students report they hardly ever have trouble understanding textbooks and 30% said that sometimes they have trouble. No one said they never have trouble and no one said they have trouble the majority of the time. Forty percent said that they feel they are reading

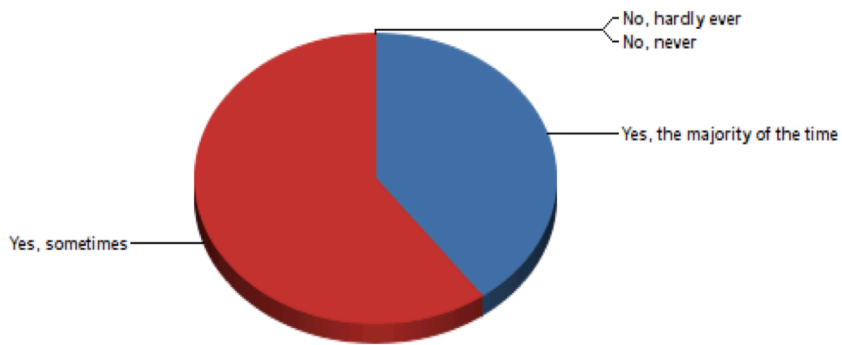
at a college level and 60% said they sometimes feel like they are reading at a college level.¹⁰ In comparison, 17% of non-FRPL students said they enjoy reading today, 48% percent reported they sometimes enjoy reading and 35% reported never enjoy reading today. Forty-six percent of non-FRPL students report they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks, 13% said they never have trouble, 38% said that sometimes they have trouble, and 4% said they often have trouble. Fifty-eight percent said they are reading on a college level and 87% percent said they are sometimes reading at a college level. Thirteen percent said they feel like they are hardly ever reading at a college level.

¹⁰ No FRPL-students said that they felt like they were not reading at a college level.

Do you feel that you are reading at a college level?

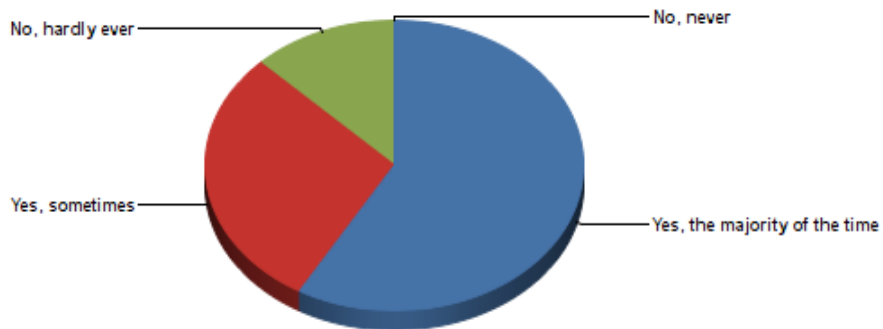
Freshmen FRPL Students:

Yes, the majority of the time	40%
Yes, sometimes	60%
No, hardly ever	0%
No, never	0%



Freshmen Non-FRPL Students:

Yes, the majority of the time	58%
Yes, sometimes	29%
No, hardly ever	13%
No, never	0%



FRPL Freshmen Student Athletes- Were you read to as a child?

Overall, 20% of all freshmen male FRPL student athletes said they were read to often as children. Fifty percent were football players and the other fifty percent were non-football players. Fifty percent of the FRPL athletes who were read to as children identified as Caucasian and 50% African American. Fifty percent of students surveyed said their mother had a college degree, while the other 50% said their mother had some college education. Fifty percent of students who were read to said their father had a college degree, 50% said their fathers did not graduate high school. One hundred percent of students said they grew up in a two-parent household. Fifty percent of these young men began playing sports during elementary school and 50% began during high school school.

In inquiring about freshmen FRPL male athletes who were read to as children and their childhood experience with reading, 50% said they enjoyed reading as a child while 50% said sometimes enjoyed it. Regarding high school, 50% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week and 50% said they read every day. Fifty percent attained a GPA of a 3.0 or higher. Overall, 50% of male freshmen FRPL students who were read to as children described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” the other 50% said it was extremely positive. No one reported their experience as being negative.

In regards to reading today, 100% of male freshmen FRPL students who were read to as children report that they sometimes enjoy reading. One hundred percent say they sometimes have trouble understanding college textbooks. Half said they feel they are reading on a college level and the other half said they sometimes feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 50% of freshmen male FRPL student athletes said they were sometimes read to as children. One hundred percent of the students who stated they were read to sometimes as

children were African American freshmen football players. Twenty percent said their mother had a college degree, while 60% said their mother had some college education and 20% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Twenty percent said their father had a college degree, 40% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 40% said their fathers did not graduate from high school. Sixty percent of these young men began playing sports before or during elementary school and 40% said they began playing sports during or after middle school.

In inquiring about freshmen male FRPL student athletes who were sometimes read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 60% said they sometimes enjoyed reading as a child and 40% said they never enjoyed it. No one said they enjoyed reading. Regarding high school, 60% said they never read outside of high school while 40% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, and no one said they read every day. Forty percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 60% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 60% of male freshmen students who were read to sometimes as children described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” 20% said it was fairly positive, and 20% said it was fairly negative.

In regards to reading today, 40% of male freshmen FRPL student athletes who were read to sometimes as children report that they never enjoy reading, 20% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 40% said they enjoy reading. Eighty say they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks and 20% said they sometimes have trouble. Forty percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 60% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 30% of freshmen male FRPL student athletes said they were never read to as children. The only FRPL student athletes who indicated they were never read to as children

were African American football players. Thirty-three percent said their mother had a college degree, while 33% said their mother had some college education. No students said their mother attained a high school diploma, however, 33% said their mother did not graduate from high school. None of students who were never read to said their father had a college degree, 33% said their father had some college education, and 67% said their father attained a high school diploma. None said their fathers did not graduate high school. Thirty-three percent said they grew up in a single parent household. Thirty-three percent of these young men began playing sports before elementary school and 67% began playing sports in high school. None reported beginning sports during elementary or middle school.

In inquiring about male freshmen FRPL athletes who were never read to as children and their childhood experience with reading, 33% said they enjoyed reading as a child, 33% said they sometimes enjoyed reading as a child and 33% said they never enjoyed it. Regarding high school, 33% said they never read outside of high school, 33% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, 33% said they read three to six times a week, and none said they read every day. Sixty-seven percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 33% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 67% of male freshmen FRPL athletes who were never read to as children described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” 33% said it was fairly negative. No one described their experience as positive.

In regards to reading today, 33% of male freshmen FRPL athletes who were never read to as children report that they never enjoy reading today, 33% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 33% said they enjoy reading. One hundred percent say they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks. Thirty-three percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 67% said they feel they are sometimes reading at a college level.

FRPL Freshmen Athletes- Enjoy Reading as a child?

Overall, 30% of freshmen FRPL male student athletes said they enjoyed reading as children. Fifty percent of those who enjoyed reading as children identified as Caucasian and 50% identified as African American. Fifty percent said their mother had a college degree, while the other 50% said their mother had some college education. Fifty percent said their father had a college degree and the other 50% said their father had some college education. Fifty percent of FRPL students who enjoyed reading said they grew up in a single parent household. One hundred percent began playing sports in high school.

In inquiring about freshmen FRPL male athletes' who enjoyed reading as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 50% said they were read to often as children and 50% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 50% said they read three to six times per week and 50% said they read every day. One hundred percent said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 50% of male freshmen FRPL athletes who enjoyed reading as children described their childhood experience with reading as extremely positive, 50% said it was average. None of those who enjoyed reading as children described their experience as negative.

In regards to reading today, 50% of male freshmen FRPL athletes who enjoyed reading as children report that they enjoy reading today and 50% said they sometimes enjoy reading. Fifty percent say they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks, while 50% said they sometimes have trouble. One hundred percent said they feel they are reading on a college level.

Overall, 50% of freshmen FRPL male student athletes said they enjoyed sometimes reading as children. One hundred percent of those who sometimes enjoyed reading as children identified as African American football players. Forty percent said their mother had a college

degree, while 20% said their mother had some college education and 20% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Forty percent said their father had a college degree, 60% did not graduate from high school.¹¹ Sixty percent percent said they grew up in a single parent household. Sixty percent began playing sports before or during elementary school and 40% began playing sports in middle school.

In inquiring about freshmen FRPL athletes who sometimes enjoyed reading as children and their overall childhood experience with reading, 20% said they were read to often as children, 60% said they were sometimes read to, and 20% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 20% said they never read outside of high school, and 80% said they read outside of school only one or twice a week. None said they read every day. Forty percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 60% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 20% described their childhood experience with reading as positive, 60% said it was average. Twenty percent described their experience as negative.

In regards to reading today, 40% of FRPL athletes who sometimes enjoyed reading as children report that they enjoy reading today, 40% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 20% said they never enjoy reading. Twenty percent said they sometimes have trouble understanding college textbooks, and 80% said they hardly ever have trouble. Forty percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 60% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 30% of FRPL athletes said they did not enjoy reading as children. One hundred percent who did not enjoy reading as children were African American football players. None said their mother had a college degree, while 67% said their mother had some college

¹¹ No FRPL freshmen athletes that said they enjoyed reading sometimes said their fathers attended or graduated from college.

education, and the other 33% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Thirty-three percent said their father had a college degree and 67% said their father attained a high school diploma. Sixty-seven percent of FRPL athletes who did not enjoy reading said they grew up in a single parent household. Sixty-six percent of these young men began playing sports before or during elementary school and 33% began playing sports in high school.

In inquiring about freshmen FRPL athletes' who did not enjoy reading as children and their childhood experience with reading, none said they were read to often as children, 67% said they were sometimes read to, and 33% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 100% said they never read outside of high school. Sixty-seven percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 33% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, none of male FRPL athletes who said they did not enjoy reading as children described their childhood experience with reading as positive. Sixty-seven percent said it was average. Thirty-three percent describe their experience as negative.

In regards to reading today, none of male freshmen students who did not enjoy reading as children report that they enjoy reading today, 33% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 67% said they never enjoy reading. Sixty-seven percent say they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks and 33% percent said they sometimes have trouble. One hundred percent said they sometimes feel like they are reading at a college level.

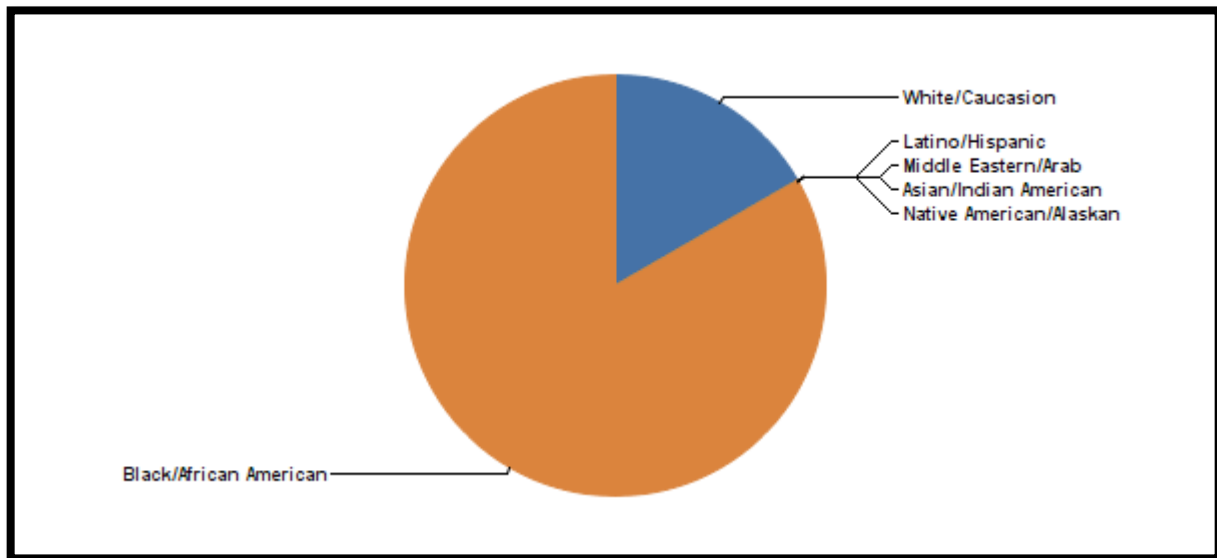
Freshmen Football Players vs. Other Freshmen Athletes

Because football has the largest percent of low-income and minority players, it is important to compare the data collected from football players to that of non-football players. In this section, I present data from freshmen football players and data from freshmen non-football

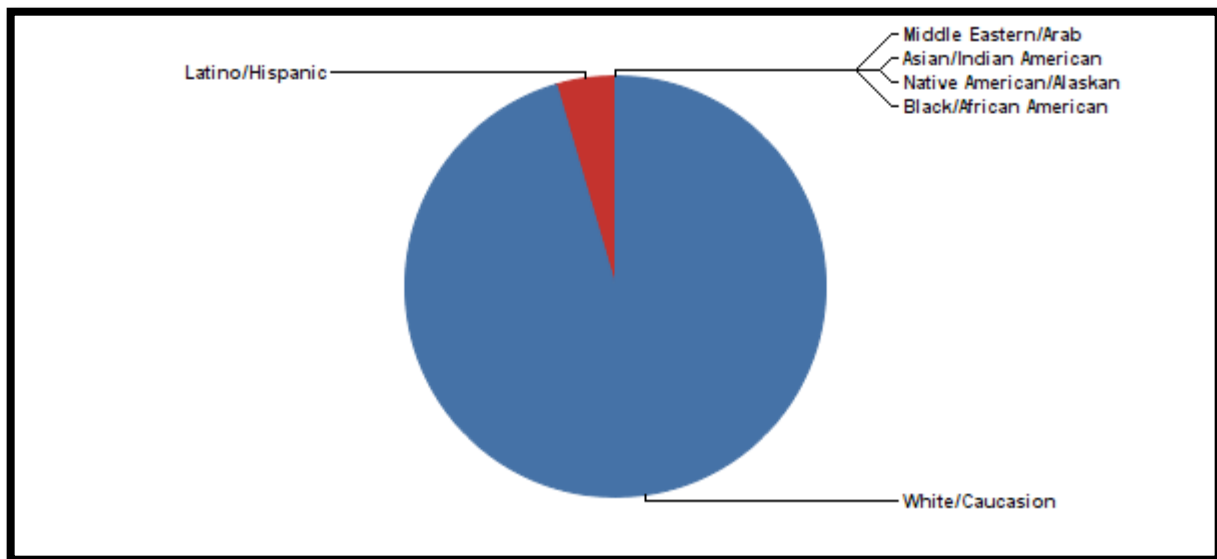
athletes (baseball, tennis, golf, tennis, and track and field)¹². Eighteen freshmen football players were surveyed and 34 male non-football athletes were surveyed.

