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Between the classroom and the field: An examination of the experiences of black male football student-athletes

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Between the Classroom and the Field: An Examination of the

Experiences of Black Male Football Student-Athletes

by

Jeff I. Porter

Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Educational Leadership

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Ypsilanti, Michigan

March 16, 2017

Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of my father, John Issac Porter, Sr., Esq. (1949–2008)

No matter how tall I grow, I will always look up to you.

Acknowledgments

I want to extend my appreciation and gratitude to all the people that in one way or another helped me to finish this dissertation and to complete this journey of my academic career. This journey has not been easy but has taught me numerous lifelong lessons, and I am grateful for the individuals that continued to help and motivate me to pursue a doctoral degree. Similar to the support network described in this dissertation, my support network was a critical component in getting me to apply for and persevere through this doctoral program. First, I want to thank God, my Lord and Savior, for providing me with the opportunity to be here today and the endurance to continue pressing on toward higher goals. Knowing that you are constantly directing my path gives me great comfort and joy, and I dedicate all this work to you.

I would like to thank my best friend and my wife, Dr. Tiffany Ofili Porter, for not only supporting but tolerating me throughout this entire process. We have had to reschedule and rearrange so many planned activities just so I can have enough time to dedicate to this work. I am truly grateful to have had you by my side from the start, which has made this process much more bearable. I cannot thank you enough for everything. I love you.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for providing valuable feedback throughout this process and for helping me to fine tune my study so that I can contribute to the field. In particular, I want to express my sincere gratitude for Dr. Raul A. Leon. You have been the best committee chair one could have asked for. Thanks for helping to enhance my work and providing advice to help make me a better student and administrator. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge Dr. James Barott for your continued expertise on how to make this dissertation stronger. I appreciate all of your feedback and guidance.

To Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher: I cannot thank you enough for your guidance beginning when I was a master's student at Eastern Michigan University. You saw more potential in me than I saw in myself, and you continued to challenge me to be better. Your words of encouragement, your expertise, and your dedication to ensuring that I finish this process meant the world to me. You are a mentor to me, and I sincerely appreciate everything that you have done.

To Mr. Greg Harden: You have been a mentor of mine since I arrived on campus as an undergraduate student. Regardless of any goal that I have had, you simply ask me to create a plan and to stick to that plan. You have provided with countless lifelong lessons while being a voice of reason during my times of distress. Your guidance has been invaluable not only throughout this process but since we first met. Thank you, my friend.

To Linda Porter: Thank you for being a guiding light for me. There is no dream too big or accomplishment too small that you are not proud of. You have been there anytime I needed you and comforted me when no one else could. There are not enough words to accurately express my love and gratitude for you, so I will just say thank you.

To my classmates, and my friends: Each of you have provided me support, encouragement, and guidance in a different way. You were the source of laughter and sanity during the dissertation process and have made these years enjoyable. I want to thank you all from the heart for making each moment and conversation one to remember. Thank you for sharing your time with me.

Abstract

This study is concerned with the fact that numerous Black student-athletes that play football at Division 1 predominantly White institutions (PWIs) are graduating at the lowest rates of all student and student-athlete groups on college campuses nationwide. An intercollegiate athletics system acts as the commercial arm of the university and is designed to ensure the sustainability and viability of football by creating contradictory athletic and academic pressures that the student-athletes must navigate. Despite the intentional obstacles that Black student-athletes encounter, there are many that do graduate from their institution and transition into a professional career. Therefore, the guiding research question was: How did Black male football student-athletes manage to graduate while being part of a Division 1 team at a research-intensive institution?

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who met the criteria defined by the researcher. This study utilized a qualitative case study method to examine the experiences of the selected participants. Primary data were collected through interviews from five Black football players and seven current and former university faculty and staff members. Secondary data were collected from participant questionnaires and cross-referenced with media guides and player profiles.

The study revealed three central findings. First, the data disproved the common notion that Black football student-athletes are from inner city, poor socioeconomic backgrounds and attended failing high schools that did not adequately prepare them for college. Second, the participants in this study navigated contradictory athletic and academic pressures when they utilized their strong social support network of people who provided advice, guidance, and a safe space to process feelings. The function of the support was to strengthen their motivation to

graduate. Last, the organizational system which these student-athletes had to navigate, influenced all facets of their lives and dictated the degree programs they pursued. The student-athletes that managed to graduate from the institution did so from a degree program that was accommodating to their football related schedules. Implications and suggestions from the author for future research are also discussed.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

College athletics have been thrusted further into the national spotlight due to ongoing litigations (e.g., *Ed O'Bannon v. National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA]*) concerned with the debate of whether or not college athletes (especially those who participate in revenue-generating sports) should be financially compensated (McQuilkin, 2002; Smith, 2001). The role and impact of revenue-generating sports (i.e., football and basketball) on the academic community resides at the center of this conversation (Beamon, 2008; Sellers, 2000). One aspect of this discussion is that the system of intercollegiate athletics is primarily designed to ensure the sustainability of football and men's basketball for the NCAA and its member institutions at the expense of educational pursuits of the student-athletes. According to Fulk's (2015) report (on behalf of the NCAA), 90% of the revenue generated for the NCAA comes from television and marketing rights for the Men's Division 1 Basketball Championship. In addition, member institutions generate the vast majority of their revenue from the ticket sales, television, and marketing associated with football (Fulk, 2015).

Supporters of college athletics argue that athletic scholarships (also referred to as "grant-in-aid") provide student-athletes with an opportunity to attend prestigious institutions and earn a college degree (Siegel, 1994). Proponents of grants-in-aid argue that such opportunities would not have been afforded to these student-athletes without their participation in collegiate athletics, which seems to be especially true for numerous African American (or Black) student-athletes (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005; Singer, 2008). Through this lens, college athletic participation is an invaluable resource that provides a tremendous opportunity for student-athletes.

Critics, however, argue that college athletics systemically exploit the athletic prowess of student-athletes and ignores their academic responsibilities and social development (Sellers, 2000; Singer, 2008). Adler and Adler (1987) stated that the pressures to perform on the field

coupled with the academic expectations to maintain their eligibility create conflicts for student-athletes. Conflicting expectations combined with the time commitment required to maintain their status and scholarship on the team challenge the idea that college attendance is rife with opportunity since many student-athletes leave college feeling as if they have been exploited for their athletic talents and were not provided with a realistic opportunity for academic achievement (Beamon, 2008; Sellers, 2000). Consequently, student-athletes receiving athletic scholarships face a major dilemma; do the student-athletes adhere to their athletic schedules because of the financial support provided at the expense of their academic pursuits? Student-athletes must maintain academic standards while fulfilling their athletic obligations (which could easily total more than 40 hours weekly) to keep financial assistance (Beamon, 2008).

Today, football still generates the vast majority of the revenue needed for university athletic departments to support their expenses (Fulk, 2015). This includes supporting non-revenue