With regards to race and ethnicity, 17% of the freshmen football players identified as Caucasian/White and 83% as African American/Black. Of the non-football players surveyed, 88% identified as Caucasian/White, 6% as African American, and 6% as Latino/Hispanic.

Freshmen Football Players Ethnicity/Race



Freshmen Non-Football Players Ethnicity/Race



¹² Basketball players were not surveyed

With regards to financial background and parent information, 50% of freshmen football players surveyed qualified for free or reduced price lunch. Forty-four percent said their mother had a college degree and 11% said their mother had not graduated from high school. Twenty-eight percent said their father had a college degree, 17% said their father attended some college, 39% said their father had a high school diploma, and 17% said their father had not graduated from high school.¹³ Thirty-three percent said they grew up in a single parent household. In comparison, only 8% of non-football players said they qualified for free or reduced price lunch. Seventy one percent said their mother had a college degree and 3% reported that their mother did not graduate from high school. Sixty-eight percent said their father had a college degree, 3% said their father graduated from high school, and 6% said their father did not graduate from high school. Nine percent said they grew up in a single parent household.

When asked about their past experience with sports, 44% of freshmen football players said they started playing sports before elementary school, while 23% said they started playing sports during or after middle school. In comparison, 83% percent of non-football players said they started playing spots before or during elementary school, and 18% said they started playing sports during middle or high school.

When asked about their childhood experience with reading, only 6% of freshmen football players stated they enjoyed reading as a child, 55% said they sometimes enjoyed reading, and 39% said they did not. Thirty-three percent said they were read to on a consistent basis and 22% said they were never read to as a child. Fifty-six percent described their childhood experience with reading as average while 34% said it was positive and 11% said it was negative. In comparison, 32% of non-football players said they enjoyed reading as a child, 33% said

¹³ 7% of those surveyed said the information regarding father's education was not available.

sometimes, and 35% said they did not. Fifty-nine percent said they were read to often as children, 38% said sometimes, and 3% said they were never read to as a child. Fifty percent describe their childhood reading experience as average. Thirty-nine percent said it was positive while 12% said it was negative.

When asked about their high school experience with reading, none of freshmen football players surveyed remember reading outside of school on a daily basis and 50% stated that they never read outside of school. Sixty-seven percent said they maintained a 3.0 high school GPA or higher. In comparison, 3% of non-football athletes said they remember reading outside of school everyday and 62% said they never read outside of school. Eighty-two percent said they maintained a 3.0 GPA or higher.

When asked about reading today, 22% of freshmen football players said they enjoy reading today, 39% stated they sometimes enjoy reading today, and 39% said they do not. Thirty-three percent said they feel like they have trouble understanding college textbooks, while 67% say they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks. Overall 44% said they feel that they are reading at a college level and 56% said they feel that they are sometimes reading at a college level. In comparison, 27% of all non-football players said they enjoy reading today, 36% said they sometimes enjoy reading, and 36% said they do not enjoy reading today. Thirty-eight percent said they feel like they have trouble understanding college textbooks, 62% said they do not. Overall, 47% said they feel like they are reading at a college level the majority of the time, 38% sometimes, and 15% said they hardly ever or never feel that they are reading at a college level.

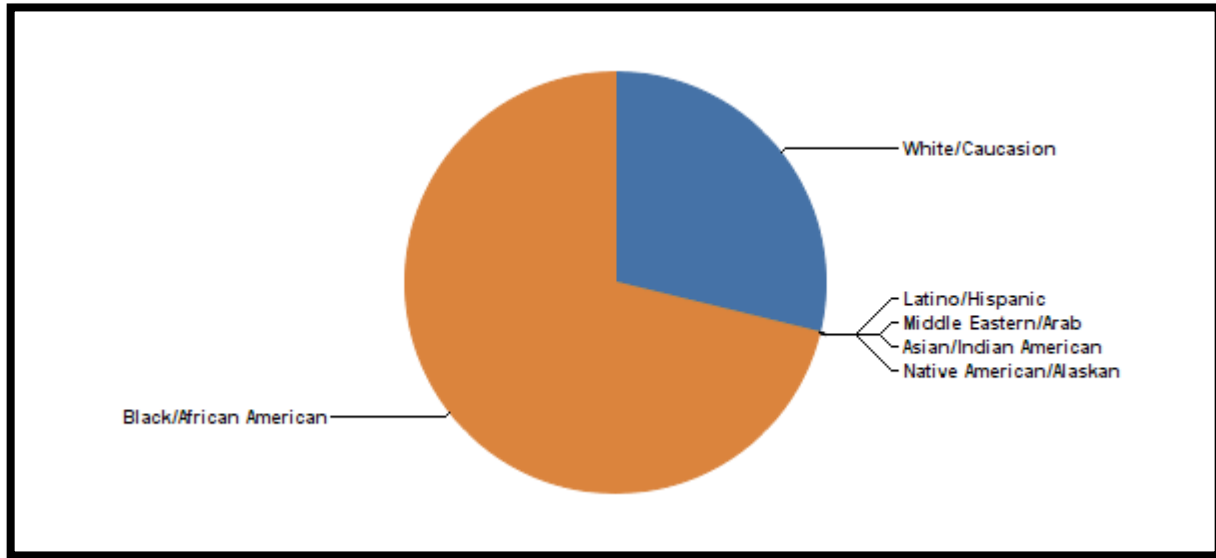
Reading and College Football Players

After collecting the data from freshmen male athletes, I noticed three trends that sparked my interest to further investigate members of the football team from all grade levels. The first trend I noticed was that the majority of low income and minority freshmen athletes were members of the football team. The second was that all of the freshmen athletes who reported they were not read to and the majority who did not enjoy reading as children were football players. The third was that all low-income freshmen athletes who reported they were not read to and did not enjoy reading as children were on the football team. After noticing these trends, I decided to hone in on these individuals to find out more about college athletes' perception of reading. I surveyed members of the football team of all ages.

Classification Breakdown for all Football players surveyed:

Year in School	Total Number on Team	Number Surveyed	Percent of Players Surveyed
Freshmen	52	18	34.6%
Sophomore	33	16	48.5%
Junior	30	11	36.6%
Senior	20	14	70%
Total	135	59	43.7%

Football Players Ethnicity/Race:



Regarding race and ethnicity of the football players surveyed, 28% identified as Caucasian/White, 2% identified as being Latino/Hispanic, and 70% identified as being African American/Black. With regards to financial background and parent information, 48% of all football players surveyed qualified for free or reduced price lunch, 43% did not, and 8% chose “Answer not available.” Regarding their mothers’ education, 50% said their mothers attained a college degree, 23% attended some college, 20% attained a high school diploma, and 7% did not graduate from high school. Forty-two percent said their father had a college degree, 17% said their father attended some college, 27% said their father had a high school diploma, and 8% said their father did not graduate from high school.¹⁴ Forty percent said they grew up in a single parent household. With regards to sports background, 82% said they started playing sports before or during elementary school, while 18% said they started playing sports during or after middle school.

When asked about their background with reading, only 5% of the football players surveyed stated they enjoyed reading as a child, while the majority (58%) said they sometimes

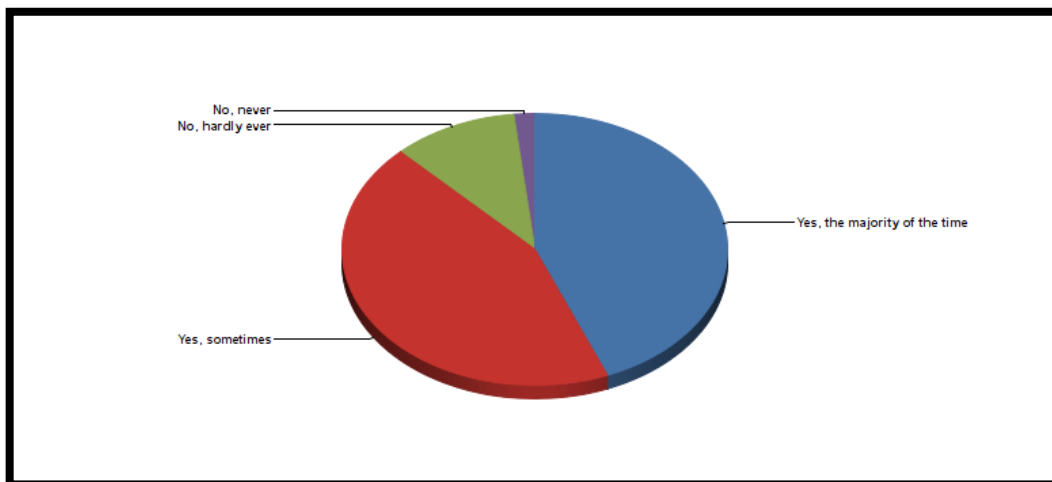
¹⁴ 7% of those surveyed said the information regarding father’s education was not available.

enjoyed reading and 37% said they did not enjoy reading. Thirty-three percent said they were read to often as children, 43% said they were read to sometimes, and 23% said they were never read to as children. Fifty-eight percent described their childhood experience with reading as average, 34% said it was positive, and 9% said it was negative.

Regarding their high school education, only 3% of football players remember reading outside of school everyday while in high school, 46% stated they read once or twice a week, and 44% indicated that they never read outside of school. Forty-four percent said they maintained a GPA of a 2.0 to 2.99, and 54% maintained a 3.0 GPA or higher.¹⁵

When asked about reading today, 22% of football players said they enjoy reading today, 47% stated they sometimes enjoy reading today, and 32% said they do not. Seven percent said they feel like they have trouble understanding college textbooks, 32% said they sometimes do, 40% said they hardly ever have trouble, and 22% said they never have trouble. Overall 45% said they feel that they are reading at a college level, 43% said they feel this way sometimes, and 12% said they hardly ever or never feel like they are reading at a college level.

Do you feel like you are reading at a college level?



¹⁵ One student reported having a 1.0-1.99. Considering all athletes must have above a 2.0, this student is possibly a transferred from a junior college or did not record the correct answer.

All Football Players- Were you read to as a child?

Overall, 33% of all football players said they were read to often as children. Fifty percent identified as Caucasian, 45% African American, and 5% Latino/Hispanic. Thirty percent of the football players qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, 60% did not.¹⁶ Fifty-five percent said their mother had a college degree, 25% said their mother had some college education and 20% attained a high school diploma. Fifty-five percent said their father had a college degree, 10% said their father had some college education, 15% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 10% said their fathers did not graduate high school.¹⁷ Seventy percent said they grew up in a two-parent household. The vast majority (90%) began playing sports before or during elementary school, and 10% began playing during or after middle school.

In inquiring about football players who were read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 5% said they enjoyed reading as a child, 65% said sometimes, and 30% said they never enjoyed reading. Regarding high school, 50% said they never read outside of high school, while 45% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week and 5% said they read three to six times per week. None said they read everyday. Sixty-five percent said they maintained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 50% described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” 40% said it was positive, and 10% said their experience as negative.

In regards to reading today, 20% of football players who were read to as children report that they never enjoy reading, 50% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 30% said they enjoy reading. Half say they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks. Sixty percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 30% said they sometimes feel

¹⁶ 10% answered not available when asked if they qualified for FRPL.

¹⁷ 10% answered not available when asked about their father’s education

they are reading at a college level, and only 10% said they hardly ever feel like they are hardly ever reading at a college level.

Overall, 43% of football players said they were sometimes read to as children. Twenty-three percent identified as Caucasian and 77% were African American. Furthermore, 38% of the male students qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch, 50% did not.¹⁸ Fifty-eight percent said their mother had a college degree, 15% said their mother had some college education, 19% said their mother attained a high school diploma, and 8% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Forty-two percent said their father had a college degree, 15% said their father had some college education, 27% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 12% said their fathers did not graduate high school. Seventy-two percent said they grew up in a two-parent household. Seventy-seven percent began playing sports before or during elementary school and 23% said they began playing sports during or after middle school.

In inquiring about football players who were sometimes read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 62% said they sometimes enjoyed reading as a child and 38% said they never enjoyed it. No one said they enjoyed reading. Regarding high school, 35% said they never read outside of high school while 50% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, 8% read three to six times, and 8% said they read every day. Forty-two percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 54% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher.¹⁹ Overall, 58% described their childhood experience with reading as “average,” 34% said it was positive, and 8% said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 35% of football players who were read to sometimes as children report that they never enjoy reading, 46% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 19%

¹⁸ 12% answered not available when asked if they qualified for FRPL.

¹⁹ 4% answered that they had a GPA of 1.0-1.99 in high school.

said they enjoy reading. Fifty-eight percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, 35% said sometimes, and 8% said they have trouble understanding college textbooks the majority of the time. Thirty-eight percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 50% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level, and 13% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 23% of football players said they were never read to as children. Ninety-three percent of them were African American, the other 7% identified as Caucasian. Seventy-one percent qualified for Free or Reduced Price Lunch. Twenty-nine percent said their mother had a college degree, 36% said their mother had some college education, 21% said their mother attained a high school diploma, and 25% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Twenty-one percent said their father had a college degree, 29% said their father had some college education, and 43% said their father attained a high school diploma. None said their fathers did not graduate high school.²⁰ Fifty percent said they grew up in a single parent household. Seventy-eight percent began playing sports before or during elementary school and 21% began playing sports in high school. None reported beginning sports during middle school.

In inquiring about football players who were never read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 14% said they enjoyed reading as a child, 43% said they sometimes enjoyed reading and 43% said they never enjoyed it. Regarding high school, 54% said they never read outside of high school while 38% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, 8% said almost everyday, and none said they read every day. Sixty-four percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 36% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or

²⁰ 7% said answered not available when asked about their father's education

higher. Overall, 69% described their childhood experience with reading as average, 23% said it was fairly positive, and 8% said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 43% of football players who were never read to as children report that they never enjoy reading today, 43% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 14% said they enjoy reading today. Eighty-six percent say they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, and 7% said they sometimes have trouble understanding, and 7% say they have a hard time the majority of the time. Thirty-six percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 50% said feel they sometimes read at a college level, and 14% said they hardly ever or never feel like they are reading at a college level.

All Football Players- Did you enjoy reading as a child?

Overall, 5% of all football players said they enjoyed reading as children. One hundred percent of football players were African American. One hundred percent said they were from low-income backgrounds. Thirty-three percent said their mother had some college education and 67% attained a high school diploma. Thirty-three percent said their father had some college education, 33% said their father attained a high school diploma and 33% said their fathers did not graduate high school. Sixty-seven percent of students said they grew up in a single-parent household. The majority (67%) began playing sports before or during elementary school and 33% began playing during or after middle school.

In inquiring about football players who enjoyed reading as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 67% said they were read to often as a child while 33% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 33% said they never read outside of high school, 33% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, and 33% said they read almost everyday. Sixty-seven percent attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 33% described their

childhood experience with reading as average, and 33% reported their experience as being positive. No one said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 67% of football players who enjoyed reading as children report that they enjoy reading today, 33% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and none said they do not enjoy reading today. Sixty-seven percent say they sometimes have trouble understanding college textbooks and 33% said they never have trouble. Sixty-seven percent said they feel they are reading on a college level and 33% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 43% of football players said they sometimes enjoyed reading as children. Sixty-seven percent identified as African American, 31% as Caucasian, and 3% as Latino/Hispanic. Forty-three percent said they were from low-income backgrounds. Fifty-seven percent said their mother had a college degree, 23% said their mother had some college education, 14% said their mother attained a high school diploma, and 6% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Thirty-four percent said their father had a college degree, 14% said their father had some college education, 17% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 11% said their fathers did not graduate high school.²¹ Thirty-seven percent said they grew up in a single-parent household. The majority (77%) began playing sports before or during elementary school and 23% said they began playing sports during or after middle school.

In inquiring about football players who sometimes enjoyed reading to as children and their childhood experience with reading, 37% said they were read to often as children, 46% said they were sometimes read to, and 17% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 26% said they never read outside of high school while 60% said they read outside of school only

²¹ 3% answered not available when asked about their father's education

once or twice a week, 9% read almost every day, and 6% every day. Forty-six percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 51% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher.²² Overall, 47% described their childhood experience with reading as average, 47% said it was positive, and 6% said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 29% of football players who enjoyed reading sometimes as children report that they don't enjoy reading today, 60% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 11% said they enjoy reading today. Sixty-three percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, 34% said sometimes, and 3% said they have trouble understanding college textbooks the majority of the time. Forty-seven percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 47% said sometimes, and 6% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 43% of football players said they did not enjoy reading as children. Seventy-three percent were African American and 27% were Caucasian. Forty-five percent of these football players said their mother had a college degree, while 23% said their mother had some college education, 23% said their mother attained a high school diploma, and 9% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Twenty-seven percent of football players who did not enjoy reading said their father had a college degree, 18% said their father had some college education, and 41% said their father attained a high school diploma.²³ Thirty-two percent said they grew up in a single parent household. Ninety percent began playing sports before elementary school and 10% began playing sports in middle or high school.

In inquiring about football players who did not enjoy reading as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 27% said they were read to often as a child, 45% said they

²² 3% reported they attained a high school GPA of 1.0-1.99.

²³ 14% answered not available when asked about their father's education

sometimes were read to, and 27% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 76% said they never read outside of high school and 24% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week. None said they read every day. Forty-five percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 55% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 73% described their childhood experience with reading as average, 14% said it was fairly positive, and 14% said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 68% of football players who did not enjoy reading as children report that they do not enjoy reading today, 27% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 5% said they enjoy reading today. Sixty-three percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, and 30% said they sometimes or always have trouble. Thirty-eight percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 43% said sometimes, and 19% said they hardly ever or never feel like they are reading at a college level.

Reading and Low-Income Football Players

The following section is important in comparing the different perceptions among low-income and non low-income football players. The players who identified as qualifying for Free or Reduced Price Lunch are considered low-income students (48%). Football players who stated they did not qualify for free or reduced price lunch (43%) are considered non low-income students.²⁴

In regards to race and ethnicity, all of the football players who said they qualified for free or reduced price lunch identified as African American/Black. In comparison, 54% of football players who said they did not qualify for free or reduced price lunch identified as Caucasian/White, 42% identified as African American/Black, and 4% identified as Latino/Hispanic.

²⁴ 8% of football players answered Not Available for the question asking, "In high school, did you qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunch?"

When asked about their financial background and their parents' education, 28% of low-income football players stated their mother had a college degree and 24% said their father had a college degree. Fourteen percent reported that their mother had not graduated from high school and 14% that their father had not graduated. Fifty-nine percent said they grew up in a single parent household.²⁵ In comparison, 73% of non low-income football players stated that their mother had a college degree and 58% that their father had a college degree. All said their mother and father both had at least a high school diploma. Only 15% said they grew up in a single parent household.

When asked about background with sports, 69% of low-income football players said they started playing sports before elementary school and 31% said they began playing during or after middle school. In comparison, 92% percent of non low-income football players said they started playing sports before or during elementary school and 8% said they began playing during or after middle school.

When asked about their childhood experience with reading, 10% of low-income football players said they enjoyed reading as a child, 52% said the enjoyed reading sometimes, and 38% said they did not enjoy reading as a child. Twenty-one percent said they were read to often as children, 45% said they were read to occasionally, and 34% said they were never read to as children. Sixty-nine percent describe their experience with reading as a child as average, 17% describe their experience as positive, and 13% described their experience as negative. In comparison, none of the non low-income football players said they enjoyed reading as children, 69% said the enjoyed reading sometimes, and 31% said they did not enjoy reading as a child. Forty-six percent said they were read to often, 38% said they were read to occasionally, and 15%

²⁵ 7% of FRPL FB players answered Not Available for the question asking "Did you grow up in a single parent household?"

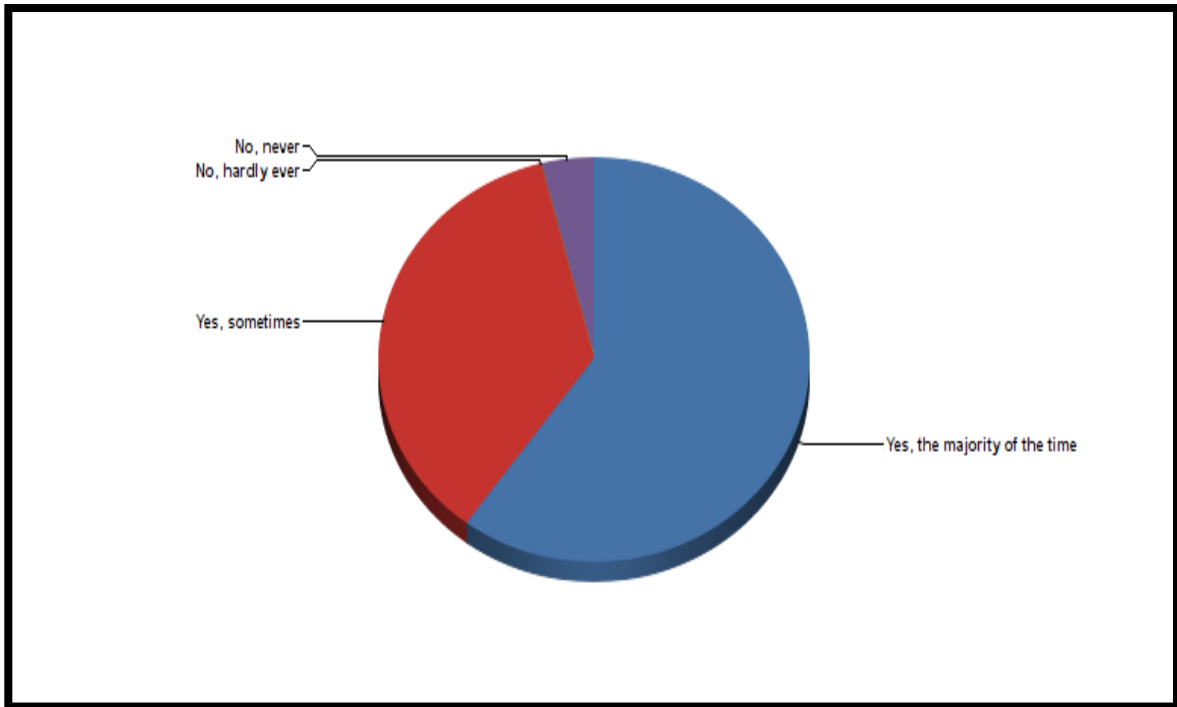
said they were never read to as children. Forty four percent said they feel their experience with reading as a child was average, 56% describe their experience as positive and none describe their experience as negative.

When asked about their reading and high school experience, 45% of low income football players said they maintained a high school GPA of a 3.0 or higher. Thirty-nine percent said they never read outside of high school, 50% said they read once or twice per week, 7% said they read almost every day, and 4% said they read everyday. In comparison, 65% of non low-income football players said they maintained a high school GPA of a 3.0 or higher. Forty-six percent said they never read outside of high school, 46% said they read once or twice per week, 8% said they read almost every day, and none said they read everyday.

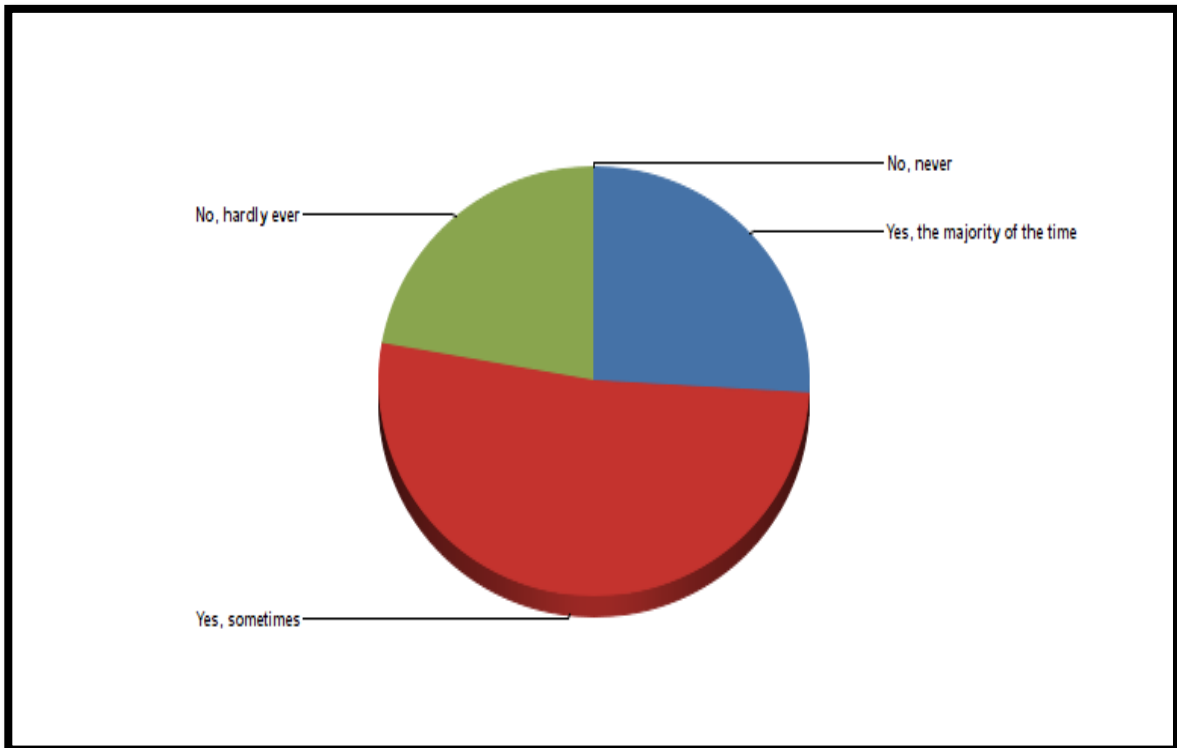
When asked about their thoughts on reading today, 21% of low-income football players said they do enjoy reading today, 41% said they sometimes do, and 38% said never enjoy reading today. Fifty-eight percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks. Overall, 26% feel that they are reading at a college level, 52% said they feel they are sometimes reading at a college level and 22% said they hardly ever or never feel that they are reading at a college level. In comparison, 27% of non low-income football players said they enjoy reading today, 54% said they sometimes do, and 19% said they don't enjoy reading. Sixty-six percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks. Overall, 62% feel that they are reading at a college level, 35% said sometimes, and only 4% said they hardly ever or never feel that they are reading at a college level.

Do you feel like you are reading at a college level?

Non Low-Income Football Players



Low-Income Football Players



Low Income Football Players- Were you read to as a child?

Overall, 21% of all FRPL football players said they were read to often as children. One hundred percent of the FRPL football players who were read to as children were African American. Thirty-three percent of said their mother had a college degree, 33% said their mother had some college education, and 33% had attained a high school diploma. Thirty-three percent of students who were read to said their father had a college degree, none said their father had some college education, 17% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 33% said their fathers did not graduate high school.²⁶ Sixty-seven percent of students said they grew up in a single-parent household. Forty-eight percent began playing sports before or during elementary school and 17% began playing during or after middle school.

In inquiring about football players who were read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 17% said they enjoyed reading as a child, while 67% said they sometimes did, and 17% said they never enjoyed it. Regarding high school, 33% said they never read outside of high school, while 67% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week. None said they read everyday. Sixty-seven percent said they attained a GPA of 2.0 to 2.99, while 33% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 83% of FRPL football players who were read to as children described their childhood experience with reading as average, and 17% reported their experience as being negative. No one said it was positive.

In regards to reading today, 17% of FRPL football players who were read to as children report that they do not enjoy reading today, 50% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 33% said they enjoy reading today. Sixty-seven percent say they sometimes have trouble understanding college textbooks, 17% say they have trouble the majority of the time, and 17%

²⁶ 17% answered not available when asked about their father's education

said they never have trouble. Thirty-three percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 33% said they sometimes feel that way, and only 33% said they hardly ever feel like they read at a college level.

Overall, 45% of FRPL football players said they were sometimes read to as children. One hundred percent were African American. Thirty-eight percent said their mother had a college degree, while 23% said their mother had some college education, 23% said their mother attained a high school diploma, and 15% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Thirty-one percent said their father had a college degree, 15% said their father had some college education, 31% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 15% said their fathers did not graduate high school.²⁷ Sixty-two percent of students said they grew up in a single-parent household. The majority (61%) began playing sports before or during elementary school while 39% said they began playing sports during or after middle school.

In inquiring about FRPL football players who were sometimes read to as children and their childhood experience with reading, 62% said they sometimes enjoyed reading as children and 38% said they never enjoyed it. No one said they enjoyed reading. Regarding high school, 31% said they never read outside of high school, while 54% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, 8% read three to six times, and 8% they read every day. Forty-six percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 54% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 54% described their childhood experience with reading as average, 31% said it was positive, and 16% said it was negative or extremely negative.

In regards to reading today, 46% of football players who were read to sometimes as children report that they don't enjoy reading today, 38% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and

²⁷ 8% answered not available when asked about their father's education

15% said they enjoy reading. Sixty-two percent say they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, 31% said sometimes, and 8% said they have trouble the majority of the time. Twenty-seven percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 45% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level, and 27% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 34% of FRPL football players said they were never read to as children. One hundred percent of them were African American. Ten percent said their mother had a college degree, while 40% said their mother had some college education, 30% said their mother attained a high school diploma, and 20% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Ten percent said their father had a college degree, 30% said their father had some college education, and 50% said their father attained a high school diploma. None said their fathers did not graduate high school.²⁸ Fifty percent said they grew up in a single parent household. Seventy percent began playing sports before elementary school, 30% began playing sports in high school. None reported beginning sports during elementary or middle school.

In inquiring about FRPL football players who were never read to as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 20% said they enjoyed reading as a child, 30% said they sometimes enjoyed reading and 50% said they never enjoyed it. Regarding high school, 56% said they never read outside of high school, while 33% said they read outside of high school only once or twice a week, 11% said three to six times per week, and none said they read every day. Sixty percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 40% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 80% of football players who were never read to as children

²⁸ 10% answered not available when asked about their father's education

described their childhood experience with reading as average, 10% said it was fairly positive, and 10% said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 40% of FRPL football players who were never read to as children report that they do not enjoy reading today, 40% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 20% said they enjoy reading today. Seventy percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, and 30% said they sometimes or always have trouble. Twenty percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 70% said they sometimes, and 10% said they hardly ever or never feel like they are reading at a college level.

Low Income Football Players- Did you enjoy reading as a child?

Overall, 10% of all FRPL football players said they enjoyed reading children. One hundred percent of the FRPL football players who enjoyed reading as children were African American. Thirty-three percent said their mother had some college education and 67% attained a high school diploma. Thirty-three percent said their father had some college education, 33% said their father attained a high school diploma and 33% said their fathers did not graduate high school. Sixty-seven percent of students said they grew up in a single-parent household. The majority (67%) began playing sports before or during elementary school and 33% began playing during or after middle school.

In inquiring about FRPL football players who enjoyed reading as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 33% said they were read to often as children, while 67% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 33% said they never read outside of high school while 33% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, and 33% said they read almost every day. None said they read everyday. Overall, 67% described their childhood

experience with reading as average, and 33% reported their experience as being extremely positive. No one said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 67% of FRPL football players who enjoyed reading as children report that they enjoy reading today and 33% said they enjoy reading sometimes. Thirty-three percent say they hardly ever have trouble understanding college textbooks, and 67% say they have trouble sometimes. Sixty-seven percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, and 33% said they hardly ever feel like they are hardly ever reading at a college level.

Overall, 52% of FRPL football players said they sometimes enjoyed reading as children. One hundred percent were African American. Forty percent of these football players said their mother had a college degree, while 20% said their mother had some college education, 27% said their mother attained a high school diploma and 13% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Thirty-three percent said their father had a college degree, 7% said their father had some college education, 40% said their father attained a high school diploma, and 20% said their fathers did not graduate high school. Sixty percent of students said they grew up in a single-parent household. The majority (60%) began playing sports before or during elementary school and 40% said they began playing sports during or after middle school.

In inquiring about FRPL football players who sometimes enjoyed reading as children and their childhood experience with reading, 27% said they were read to often as children, 53% said sometimes, and 20% said they were never read to. Regarding high school, 13% said they never read outside of high school, while 73% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, 7% read almost every day, and 7% said they read every day. Fifty-three percent said they attained a high school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 47% said they attained a GPA of

3.0 or higher. Overall, 67% describe their childhood experience with reading as average, 20% said it was positive, and 13% said it was negative or extremely negative.

In regards to reading today, 13% of FRPL football players who sometimes enjoyed reading as children report that they don't enjoy reading today, 60% said they enjoy reading sometimes, and 27% said they enjoy reading. Sixty-six percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, 33% said sometimes. Twenty-nine percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 57% said sometimes, and 14% said they hardly ever feel like they are reading at a college level.

Overall, 38% of FRPL football players said they never enjoyed reading as children. One hundred percent of them were African American. Eighteen percent of these football players said their mother had a college degree, while 45% said their mother had some college education, 18% said their mother attained a high school diploma, and 18% said their mother did not graduate from high school. Eighteen percent said their father had a college degree, 27% said their father had some college education, and 27% said their father attained a high school diploma.²⁹ Fifty-five percent said they grew up in a single parent household. Eighty-two percent of these young men began playing sports before elementary school, and 18% began playing sports in middle or high school.

In inquiring about FRPL football players who did not enjoy reading as children and their childhood experiences with reading, 9% said they were read to often as children, 45% said they sometimes were read to and 45% said they were never to. Regarding high school, 80% said they never read outside of high school, while 20% said they read outside of school only once or twice a week, and none said they read every day. Sixty-four percent said they attained a high

²⁹ 27% answered not available when asked about their father's education

school GPA of 2.0-2.99 and 36% said they attained a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Overall, 73% described their childhood experience with reading as average, 9% said it was fairly positive, and 18% said it was negative.

In regards to reading today, 82% of FRPL football players who never enjoyed reading as children report that they still do not enjoy reading today and 20% said they enjoy reading sometime. No one said they enjoy reading today. Fifty-four percent said they hardly ever or never have trouble understanding college textbooks, 36% said they sometimes do, and 9% said they always have trouble understanding college textbooks. Ten percent said they feel they are reading on a college level, 60% said they sometimes feel they are reading at a college level, and 30% said they hardly ever or never feel like they are reading at a college level.

Chapter V: Data- Interviews

For each interview, I will label myself (the interviewer) as AKS. I will label the students Student A-F to protect their identities. I've transcribed each response in full. All of the student athletes interviewed were members the football team at the time.

Student A:

Student A is a senior from outside the state of Mississippi. He is a twenty-two year-old African American male. He attended an urban-area public high school and comes from a lower-middle class background.

AKS: What is your earliest memory of reading as a child?

SA: Probably in first grade... the name of the book was *John Henry*... about this guy who challenged the steamroller to building a train track—then won. The man could always beat the machine. My childhood was pretty positive with reading—[reading that book] made me wanna read more books similar to that one. I liked the idea that if you believe you can always beat it.

AKS: Do you have memories of being read to as a child?

SA: Somewhat, not really. My mother used to read to me when I was young—but I grew up too fast and wanted to do stuff on my own. She stopped reading to me when I was about seven years old. I thought I was too grown.

AKS: Did this experience influence how you read, your ability to read, or whether or not you liked to read in school?

SA: When I look back on it I wish I would have continued to let her read to me... I probably would have liked to read more and read bigger books. I'm not the greatest reader, but I'm not the worst. If I had let her play her part as a mother and read to me, that would have helped me out in the future.

AKS: Has this experienced influenced your perception of reading?

SA: I do believe this experience influenced it. A lot. Like I said, I'm pretty good at reading and understanding words. But there is some stuff that I will catch myself wondering what it means and I have to look it up. Still to this day.

AKS: What was your parents' attitude towards reading?

SA: My father reads every day. If it's not a book, it's the newspaper or articles online. And my mother, I know she reads to my younger brother everyday. He is five. It's just because he likes to use new technology. I had really dedicated parents that cared about my schoolwork.

AKS: Do you remember a specific incident when someone encouraged you to read?

SA: Not really, other than my parents. No one really pressured me or told me I should read.

AKS: How did you feel about reading as a kid?

SA: Back then, I didn't really care for it to be honest because I was always the biggest kid in the class... and they would always say to me, "yeah you are going to the NBA or play pro football one day" so that is what I really stuck with. I'm just going to be an athlete. I was the athlete. I was going to ride with that. I do think it would have helped, I know I would have appreciated it now knowing what reading does for you.

AKS: It sounds like other people's perception of you really impacted how you felt about your own ability in the classroom?

SA: I do think it did. It all falls back on me... I'm not going to place the blame on anyone else. I do believe they could have shaped and molded my feelings towards reading though.

Looking back... if a teacher or coach would have said, [Student A], you are going to be a great athlete, but you really got to learn how to read... that would have changed my perspective. I do believe that.

AKS: When did sports start to become a priority in your life?

SA: Probably when I was five.

AKS: How did you balance homework, reading, and sports and how did this influence your view or perception of school and reading?

SA: If I could be completely honest, [during] middle school and high school... I say probably 95% of it was working on sports and the other 5% I gave to schoolwork. Because I was gifted and talented and blessed and since I was good on the field and on the court, my teachers let me get by. I could [always] show in class that I could comprehend and understand the material... but when it came to turning in homework or doing test, I really didn't show any effort or care towards it. I didn't have a good attitude about schoolwork.

AKS: It sounds like your teachers set a lower standard for you because you were good at sports.

SA: Right.

AKS: How does that make you feel?

SA: I think it's unfair. As an athlete, especially a college athlete, you have to uphold the standards of being a regular student and being an athlete. If they would have pushed me harder it would have helped me become a better athlete as well as a better student. I would have been able to prioritize and organize things better. I think it was a set back in my life.

AKS: How did that discourage you or impact your perception of school overall?

SA: I always felt that I was going to be favored. I always felt like okay I'm going to show up to class... I'm going to be there and I'm not going to cause any problems. I'm going to act like I am listening but really I'm going to leave and go on with my day. My priorities were football and basketball. And that was it.

AKS: Did you ever let homework or reading "slide" because of practice or sporting events?

SA: I say always. I remember though, I was in trouble my freshmen year [of high school]. I failed horribly in high school. I think I failed every class. When basketball season was starting up, and I loved playing basketball... I was supposed to be starting on the varsity team as a freshman. When [the time came], I didn't have the grades, so I couldn't play. I lost out on that. I felt embarrassed because everybody else was able to play... they did what they had to do and I wasn't apart of it cause I didn't do [what I had to do].

AKS: Is there a specific memory you have where you were treated differently in the classroom than other students because you were an athlete?

SA: Yes, for sure. There were incidents where I was allowed to always do my test... take my tests separately than other kids. I would get different due dates on assignments. My time to do things would always get prolonged. They just always let me slide.

AKS: They being your teachers?

SA: Yes.

AKS: How does that make you feel now?

SA: I just know it didn't help me. I enjoyed it back then but I wasn't really looking at the future. If I could do it again, I would. I would do it the right way instead of the easy way.

AKS: How did this impact your perception of reading?

SA: I didn't feel that reading was important. It had no weight in comparison to sports. Like... I was able to read a play and run a play... and that's all that mattered. My whole life was about sports. Reading was something I just heard about. Reading was something on the side. It didn't

have anything to do with my future. It was something I could have picked up... but I didn't have to.

AKS: Was there anyone pushing you to prioritize academics over sports?

SA: I had a language arts teacher. I remember her. She was real passionate about the athletes. She liked me and I was always respectful to her. She told me I needed to put school first. I needed to study, I needed to read and I needed to be an overall good person. [She told me] I can't just stop with being good at sports because one day sports is going to be over.

AKS: Do you feel like she was right in saying that?

SA: I know she was right. I've been through a lot. Looking back she was the only one at my high school... the only one who cared about me and who I was as a person and not just about how good I was at sports.

AKS: In your K-12 education, did your school/teacher offer any incentives to read? (AR program, candy, etc.)

SA: Yeah, I think there was candy. That really didn't work on me.

AKS: In what way could your reading experience have been more positive?

SA: If our coaches [had pushed us to read]. Out of everyone, I really listened to them. If my coaches said, "you need to read," I think I would have read a lot [more]. I mean I loved playing sports.... If a person that tells me how to get better at sports tells me also that I need to read, I'm gonna read.

AKS: Looking back on your four years in college, what has been the most difficult class you have taken?

SA: Accounting 201. [There was] a lot of reading. I didn't do it. It looked too difficult and complex. I was like... I can't do this. No way. The book was so thick it discouraged me.

AKS: Was it more of "I can't do this" or "I won't do this"?

SA: {chuckles} It was more of "I won't read this." I opened that book up and it was a bunch of small print... It scared me a little bit. Because I didn't read, the class was really hard. It was discouraging.

AKS: Do you feel like you are reading at a college level?

SA: I don't know... I couldn't tell you. In high school we did a lot of Greek root words... so a lot of words I can understand. I really still don't like to read. But yes. I guess I feel like I'm reading at a college level.

AKS: Is reading ever a challenge for you?

SA: It just depends on what I'm reading. Sometimes I get bored real quick and sometimes comprehension is an issue. It's definitely because of my past... not taking the time to read. Sometimes I feel like it's flowing. I know I'm reading words but I don't know what I'm reading.

AKS: Do you feel that your K-12 education prepared you for reading in college?

SA: Now, I [realize] I had a pretty good high school... I didn't take advantage of it. I don't think I took the steps forward to gain everything I needed to excel in college. I know being an athlete had a lot to do with that.

AKS: What has been your most rewarding experience in college academically?

SA: My psychology class. It made me want to read.

AKS: If you could give advice to someone about reading, what would it be?

SA: Everyone should take reading a lot more seriously. Some people think they got it, like I thought I did. I thought I was okay because I knew how to read... and I knew how to put words together.... Back when I was young, I thought that was cool and that was all you needed. I thought, "yeah I can read that" but [everyone] needs more time and practice to be a good reader].

AKS: What would you think about offering a class like "How to read in college 101"?

SA: I think it would be [helpful]. But I don't know how many people would take it.... Like it would be embarrassing... people would be like "why are you in here as a senior?" If they titled it something else like Sports 101 and tricked us, I would take it, but otherwise no way.

Student B:

Student B is a freshman from Mississippi. He is an eighteen-year-old African American male. He attended public high school in a low income school district. I will refer to him as SB (Student B).

AKS: What is your earliest memory of reading as a child?

SB: It would be kindergarten. I didn't go to pre-school or anything so I didn't know how to read like everyone else. I had a harder time reading than anyone else.

AKS: Did you have a good teacher?

SB: Yes I did. She worked with me. She spent a lot of time with me and we still stay in contact now. She worked with my parents too. Like, she actually taught my parents how to teach me.

She would come over to my house and help me read and do school work from when I was in kindergarten on. I remember a lot of flash cards, and a lot of reading small books. It helped though. It all helped.

AKS: It sounds like your experience with her was positive?

SB: It started out hard.... I mean starting out behind everyone else [was hard] but it turned out to be alright.

AKS: Do you accredit that to her [that teacher]?

SB: Oh yeah, most definitely.

AKS: Was this experience a reflection of your overall experience with reading?

SB: Oh yeah, because if I had never learned to read, it would have been a harder life. So she definitely helped me out a lot.

AKS: Were you read to as a child?

SB: No not really. My parents were really young when they had me... so they were always busy working and stuff. I grew up in a whole family household. The whole family lived there. There was nine people in the house. After my dad came back from college, and after [my parents] got established, they kind of started picking up the pace. My dad graduated from college. My mom did not. She stayed back and took care of me. But when I was around 7 or 8, my mom and my dad started reading to me around that time.

AKS: How did you feel when your parents read to you?

SB: Sleepy most of the time---it was bedtime.

AKS: Did it encourage you to read?

SB: At times it encouraged me. I took school pretty seriously.

AKS: Did this experience influence your perception of reading today?

SB: Yes. My parents and my teacher Ms. Smith³⁰ really [influenced me]. Ms. Smith stayed with me all the way to my 12th grade year. Even when recruiting started happening, she was there through it all. I guess she just saw something [in me].

AKS: What was your parents' attitude towards reading?

SB: They were pretty serious about it. There was just only so much they could do. They were 16 when they had me. My mom is a hairdresser, so she spent a lot of time doing that... and my dad

³⁰ Name changed for confidentiality

was in 10th grade so he was busy doing that. And then he went off to college for a while so.... They didn't have the time. That's when Ms. Smith stepped in.

AKS: Do you remember a specific incident when someone encouraged you to read?

Other than [Ms. Smith], no, not really. When I committed [to play football] here, I was like "I got a scholarship I am done with school." Ms. Smith said, "that isn't going to stop you from going to school and reading."

AKS: It sounds like she was the major influence in your life when it came to reading?

SB: She was a tough one. Yes.

AKS: How did this make you feel?

SB: It put a lot of pressure on me.

AKS: Were you scared of letting her down?

SB: Yes, definitely. I was afraid of letting her and my parents down. I mean they had me so young and I felt like they deserved to get something back.

AKS: Did anyone ever discourage you from reading?

SB: Probably some guys in the neighborhood. My neighborhood was kind of rough, so a lot of guys [were] doing stupid stuff like selling drugs and doing stuff like that. They would be making money instead of reading. Making money instead of playing football. They always told me that this would make you money now and it would be worth it.

AKS: What made you take another path?

SB: TV- I watched a ton of TV... a lot of sports. I would see guys playing football in the NFL and I would be like "I want to do that one day".

AKS: How did you feel when they discouraged you?

SB: I was tempted to join them. I mean there was a lot of money going through there and my parents didn't have much. I wanted to have my own money at the time. But I knew I just had to be patient. My parents sacrificed a lot for me.

AKS: Do you think about this experience often?

SB: Yeah, I do. A lot of those guys try to come back around now. They still try to discourage me... but I just try to stay away from them. Even though they are from the same neighborhood, I just try to stay away because we are on two different pages.

AKS: How does that make you feel?

SB: I mean, it kina makes me feel weird when I go back home. But it is what it is.

AKS: When did sports become a priority?

SB: In the 7th grade. I played football when I was younger... started when I was in the 3rd grade. But in 7th grade I got moved up to play on the 9th grade team. I knew I had a chance at it so I started staying real steady with it. I mean, I had a good coach too.

AKS: Did your coach have influence over academics?

SB: Yes he did. He knew how important it was for me to do good in school. He made me run when I didn't do good. It gave me a lot of discipline.

AKS: How did you balance football, schoolwork, and reading?

SB: Umm.... I just had to find time. And I had a lot of good friends that would help me out also. They would give me good notes cause I didn't take the notes that I needed to take. That just kept me up on everything that was going on in the class and stuff. I felt like I was behind. I was behind. After I got my scholarship, I shut it down for a while.

AKS: When you got to the ninth grade, do you think you were prepared to read at a high school level?

SB: {Assertively} No, absolutely not.

AKS: Could you write?

SB: NO. I didn't pay attention really when I was growing up. I was just focused on what I had to do to get out there, and that was football. I spent a lot more time working on my game than I did my books.

AKS: Looking back do you wish you had done stuff differently?

SB: Yeah. I wish I would have studied more and read more. It would have made stuff a lot easier here.

AKS: How did playing sports influence your perception of reading?

SB: I looked at it like it wasn't as important. I looked at it like I just had to do it. I had to do some of it. I was good with just getting by.

AKS: Did you ever let homework or reading slide because of football?

SB: (Laughing) yeah... all the time. Definitely. If I was tired, I just didn't wanna do it and I wouldn't. I saw [school] as I had to do it. I had to go to school because I wanted to go to college. I wanted to go to college to play football.

AKS: Were you ever treated differently because you were an athlete?

SB: All the time. I got my first scholarship real early. [My high school teachers] looked at it as if I thought I was more than the average student. Because I was only 15 and had a scholarship to a D1 school, they thought that “he doesn’t think he has to do what everyone else has to do.” I felt like [my teachers] targeted me more. Like there was a target on my back [expecting that] “you are supposed to be great in the classroom... and you’re supposed to be great on the field.” They expected more out of me. I just wasn’t expecting that much out of myself.

AKS: So you’re saying they set a higher standard for you?

SB: Right. I feel like at times I could meet it. But my teachers supported me a lot and made sure I was there and doing the work I needed to do.

AKS: Do you feel like they ever passed you along because of your athletic ability?

SB: Um... no. I feel like they just wanted me to be something. They said you are going to do this. You are not going to be separated from everyone else because of who you are... so I had to do like five stacks of makeup work. I just had to do it or I wouldn’t pass. So I did it... and I got out of there.

AKS: How do you feel about them holding you to the same/higher standard looking back?

SB: I’m glad. I’m glad they held me to a higher standard, because you know it made me actually pay attention and have a reason to do all the work.

AKS: How did this influence your perception of reading?

SB: They would *always* call on me to read. Always. It wasn’t that I didn’t know how to read, it was just like all the words... my attention span... my attitude wasn’t good.

AKS: How did that make you feel... when they would call on you to read?

SB: I would just tell them I didn’t wanna read! They would keep pushing me until I did it. Sometimes I did it.

AKS: Was there a person who pushed you to read, study and succeed in school?

SB: Yes. Ms. Smith. Always. She used to get on me a lot... she was a second parent. If I wasn’t doing my schoolwork, she wasn’t having any of that.

AKS: Were there ever incentives given to you to promote reading?

SB: We had a system... half the time I didn’t read the books, I would just go take the test. I passed a lot of them, I don’t know how. But those AR points, I don’t think they really helped me.

AKS: Did you have a favorite book?

SB: Not really.

AKS: Do you remember your first chapter book you read?

SB: Nah.

AKS: Did adults praise your accomplishments in the classroom as much as they praised your accomplishments on the field?

SB: No. Definitely not.

AKS: Did an adult ever praise you for reading?

SB: My parents did. And Ms. Smith did also.

AKS: How could your experience with reading been more positive growing up?

SB: If I would have just paid more attention. Took better notes. And read more. I didn't read. Like I hadn't read a book until I got to college. That was the first time I really had to start reading. Literally through 8th grade I was told I wasn't that good at reading. So if I had did that more, it probably would have helped me out more now.

AKS: How does that make you feel?

SB: I mean... I'm a good reader now but its not something I wanna do out of love. You know.... I just don't like reading that much. I don't wanna read unless I have to. I didn't ever have to read. Period.

AKS: Do you feel like you are reading at a college level?

SB: Yeah, now I do, yeah. The first semester... it took some getting used to but now I study and I pay attention. Now I spend all my time at the FedEx so I've improved.

AKS: What is the hardest part about college and reading in college?

SB: Paying attention to my professors... and taking good notes. And then reading those notes. Making sure I understand everything the professor is saying and making sure my notes match up.

AKS: How do you feel about reading college textbooks? Do you find it challenging?

SB: A text book is a text book... less pictures, more words. It is tough, but practice makes perfect.

AKS: Do you feel like K-12 prepared you?

SB: Somewhat... I had some teachers who just let me by because of who I was... so that kind of affected me in some areas, especially math. But I also had teachers like Ms. Smith and that kept me going.

AKS: How do you feel about some of those teachers passing you along?

SB: At the time it was good... but now it has definitely come back to bite me. But I will be alright.

AKS: So if you could go back and do it all over again...

SB: Oh yeah, I would pay more attention. I would make it count.

AKS: What has been your most rewarding experience in college so far?

SB: Being student of the month. I came a real long way.

AKS: What would you tell a little kid who wants to play football about the importance of reading?

SB: Just that... it takes a lot of paying attention. It comes a lot easier when you pay more attention to and read more, it makes everything a lot easier. It takes a lot of effort. Time is short... but try to put in as much time as you can.

AKS: What would you think about creating a reading class for college athletes?

SB: I think they should look more into that. I think they should ask us more about how it was... I think it would be a lot easier that way, because we will all be honest with them... you know... if they just came at us like that [with honesty].

SB: People don't want to be embarrassed about [not being able to read]. It is hard because you never know who's going to talk to who. They might talk to a scout or something in the NFL and tell them you can't read.... And that affects you.... We know [the scouts] don't want a safety or a quarterback that can't read. If you can't read then you can't understand a playbook. It is better to learn late than never.

SB: I think there could be testing also. [Something] like "how did you take tests in high school?" They need to test and see where is your reading level and just go off of that and work with you. Especially in here [FedEx]. We have a whole facility for that.

AKS: If it was under the radar or disguised as something else, do you think people would put themselves in a program?

SB: If they had like a standardized test we could take, I think we would have to be enrolled. Then, they could just tell us that we have to come and the coaches would be there also saying you've gotta do it. It would make it easier on everybody [that way... to have a test] than to [trust the players to] come in and say "I've got reading problems..." Because no one is going do that. They are embarrassed. I know I was. It can be discouraging.

Student C:

Student C is an eighteen year-old African American male. He is from Mississippi. He grew up in an urban area and went to public school most of his life. He is quiet but well spoken.

AKS: What is your earliest memory of reading as a child?

SC: First grade - Ms. Johns'³¹ class. It was a positive. Because people always told me I was a bright kid, I never really struggled with it. I remember we would have to read out loud and popcorn read...³² that's basically how she made it comfortable for us when learning how to read.

AKS: Did your classmates encourage you when you were 'popcorn' reading?

SC: Yeah for sure. Everyone wanted to do their best and it was kind of a like a little competition . . . and you know how little kids get with competitions. That's basically how it was.

AKS: Was this a reflection of overall experience?

SC: Yeah—I've always wanted to read and I've always been able to read so its never really been a problem.

AKS: Were you read to as a child? Did your parents or grandparents ever read to you outside of school?

SC: Yeah—I was read to a lot. My mom and dad read to me every single night. It made me like reading. I just always wanted to read a lot of books with them. As I got older, I did not like to read as much.

AKS: Did your parents reading to you influence your ability or thoughts about reading?

SC: My ability? It made me want to read in school. So yeah. It came from my dad... my dad was an educator and he was my principal. I just wanted to be like him and he was always fluent in reading and speaking. He was the smartest person I knew, so that just made me want to do the same thing.

AKS: What was your parents' attitude towards reading? It sounds like they encouraged you.

SC: They made sure I read and took care of my schoolwork. Both of them graduated from college with master's degrees... so it was always "you gotta keep it up" and no excuses.

AKS: Can you think of a specific incident that encouraged to read?

³¹ Name has been changed for confidentiality

³² Popcorn reading is when one student in the class reads a paragraph or section aloud, then calls on another student to read the next paragraph or section

SC: Open doors—it was a program for little kids. If they saw that they were excelling in school, they put you in it. Our teacher in there would always encourage us to read. She would always encourage us to read, read more, and push ourselves.

AKS: How old were you when you were enrolled in this program?

SC: It was second through seventh grade. It was a program during school. It was one of those programs that helps you open up your mind--- basically working with puzzles and stuff. We played a lot of chess, we did a lot of projects, went on a lot of field trips to learn about different things. It was one of those eye-opening experiences with school. It made school fun.

AKS: Did that impact your perception of reading?

SC: Definitely. I loved school.

AKS: Can you think of a time when someone discouraged you to read?

SC: I think [there] might have been an incident when they did... but I didn't pay it any mind because I always knew I could read.

AKS: When did sports become a priority in your life?

SC: I have to say in between my 10th and 11th grade year. In the 9th grade I was playing sports but I was also playing in the band. I had been playing sports all my life so I really didn't know much about recruitment and stuff... But when I started getting offered [scholarships], I started thinking... maybe I should quit the band, I probably am pretty good at this other stuff [sports].

AKS: How did you balance you schoolwork, reading, and playing sports?

SC: Well... high school was kind of easy. I was mainly just focusing on sports... but I always did my work. I took two college courses during my senior year so it was fairly easy to manage all of it.

AKS: Did playing sports influence your perception of reading? Did you ever think it was more or less important because you were a great athlete?

SC: No I wouldn't say so. [My perception] was pretty consistent.

AKS: Did you ever let homework or reading slide because of sports?

SC: Yeah. Every day. It was one of those things that I knew I would get it done... so I didn't worry about it too much. One time I had procrastinated because I had been having practice all week... I had a paper due in English comp. I had to stay up extra late to finish it all. But I did it. I will never forget that paper.

AKS: Was there ever an instance when you were treated differently than other students because you were an athlete?

SC: Yeah. A lot. Like... definitely senior year. I was in a science course. But the teacher was cool with athletes. I think he was a coach. He didn't make me come to class. School was easy for me.

AKS: How did that make you feel?

SC: I had it cool. After my dad retired, it wasn't like the same school. I was going to one class and had three gyms. After 10am, I would leave because the basketball coach told me just to go home. I would be walking in the halls and would see the principal and he would dap me up.³³ To be honest, I'm not gonna say that I put myself up to be so much above it. It was just so easy for me, the way it was set up. So my thought was, why not take advantage of it?

AKS: How did your parents feel about that, being educators?

SC: My parents hated it. They knew I was gonna be out hanging out with friends all day and they just didn't like it. But I still got honor roll. Those two college courses... I still had to work at them. I had my free time, but I was still working. I felt like I was in college already.

AKS: How did this experience influence your perception of reading... did you read in high school?

SC: It didn't really influence it. I read in high school, I still knew it was important, but I didn't read a lot. I enjoyed it though. I mean... I enjoy reading now. I really like writing, it comes easy to me... so those two things correlate. I still feel like I've got a pretty good reading level.

AKS: Was there a person who pushed you to read, especially during high school?

SC: My mom. She was always on me about school and reading. That was the one person that preached "you gotta read, Student C". During middle school and through high school she always stressed "you gotta read, you gotta comprehend."

AKS: Did your teacher ever offer incentives for reading? Like AR points, or candy?

SC: Oh, yeah! AR Points, I had that. I went to this art school in 4th and 5th grade. It was theater, dance, music, and art. We had AR points. You had to stack up those points. You had to reach a certain level and get a certain amount each term... you took me back with that one.

AKS: Did that encourage you to read?

³³ "Dap me up" is slang for a "fist pump" or a "high five"

SC: That encouraged me to read. I had these two friends and they were twins... and they would just read everything, especially the Harry Potter books. They would just read them in a week... I'd be like... "where do you stuff all that information!?"

AKS: Did your teachers praise you when you reached your goal?

SC: Honestly, in that situation, I felt like it was a racist thing. They all felt like I couldn't do it. But once I did, I was like... "yeah now look at me." The school was a great school, but I felt like the teachers leaned more on the white kids than on the black kids, because they felt like we couldn't do as much... I was from the black suburbs but all those kids were from the rich families. But I mean... I did it. I proved them wrong. If they saw me now...

AKS: It sounds like you had the mentality "I have to prove them wrong." When did you develop that?

SC: I think I was doing it at a young age... I didn't realize I was doing it then... people are constantly proving that they are worthy... that is life.

AKS: Did you have a favorite book growing up?

SC: {Without hesitation/pause} Not a favorite book, but a favorite author. Andrew Clemens. He was my go-to if I needed AR points. In 4th or 5th grade I used to read that book... they were probably 100 pages. His books were just always so interesting to me. But I also used to read Junie B. Jones, and all of the Dr. Seuss books; my favorite was the one with all the dogs.

AKS: How did adults respond to accomplishment?

SC: I would be so happy when I finished a book, and my mom would be so happy she would give me money! That would be good motivation to read. It was a pretty good deal.

AKS: Looking back, do you think your experience with reading could have been more positive?

SC: My mom used to stress reading all the time, but I think if I would have read more... even though I maybe didn't want to... I think I could have been even better at it.

AKS: What has been your most difficult class so far in college?

SC: Sociology, because of the reading and having to comprehend what really goes on in that class. I have to talk through a lot of stuff that goes on in that class. If I had to just learn it on my own then I don't know if I could do it.

AKS: Do you have a hard time understanding the textbook?

SC: Yeah, I would say so because I have to really break it down to understand it. It has gotten way better. The reflection papers really help me understand it better because I can put my

thoughts onto paper. When I get it back, I see her say “great answer Student C” and stuff like that... it makes me think... Okay I’m actually getting it. I can be good at this.

AKS: Do you feel like you read at a college level?

SC: I do. I feel like I am.

AKS: Is reading ever a challenge for you?

SC: Sometimes. When I first got here at the beginning of the semester is when it was most challenging. I just didn’t know you had to read so much in college. I had to finally realize it’s not high school no more. I just had to go ahead and lock down and understand that you are in college and they require more of you.

AKS: So overall, do you feel you K-12 education prepared you for reading in college?

SC: I do. But I feel like as far as the high school part, I eased my way through it without having to do that much. . And now I’ve had to lock back in. I feel like I’m still capable of understanding what’s going on.

AKS: Do you think that freshmen should take reading class when they get to college?

SC: I do but I don’t think it would motivate them. I feel like it would be like “aw man I’m in the retarded class...” I actually felt that way when I had to take a DS math class.³⁴ I didn’t understand why they had me in there, but I guess they were just trying to see where I stand... and they had the best intentions.

AKS: What if they had you take a benchmark test, so they could have shown you where you stood?

SC: Yes. If I had taken a test before and my grade wasn’t high enough, then I would have understood [why I was in that class], rather than them just going ahead and putting me in a DS class. The class made me get back in the mode of doing math though, and it helped. My first test in that class I got a 94. When I got that on my first test, I was pretty excited. I thought... I’ve got it back.

AKS: What would you tell a little kid who wants to play football about the importance of reading?

SC: Keep working hard at it and it will become easier.

³⁴ DS stands for Developmental Studies. According to the Ole Miss website, it is “a remedial *course* for students not yet prepared to take college mathematics”.

Student D:

Student D is an eighteen-year-old African American male from outside of Mississippi. He attended a public school in a rural area.

AKS: What was your earliest memory of reading as a child?

SD: It was in the second grade. I can't remember what it was called, but we would go with our teacher one-on-one and read a book. She was just testing our fluency and if we comprehended what we read. It was a good experience. If you didn't score as high or didn't recognize as many words, she would work with you. I did well... I was one of the best in the class.

AKS: Was this experience a reflection of your overall experience with reading?

SD: It is. Of course it got tougher and the books got bigger. You know, it became harder to comprehend and it also depended on whether you had interest in the story or not. But overall... I can read... and now I can read and comprehend things pretty well.

AKS: Were you read to as a child?

SD: Yes. I was read to a lot as a kid. My parents read to me all the time. You know, picture books, just typical books that all kids read when they are growing up. It probably stopped around kindergarten or first grade.

AKS: How did that make you feel?

SD: It was good... I mainly used it to fall asleep when I was little. {laughs}

AKS: Did it boost your confidence?

SD: Oh yeah it did. Just people taking the time out of their day to read to me... meant a lot.

AKS: Do you think this influenced your ability to read as a kid?

SD: I think it did. I would always take the book they were reading to me at night and read it again the next day. It definitely had an effect on me. I wanted to be good at it.

AKS: What was your parents' attitude towards reading?

SD: They were always begging me to read and encouraging me to do it. You know... [reading] is a powerful thing, and they knew that.

AKS: Can you think of a specific time when someone encouraged you to read or told you reading was important?

SD: My mom always says that. It probably started when I was in middle school... because that is when you have more responsibility on yourself to study more and read textbooks. They [the

teachers] would give you assignments to do at home and my mom *always* made me do it. That is probably when I realized how important it was.

AKS: How does that make you feel now?

SD: Good. It shows that she cared about me. I would listen to her... and now I am pretty good at reading and successful.

AKS: Do you remember any incidents where someone discouraged you to read?

SD: Not that I can remember. Even if they did, I didn't listen.

AKS: When did sports become a priority?

SD: Probably around my sophomore year in high school. I started playing sports when I was six... but when I realized that I was good at it and that I would probably have a future in it I was in high school.

AKS: How did you balancing homework, reading, school, and sports?

SD: It was definitely a challenge. It was like a job almost.

AKS: Did football take priority over school?

SD: No--- never. My parents always stressed to me the importance of school. And that fact that if you get hurt or something like that... you have to have something to fall back on.

AKS: How did their perception influence yours when it came to school and reading?

SD: It upped the importance. When I started talking to [college] coaches, they would always ask me what my GPA was... what my ACT score was. That's when I realized that you are going [to college] for sports... but you gotta be eligible to play when you get there. I knew I had to read to get a good GPA and score good on the ACT.

AKS: Did you ever let homework or reading slide because of sports?

SD: Definitely. Probably twice a week when I couldn't do it at all. But I always got the chance to get up early the next morning and do it then. Just being tired I would always say... "I will just do it the next morning and turn it in."

AKS: It sounds like you always managed to get it done though.

SD: Yes, always. There was a lot at stake and I knew that.

AKS: Was there ever a time that you were treated differently because you were an athlete?

SD: Definitely. I can remember having as basketball coach as a teacher. If we had a game, I knew I would be able to just turn things in late. It made me feel good, but the other kids in the

class didn't like that or appreciate it. If I could go back and do it again I probably would... I struggle with procrastination now.

AKS: Did you have a lot of people in your life push you prioritize sports over school?

SD: I had a few football coaches. They didn't say to disregard homework.... But you know, they were shoving a football down your throat 24/7. It made me focus on sports more. That's when it became hard... to prioritize homework and reading first. If it wasn't for my parents, I wouldn't have had the grades I did, especially in high school.

AKS: Did this make you feel like reading more or less important?

SD: My perception of reading didn't change... but my perception of doing work on time did.

AKS: Were there other people in your life who pushed you to read?

SD: Yeah- other than my parents... I had a lot of coaches push me. They knew the importance of school. I also had a lot of family members pushing me. It was always really consistent.

AKS: Do you remember having any incentives to read in school? Like an AR system?

SD: We had an AR system. I remember you had a certain number of points you had to reach and each book would be a certain number of points. You would have to take a quiz after you read the book... just to show that you read it. We did it in elementary school and had an ice cream party for the kids that met their goal. I missed it once or twice, but when I met it... we had a lot of fun.

AKS: Did you have a favorite book as a kid?

SD: I really liked the Series of Unfortunate Events... I always liked those. The first chapter book I read was Captain Underpants. I loved him.

AKS: How did adults respond to this accomplishment?

SD: They were excited and happy for me. They just knew the importance of it and they always knew that reading was something that people struggled with... so they were happy.

AKS: Looking back, do you think your experience with reading could have been more positive?

SD: Yeah—it probably could have been. That's a tough one. Overall, I had a positive experience.

AKS: What has been the most difficult reading assignment you've had in college?

SD: In history we had to do a book review about the Boston Tea Party Massacre. We had to summarize it. History to me is important... but its not one of those things that I can just sit down and do. So that assignment was really tough. The reading was hard, but I made it through.

AKS: Do you feel that you are reading on a college level?

SD: I do.

AKS: Is reading ever a challenge for you?

SD: When it is a challenge, it's because I don't have much interest in the topic. I start to daydream while I read those kinds of books... or just find things to distract me! But if I know I have to get through it to get a good grade, then that's what I am going to do.

AKS: Do you feel like your K-12 education prepared you for reading in college?

SD: I think so. I was in a good school system and in high school, sometimes I felt like I was in college. In middle school, I felt like I was in high school. The workload was pretty heavy. I was held to the same standard as everyone else and it has helped me.

AKS: Do you think that freshmen who have trouble reading should take reading class... maybe just to get them up to a proficient level?

SD: I think it would help some guys. I think it just depends on how good you are at reading. That sounds like it would be a positive thing.

AKS: What would you tell a little kid who wants to play football about the importance of reading?

SD: If you're an athlete, and you want to be a great athlete, school comes first. Always.

Student E:

Student E (SE) is a freshman from outside of Mississippi. He is a nineteen-year-old Caucasian male. He attended private school his entire life in an urban area.

AKS: What is your earliest memory of reading?

SE: As a young boy, just my mom every night before I went to bed. She read a book to me before I went to sleep. It was something I looked forward to during the day. I knew I would always go home and when I would go to sleep, my mom would read. It was great.

AKS: Do you think this is an overall reflection of your experience with reading?

SE: I would say it was an overall reflection of my experience with reading. I definitely think it benefitted me in the future. It made me want to read more. I remember a lot of kids not wanting to read. At a young age when my mom started reading to me it sparked an interest in me and made me want to go out and find more books that we could read together. It definitely built my confidence in reading and in school.

AKS: What was your parents' attitude towards reading?

SE: They thought it was important. That is why they read to me every night as a kid. They knew it was an important part of school.

AKS: Do you remember a specific time when someone encouraged you to read?

SE: We had this AR test at my elementary school. It was a great way to motivate kids to learn how to read because you read the book, you take the test, and however many points you had at the end of the year you would use those points to get a toy or a party or something like that. It definitely was a good incentive.

AKS: Was there anyone who ever discouraged you to read?

SE: As I got older, other students did. Never my coaches or my parents. I guess reading wasn't really the cool thing to do. That would be the only thing I could think of.

AKS: Did that ever impact your perception of reading?

SE: No, never. I always liked to read.

AKS: When did sports become priority in your life?

SE: I would definitely say freshmen year of high school.

AKS: How did you balance work, school, and reading?

SE: In high school, if I didn't make my grades I wouldn't be able to play. So I had to get all my work done. Since playing was important to me, I made sure I got my grades.

AKS: What specific people in your life pushed you to read and study?

SE: Our coaches thought academics were important. But my school was really big on academics, so all my teachers pushed me and encouraged me.

AKS: Did them pushing you influence your perception of reading?

SE: For pretty much every class, reading was a huge part of the class. So if you just chose not to do it, you wouldn't succeed.

AKS: Did you ever let homework or reading slide because of practice or a game?

SE: Sometimes. Especially later in my high school career when I started realizing I would be able to play football in college... I felt like I could let it slide. The older I got the more I let it slide.

AKS: Do you ever regret it?

SE: Not really because everything worked out. But if I had gotten hurt or something, I would definitely look back and said "I wish I would have done things differently.... I wish I would have tried a little bit harder and done the work I was supposed to do."

AKS: Were you ever treated differently in the classroom because you were an athlete?

SE: Um.... I don't know. I definitely wasn't. Not at my school. I was held to the same standard as everyone else. And a lot of the students at my school played sports.... tons of students. Our sports were non-cut teams... so everyone could play. Everyone did play, so when we were in the classroom no one was treated differently.

AKS: Do you think being treated like everyone else influenced perception of reading?

SE: I do. They wouldn't let me slide by. I had to do all the work everyone else had to do. And the older I got, the more I realized how important reading is. I had to do it in order to get my grades. So I did it.

AKS: Was there anyone in your life who pushed to prioritize sports over academics?

SE: No one.

AKS: Not even a coach or your friends?

SE: No, not that I can think of.

AKS: Who pushed you to read, study, succeed?

SE: My parents. They were always there for me. Honestly, I would say pretty much everyone, especially my teachers. I would say that is the great thing about my high school is that the teachers actually cared about who I was as a person and wanted to see me succeed not only on the football field but also in the classroom. That helped me a lot.

AKS: Did you ever have a favorite teacher?

SE: Gosh—I pretty much loved all my teachers in high school. It can really impact you in a great way. At the time you don't really think anything of it, but looking back it was just great.

AKS: I know you mentioned the AR tests earlier, did you ever have any other incentives to read?

SE: Some teachers would let you read a book and let you write something for extra credit.... Other than that I can't think of anything.

AKS: Do you remember the first chapter book you ever read?

SE: Oh yeah. It was a big series... The tree house club...or something like that. There were a bunch of books in the series and I really liked them. I can't remember the exact name.

AKS: How did adults respond to this accomplishment?

SE: They didn't think much of it. It was a process. It was just expected of me at home and at school to be reading at that level.

AKS: Is there any way your past experience with reading could have been more positive?

SE: Sometimes in high school they assigned awful books for summer reading... and that definitely makes you not want to read as much. If they picked more interesting books, students would have wanted to read more. I would have.

AKS: Do you think that the summer reading program was beneficial?

SE: If they had chosen a more interesting book, yes for sure it could have been... because then it wouldn't be just a three-month break of you not doing anything. Some students would choose not to read it—a lot of times I wouldn't read them just because they were so terrible. But if they chose better books... it would have been really beneficial.

AKS: What is the most difficult class you have taken in college so far?

SE: None of them have been extremely difficult... but if I had to choose one, I would say writing 101. Really at the beginning of the semester, she would assign 100 pages for us to read in two days. For me... that is a lot of reading. And I am a slow reader... so I thought that was kind of hard. But as it's gone on, it has become easier.

AKS: Were you prepared for a class like that coming out of high school?

SE: Oh definitely. In high school we wrote tons of research papers and stuff like that. We always had to read books and write papers on them. So I was definitely well prepared for this class. It was a lot to juggle at first, and it's a lot, but I get it done. It was more time and actually finding the time to do it.

AKS: Do you feel like you read at a college level?

SE: Yes, definitely.

AKS: 100% of the time?

SE: 100% of the time. Reading is never a challenge for me.

AKS: Do you feel that your K-12 education prepared you for reading in college?

SE: Most definitely. At the youngest age, we started out reading the simplest words then moved to small chapter books... then we just kept going until the big chapter books. We had a lot of support from everyone.

AKS: Do you think that some students who haven't come from such a good high school or maybe could just use the extra help would benefit from a freshmen reading class?

SE: I think so. Yeah. Just to prepare you for the classes. It could be put on by the people in FedEx for incoming freshmen, especially for people that might need a little extra help in reading and writing too. I think that would be beneficial for everyone.

AKS: How so?

SE: I think it would build their confidence. If they get enough practice in, then they will be ready to do whatever their teachers ask them to... and know that they can do it and that they don't have to cheat or just try to get by.

AKS: Do you think students would be embarrassed to enroll?

SE: I could see how it would be embarrassing. I could see how some students wouldn't take it well and see it as an extra thing they are required to do each week, they might not like that. But if it was during a mandatory study hall... if you put it during that... we all have to be up here any way.... I think that would work.

AKS: Would you pass judgment on these students for taking a class like that?

SE: No, not at all. They are my teammates. Some people are just blessed with where they come from and have teachers that hold them accountable... and want to see them succeed. I realize that not all students are as lucky as I was to have teachers that want to help them. So them getting extra help here in college would be great. It would build their confidence...which would be awesome.

Student F:

Student F is a sophomore from outside of Mississippi. He is a twenty-year-old African American male. He attended public school in urban area and grew up in a low-income neighborhood. Student F is from same city as Student E.

AKS: What is your earliest memory of reading as a child?

SF: Reading was always really tough for me because I was never really challenged to read on a higher level. Getting by was my whole childhood—just getting by, until now, in college. In high school, I really couldn't read as well as the other kids could. Back in middle school one day, I read in front of the class and was laughed at. It stuck with me. It still sticks with me to this day. Even though I read okay now, due to some extra classes I took last semester, but that memory just always stuck with me.

AKS: I bet that really affected you in a lot of ways. Did your teacher say anything when all of that was happening?

SF: The teacher got everyone to stop laughing, but it still stuck with me that everyone was laughing even though I really tried. It hardened me. I didn't ever want to read in front of anyone ever [again]. The teacher went about her business then after class she pulled me aside and told

me everything was going to be alright and that [learning to read] was a process that most people go through... some people it just takes longer. She told me not to worry because everyone is not on an equal reading level.

AKS: It sounds like this experience was more on the negative side. Would you say that is correct?

SF: If I was really challenged to read and really taught how to love to read, then I would have came out a lot better than it did. All that stuff really affected me: Not scoring high on reading tests, not doing good on the ACT. I scored really low on the ACT... the reading comprehension part. I wish I would have had someone help me coming up,³⁵ like the sources I have now in college.

AKS: How do you feel about your scores on the ACT? When you got those scores back, how did you feel?

SF: It took me four times to take the ACT and get the score I needed [to be eligible]. You could see the improvement from time to time, but the reading was just hard. [The score] was taking back tracks and jumps, then finally I hit the 21 I needed.

AKS: Was this experience, when you were laughed at an overall reflection of your experience with reading?

SF: I was asked to read in front of the class. All my friends was reading and all my classmates was reading, but when it came time for me to read I just stumbled over words. It was just hard for me to read. I can read visually but my language just wasn't as good. It [reading] just wasn't clicking for me.

AKS: Do you have memories of being read to as a child, maybe by a parent or older sibling?

SF: No, not really. Probably a couple of times. Really the only time I was read to was when I was really little, like elementary school or kindergarten. There were some bedtimes stories every once in a while.

AKS: How often was that?

SF: Bedtime stories? Probably ages 1-3, then it kind of stopped. My mom would read to me. It was probably every other week.

AKS: Did this experience influence your perception of reading?

³⁵ Coming up is slang for growing up

SF: No, it really didn't have any influence because it didn't happen that much. It wasn't serious reading. There wasn't any big words or anything like that.

AKS: Did you ever have a teacher sit you down and say "Student F, you can do this, you can read"?

SF: I really didn't have that until high school, when one of my teachers really sat down with me and tried to help. I was going to college really soon to play football and even then, my level of reading was just so far down [low], it was taking a long time to get it to come up. It was coming up so slow.

AKS: What was your parents' attitude towards reading?

SF: My dad cared about work. He wanted us to get our work done so we could play sports. My mom, even to this day, she wanted me to read but I had so much football, as long as I had my grades straight they kind of overlooked it.

AKS: Do you remember a specific time when someone encouraged you to read?

SF: Her name was Ms. Adams.³⁶ She was one of the teachers that really helped me out. I even told her about what happened in middle school when the kids laughed at me and why I didn't like reading in front of the class anymore and why when teachers called on me I would just sit there and refuse to read. She helped me build confidence in myself and got me to start reading and to start actually feeling comfortable reading in front of people. She was a good teacher.

AKS: When did sports start to become a priority in your life?

SF: It started for me way before school did. It just came in the mix with school. In elementary school, it came to the point where if my grades weren't good they would take away football. I come from a long line of football, so that was the worst thing they could do to me. When my grades weren't good, my momma took away football.

AKS: How did you balance reading, homework and football?

SF: I started balancing everything when there was consequences put behind not doing your work. Either it was get the work done or no football. And life without football for me is just no life at all. I had to... I didn't want to be in any kind of academic trouble. I just wanted to be straight football.

AKS: Did this influence your perception of reading?

³⁶ Name changed for confidentiality

SF: Reading wasn't on the backburner because I was afraid of not being able to play, but I still had a hard time with reading.

AKS: Were you ever treated differently in the classroom because you were an athlete?

SF: Sometimes. I know athletes get a lot of different treatment. In high school, during lunch we would get all the meals, but that's just been my whole life. Even in middle school, I was good at sports so I would always get the good meals and other kids didn't.

AKS: Did this ever carry over to the classroom? Were you ever treated differently inside of the classroom because you were an athlete?

SF: I mean, all through school. Where I come from, everybody wanted you to succeed if you could. Some athletes just don't [have the] academic part and so they take extra time to make sure you get the work done to be eligible or go on to play for a good school. That was the thing with me in high school. All the teachers took the time just to help me out because they knew I was going to get somewhere and they knew I had a dream of playing college football.

AKS: Was there a person in your life who pushed you to read and study in school?

SF: I had a lot of role models but I didn't have anyone to really push me to read better. Overall I had people to push me to get everything on the right track [academically].

AKS: Do you remember ever having any incentives to read in elementary or middle school?

SF: Yeah. In elementary school, if you had a good reading score you would get some candy. In high school we would take those six point reading tests for bonus points. I did good on that one... I think I made a four. That boosted my confidence a little bit.

AKS: Do you remember having a favorite book as a kid?

SF: I can't remember what it was called, but it was about some big monster that came to a village.

AKS: Do you remember the first chapter book you ever read?

SF: I really liked the mystery books. I really liked the Sherlock Holmes books. They really grabbed my interest.

AKS: Do you feel like your K-12 education prepared you for reading in college?

SF: Yeah, it kind of did. It had its ups and downs.

AKS: What has been the most difficult class you have taken in college?

SF: Definitely biology. It is really tough.

AKS: Is there a lot of reading involved?

SF: Kind of. Not really. It's just a lot of extra studying. I took a reading class when I had to go read to a bunch of little kids last semester and my reading problems just kind of went away. The kids actually enjoyed hearing me read. I read to those kids all last semester and it was just fun.

AKS: I bet that made up for your experience in middle school.

SF: It kind of healed some old wounds.

AKS: Can you tell me a little bit more about that program?

SF: Yeah. I would go to the little day care every Wednesday to read and spend time with the kids because they really love the football players. They would all just crowd around me and just wanted to hear me read and wanted to hear everything I had to say. It really built up my confidence.

AKS: Do you feel like you are reading at a college level?

SF: Yeah. Now I feel like I am because I feel more comfortable reading in front of people now. It isn't really a problem for me anymore. That memory of getting laughed at and all that is just.... [pauses]. I made major milestones in reading and I feel comfortable with it now.

Chapter VI: Discussion and Recommendations

Interpreting the data collected from the surveys and interviews, we can see college athletes' perceptions of reading are deeply rooted in their past experiences with reading. Overall, I noticed one overarching trend connected by a thread of smaller trends. None of these athletes formed their current perception of reading in college, but rather formed their perception over the course of their lifetime. At the same time, the majority of college athletes (50% all freshmen athletes and 55% of football players) began playing sports before or during elementary school, meaning that college athletes have been playing sports for the majority of their lives. All of the football players interviewed said they began playing sports before or during elementary school. If sports and reading were better intertwined, many of these students might grow up to feel more confident in their ability to read at a college level.

In looking at the data, it becomes apparent that student athletes from low-income backgrounds are less likely to be read to as children than their more affluent peers. Overall, only 20% of low-income freshmen athletes were read to often as children, and 10% were never read to. In comparison, 96% of their more affluent peers were read to often as children. In looking at the difference between freshmen on the football team (50% low-income and 83% minority students) and non-football players (8% low-income and 12% minority students), freshmen football players were read to more than non-football players. The difference between the two groups of students shows the trend that low-income students were read too less than their more affluent peers. Furthermore, with regards to the whole football team, I found that only 21% of the low income football players were read to often as children (34% were never read to) while 46% of their more affluent teammates said they were read to often (only 15% were never read to), again highlighting the trend. Students A, B, and E (low-income backgrounds) said they were

sometimes or never read to as children. These students provided valuable insight to what their perceptions were of reading, in which many were fairly negative. In looking back on his experience, Student B says that although he wasn't read to often, he knew his parents were doing the best they could. He goes forward to describe the teacher who "saw something" in him and began working with him after school to improve his reading skills. She also helped his parents, he states, "She actually taught my parents how to teach me." Student A added to the notion about being read to as a child, stating, "I wish I would have let [my mother] read to me... I probably would have liked to read more."

The less a student athlete is read to as a child the less likely he is to enjoy reading throughout his childhood and to describe his experience as positive. The secondary trend related to the overarching trend is that whether or not a student athlete enjoyed reading as a child impacts how they perceive their education and their ability to read in college. I draw my evidence from the number of low-income and non low-income students who did not enjoy reading. Although the majority of both subgroups said they sometimes enjoyed reading (58% all freshmen, 50% low income, 33% non low income), it is important to note that a larger percentage of low-income students said they did not enjoy reading as children: 42% said they never enjoyed reading as children compared to only 30% of non-low income students who said they never enjoyed reading. The 12% gap between the two groups highlights the trend that the lower income students who were not read to are less likely to enjoy reading as children. This point is further emphasized when looking members of the football team. Thirty-eight percent of low-income football players said that they never enjoyed reading, while only 31% of their more affluent teammates said the same. Although this is a smaller margin, it remains consistent with the identified trend. In reading the interviews, it is apparent that past experiences and whether or

not a student athlete enjoyed reading as a child impacts their overall perception of reading and reading in college. For example, students C, D, and E (non low-income) hardly ever had bad experiences with reading. They remember specific positive times and hardly ever recall being discouraged from reading. When asked if someone discouraged him from reading, Student D responded “not that I can remember. Even if they did, I didn’t listen.” In comparison, Students A, B, and F (low income) had very different perceptions of their childhood experience. Student A said that from an early age, his peers and family would always tell him “you will play pro football one day,” which lead him to conclude that he was “just going to be an athlete.” Today, he says he would appreciate reading now “knowing what [it] does for you.” Student B had a negative experience with reading sometimes when he was younger when his peers tried to deter him from performing well in school. He also states that “through the 8th grade [and on] I was told I wasn’t good at reading” which in turn impacted his overall perception of reading in college. Student F, however, was the most emotional about his past experience with reading, especially when he talked about the time in the middle school when he was laughed at for struggling to read in front of the class. He stated that this memory “always stuck with [him]... and still sticks with him today.”

I found that the previous two trends had an impact on student athletes’ performance in high school. The less a student was read to as a child, the less the student enjoyed reading, the less likely he was to read and/or comprehend the material in high school, which in turn attributes to a lower high school GPA. This is evident when looking at the difference between low income and non-low income student athletes. For example, 40% of low income student athletes admitted to never reading outside of school, but only 60% said they attained a GPA of a 3.0 or higher. In comparison, 46% of non-low income athletes admitted to never

reading outside of high school, however, 65% said they attained GPA's of 3.0 or higher. Regarding low-income football players, 39% admitted that they never read outside of high school, but only 45% said they attained GPA's of 3.0 or higher. In comparison, 46% of non-low income football players admitted they never read outside of high school, however, 65% attained GPA's of 3.0 or higher. One can conclude that although these low-income student athletes might have read more often in high school, they did not comprehend the material as well as their more affluent peers, which is reflected in their lower GPA's. It is important to recognize that all students, except for Student E, stated that if they could go back to high school and be more proactive with their reading, they would approach their schoolwork differently. Students A and F (low income) and Student C (non low-income) all admitted that the standards were not set high for them in high school. The majority of the students who were interviewed said they were treated differently in high school because they were athletes. Student A describes this experience as a "setback in his life." It is important to note that in high school, all of these athletes were motivated by the mentality that *if I don't read, I won't pass, and I won't be able to play*. Student F recalled "Either it was get the work done or no football.... And life without football for me is just no life at all." This adds to the trend that not being read to or enjoying reading as a child impacts student athletes' performance throughout their educational career, especially in high school. Also, it shows how the intermixing of sports and academics can benefit student athletes academically.

All of the previously stated components add up to formulate a college athlete's perception of his ability to read on a college level. It is evident that low-income students feel that they are reading at a college level less than their more affluent peers. Only 40% of low-income freshmen athletes stated they were reading on a college level the majority of the time, while 58%

of their more affluent peers said the same. Forty-four percent of freshmen football players said they are reading on a college level, while 47% of non-football players said the same. It is important to note that many of these freshmen athletes had not yet taken classes at the University and their perception could change after their first semester in college. However, in interpreting the data collected from football players of all ages who have experienced college level coursework, the trend is apparent. Only 26% of low-income football players stated they were reading at a college level, while 62% of their more affluent teammates said the same. Thirty-six percent more affluent football players said they were reading at a college level. It is important to recognize the difference in the perceptions of Students A, B, and F (low-income students) and Students C, D, and E (non low-income). Students A, B, and F struggled with reading throughout their educational career. All of these students were from lower-income backgrounds, were sometimes or never read to as children, did not read consistently outside of high school, and admitted that they were not prepared to read at a college level when arriving at the university to play football. Students C, D, and E on the other hand, were from more affluent backgrounds, were read to consistently as children, were pushed to read and keep up with their assignments throughout their time in school, and admitted that although they have struggled with some reading assignments in college thus far, they have always been confident in their ability to read at a college level.

All of the pieces come together to support my final conclusion that whether or not a student athlete is read to as a child, enjoyed reading as a child, and continued to read and perform well throughout high school affect how they perceive their ability to read at a college level. This is evident especially when looking at the difference between low-income and non low-income student athletes, freshmen football players and non-football players, and low income

and non low-income football players. The lower income students are read to less, enjoy reading less, perform worse in high school-- despite how much they read-- and in turn, more feel like they are not reading at a college level than their more affluent peers. This trend is also magnified in reading the difference in experiences told by Student E (non low income) and Student F (low income), who lived just miles apart from each other but had dramatically different experiences with reading.

Recommendations

Avenues and Access to Books for Low-Income Students

“She worked with me... and my parents... she actually taught my parents how to teach me.”

-Student B

“If I had let her play her part as a mother and read to me... it would have helped me out in the future.”

-Student A

Through my research, I found that low-income student athletes are more likely to have parents with lower levels of education and are less likely to be read to as children. This is also evident when looking at the differences between Students A, B, and F who were sometimes or never read to as children and Students C, D, and E who were read to consistently throughout their childhood. I recommend that we find more ways to give low-income children access to books. According to an article published by the University of Nevada, “Having as few as 20 books in the home still has a significant impact on propelling a child to a higher level of education, and the more books you add, the greater the benefit” and “Both factors, having a 500-book library or having university-educated parents, propel a child 3.2 years further in education, on average” (Evans). I propose that organizations that work frequently with low income children, such as local WIC and food stamps office and pediatric offices, offer a child one book every time he or she visits. This will also open an avenue for a respected and trustworthy figure, such as a nurse or pediatrician, to talk to parents about the importance of reading to their children.

Intervening at a young age can only benefit these students and compel them to read more as children.

Sports as an Avenue for Intervention

“Either it was get the work done or no football... and life without football is just no life at all.”

-Student F

“I was able to read a play and run the play, and that was all that mattered. My whole life was about sports... reading was just something on the side.”

-Student A

Through my research, I found that the majority of collegiate athletes began playing sports at an early age, meaning that sports can be used as a great avenue for intervention. To get these kids to read more often, adults could use sports related tools as leverage. I would recommend that little league coaches offer written feedback for their players every two weeks. During or at the end of practice, the coach would meet with the athlete and ask him to read the feedback out loud, as well as interpret what the feedback means. Not only would this encourage these kids to read more, it would also help them be able to interpret, comprehend, and utilize what they have read to become a better player.

Furthermore, I recommend that universities, like The University of Mississippi, open their doors to low-income students from around the area to attend a sports camp where reading and sports are intertwined. For example, the university could host a camp for students where members of the football team could coach the children, while also reading to them periodically throughout the day. Not only would this benefit the children, but it would also benefit players like Student F, who said that reading to children helped him “heal some old wounds” from his past experience with reading.

Intervening in High School

“It was just so easy for me... the way it was set up. So my thought was, why not take advantage of it?”

-Student C

“If it wasn’t for my parents, I wouldn’t have had the grades I did... especially in high school.”

-Student D

Student Athletes who were not read to as children and did not enjoy reading as children are less likely to read in high school. Moreover, the students who were not read to as children but read more often in high school still struggled to maintain an adequate GPA than their counterparts and were less likely to understand what reading at a college level is. It is important to recognize that high school student athletes, especially those on the football team, need to be held accountable for their schoolwork as much as non-student athletes. I suggest that high school teams around the county implement a mandatory once a week study hall to encourage athletes to finish their homework and turn it in on time, as well as keep up with their reading assignments. A study hall would also encourage student athletes to form and practice good study habits that will carry over to their college career. This would keep the team members accountable for their work, in turn helping to keep them eligible for the season.

Furthermore, it could be beneficial to implement a program similar to the one discussed previously in which local high school teams, such as the football team, host a reading/sports camp for young kids from around the area. This could benefit the high school students just as much as the little kids, and perhaps “heal some old wounds” before the students go off to college.

Intervening at the College Level

“I hadn’t read a book until I got to college... that was the first time I had to start reading.”

-Student B

“I can’t just stop with being good at sports... because one day sports is going to be over.”

-Student A

Lastly, it is important to recognize how crucial intervention on a college level can be for students who feel like they are not reading at an adequate level. I suggest that student teams, especially the football team, have a common reading during the summer with books that

are interesting and readable by players at all reading levels. For example, the football team could be assigned to read one chapter of *Remember the Titans* per week. At the end of the week, the students could participate in a round table discussion where they can talk about different aspects of the book. Not only would this be a great team-building exercise, but it would also open doors of communication amongst team members, especially those who may have a hard time with reading comprehension. For example, if Student F and Student E were asked to participate in a round table discussion, Student E might be able to provide some valuable insight and information that Student F missed when he read the book.

Furthermore, I found that academic support centers can be used as vital tools in supporting student athletes both emotionally and academically. I recommend that an academic counselor interview all incoming male student athletes, especially those coming from low income areas, to gain a better understanding of where they think they stand academically. I found that all of the students I interviewed were willing and able to talk about their past experiences and wanted to have their voices heard. Using the questions I created, the students could open up about their past experience and the academic counselor could gain a better understanding of the student's background and past educational experiences. By interviewing these students before they enroll in classes, all the while keeping an open line of communication and allowing these students to have their voices heard, the academic counselors will earn the trust of the students. The relationship between academic counselors and employees working in Athletic Academics will strengthen immensely.

These recommendations will work to bridge the gap between those student athletes prepared for college and those who are not. By intervening at an early stage, student athletes will be more prepared for college reading levels through sports activities. Once these

recommendations are implemented, these athletes can create a new trend of encouraging others to academic excellence through sports. The utilization of athletics as a means to improve literacy levels will not only strengthen student athletes academically but emotionally, by providing support at multiple levels throughout their lives.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

Based on the data I collected from my surveys and interviews, I found that there are many different experiences to consider when collecting information about an individual's perception of reading. I found that a student's background with reading, parent education level, and financial background have a significant impact on their perception of reading. I also found that playing sports did have an impact on student athletes' reading. There is a strong divide between college athletes coming from low-income backgrounds and those from higher-income backgrounds. The data demonstrates that higher income athletes, in general, feel that they had a better experience with reading as children. As a result, these students have more confidence in their ability to read at a college level. The data suggests that childhood experience with reading directly correlates to how student athletes, specifically those from low-income backgrounds, feel about their ability to read at a college level.

This data can be used to compare student athletes to non-student athletes in future research projects. This data can also be used in the Ole Miss Athletic Department as a basis for implementing new programs to benefit their student athletes both academically and emotionally.

In conclusion, I believe sports are an incredible motivating factor in getting students to read. Although it is important for parents, coaches, and educators to instill the importance of reading in their children at a young age, there could be a lack of resources (such as the case with Student B and Student F) or a disinterest in reading at an early age (Student A) that affects these students' overall perception of literacy. Sports can be used as a vital motivator in getting these boys to read. Educators should work with students to help them understand the concept of if you work hard enough in the classroom, it will only benefit you outside of the classroom, in the future, and on the field.

It would also be beneficial to do continued research on the availability of books with interesting and age-appropriate subject matters for students on a lower reading level. For example, one of my students at the after-school center is in the third grade, but reads at a kindergarten level. The books available to him cater to his reading level, but do not cater to his interests. All the students interviewed acknowledged that they enjoyed reading when they found an interesting book. Student E, who attended private school, admitted that although he felt that he was a good reader, he didn't enjoy his summer reading assignments because they were "horrible." Finding books that cater to boys, especially young boys who have a hard time focusing while reading is crucial to getting these kids to pick up a book, keep them engaged, and improve their literacy without them even realizing it.

Finally, I found that student athletes' perceptions of their past experience with reading significantly impacts their overall confidence in the classroom. It is important to gain insight from their past experiences from the moment they begin their careers as college athletes. Through my experience and my research, I have found that students' perceptions often become reality when it comes to reading. If a student enters college feeling underprepared or like they are not reading on a college level, then it is likely that he will struggle with classes involving heavy reading and fall behind. As I highlight in my Recommendations section, there are many ways to combat these problems and support these student athletes.

Personally, this research has changed my own perception of reading. I learned that perception is a huge part of reality. If a person thinks he can read and is encouraged to read, chances are he will be able to read. If a person doesn't think he can read, chances are he will not be able to read at an adequate level. This project has given me a better understanding of how to approach my students who have a difficult time reading, the right questions to ask them when

inquiring about reading, and how to break down barriers to gain my students' trust and be a source of encouragement. I also learned that every person has a story and wants their story to be heard. Next year, when I teach high school in low-income area of the Mississippi Delta with Teach For America, my research will serve solid basis of understanding students' perception of literacy and how they came to form their perceptions. For example, I know to strive to assign books that are interesting and on a level readable by all students. I also know to talk with students individually and gain knowledge about their past experiences in school and reading. Lastly, I know that the student athletes, like all of the students in my class, need to be pushed just as hard to complete their work and reading assignments on time, form good study habits, and make their grades based on their performance inside the classroom. They deserve to be treated as equals to their peers and cared about as people, not just another number on a jersey.

Final Comments

My favorite student I have ever worked with in the FedEx athletic center is an African American football player who grew up in an inner city, low-income neighborhood filled with crime, drugs, and violence. His mother, a hard-working single woman, worked three jobs so her son could focus his time and energy on football, *his only way out*. He made it out of the inner city with a scholarship to play football. He once told me that he "wasn't prepared for the work, but he was prepared to work hard." Although he arrived at college underprepared, having attained low level of literacy, he is by far the hardest working student I have ever encountered professionally. He is doing what most would deem impossible, climbing his way out of poverty and succeeding in college. In taking advantage of the resources at his disposal, he has passed every class and his reading has improved immensely.

Reading is an essential life skill. Reading educates, inspires, and builds confidence. It is the fundamental building block of a sound education. It is the driving force behind a confident student. To help student athletes like this hardworking young man, it is important that we utilize the available resources in college athletic academics to help students become better readers, which, in turn, will mold them into more confident, informed, and prepared human beings. I believe this student is a representation of all low-income student athletes who arrive at college feeling underprepared, but take advantage of the abundance of resources available to help them be successful on and off the field. If he can do it, so can they.

Appendix I: Survey

Academic Athletic Survey Fall 2014 Please circle the answer that best applies

http://uofmississippi.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_38e6X53wYnYM0kd

Are you 18 or more than 18 years old? Yes No

1. What sport do you play?

Basketball	Baseball	Football
Golf	Rifle	Soccer
Softball	Tennis	Track/Field/XC
Volleyball		

2. How old are you?

18 years old	21 years
19 years old	22 or more years
20 years old	

3. Are you male or female?

Male Female

4. What year are you in school?

Freshmen	Junior
Sophomore	Senior

5. How would you describe your ethnicity/Race?

Caucasian, White, Non-Hispanic	African American, Black, Afro-Caribbean
Latino or Hispanic American	Asian, South Asian, or Indian American
Middle Eastern or Arab American	Native American or Alaskan Native
Other	

6. When did you begin playing sports?

Before Elementary school
During Elementary school
During Middle school
During High school

7. Are you from the state of Mississippi?

Yes No

8. What year did you graduate from high school?

Before 2009 2010 2012 2014
2009 2011 2013

9. Did you attend high school in Mississippi?

Yes No

10. Did you attend public or private school?

Public Private Other

11. What was your high school GPA?

Below 1.0
Between 1.0-1.99
Between 2.0-2.99
Between 3.0-4.0

12. In what type of area did you attend high school?

Rural/Country (County School)
Urban/City (City School)
Suburban

13. In high school, did you qualify or receive Free or Reduced Price Lunch?

Yes No Not available

14. What level of education does your mother have?

Some high school
High school graduate
Some college
College graduate
Trade school
Not available

15. What level of education does your father have?

Some high school
High school graduate
Some college
College graduate
Trade school
Not available

16. Did you grow up in a single parent household?

Yes No Not available

17. Did someone (a parent, sibling, friend) read to you as a child?

Yes, Often Yes, sometimes No, never

18. Did you enjoy reading as a child?

Yes Sometimes No

19. On average, how often did you read outside of school in high school?

Everyday
1-2 times per week
3-6 times per week
Never

20. Did you use the school Library in high school?

Yes , often Sometimes No, never

21. Overall, how would you describe your childhood experience with reading?

Extremely positive
Fairly positive
Average
Fairly negative
Extremely negative

22. Today, Do you enjoy reading?

Yes Sometimes No, never

23. Today, Do you feel like you have trouble understanding college textbooks?

Yes, the majority of the time
Yes, sometimes
No, hardly ever
No, never

24. Today, Do you feel like you have a difficult time focusing while reading?

Yes, the majority of the time
Yes, sometimes
No, hardly ever
No, never

25. Do you feel that keep up with your reading assignments in your college classes?

Yes, the majority of the time

Yes, sometimes

No, hardly ever,

No, never

26. Do you feel that you are reading at a college level?

Yes, the majority of the time

Yes, sometimes

No, hardly ever

No, never

Appendix II: Interview Questions

1. Are you above the age of 18?
2. Are you from the state of Mississippi?
3. Did you grow up in a rural or urban area? Did you attend public or private school?

4. What is your earliest memory of reading as a child?
 - a. It sounds like this experience was [positive/negative]. Is that right?
 - b. Why was this experience positive or negative?
 - c. Was this memory/experience a reflection of your overall experience with reading as a child?
5. Do you have memories of being read to as a child?
 - a. Who read to you?
 - b. How did this make you feel about reading overall?
 - c. Was this a positive or negative experience?
 - d. Did this experience influence how you read, your ability to read, or whether or not you liked to read in school?
6. What was your parents attitude towards reading?
7. Do you remember a specific incident when someone encouraged you to read?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
 - i. Do you still think about this experience often?
8. Do you remember a specific incident when someone discouraged you to read?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
 - i. Do you still think about this experience often?
9. When did sports start to become a priority in your life?
 - a. How did you balance homework, reading, and sports?
 - b. How did this influence your view/perception of school?
 - c. How did this influence your view/perception of reading?
10. Did you ever let homework or reading “slide” because of practice or sporting events? How often?
11. Is there a specific memory you have where you were treated differently in the classroom than other students because you were an athlete?
12. Was there anyone pushing you to prioritize sports over academics?
13. Overall, do you feel you were treated differently than other students in the classroom?
 - a. Do you feel like this influenced your perception of reading? How so?
14. Was there a person in your life who pushed you to read, study, succeed in school? Who was this person? How did that impact your perception of school and reading?
15. In your K-12 education, did your school/teacher offer any incentives to read? (AR program, candy, etc.
16. Do you remember having a favorite book as a child? Do you remember one of the first chapter books you read? How did adults respond to this accomplishment?
17. In what way could your reading experience have been more positive?
18. What is the most difficult class you have taken in college? What class was this? What made it difficult?

19. What is the most difficult book/reading assignment you have had in college? What class was this in? Did you understand the point of the reading? Why was it so difficult?
20. Do you feel like you are reading on a college level? Is reading a challenge for you?
21. Did your K-12 education prepared you for reading in college? How so?
22. What has been your most rewarding experience in college, academically?

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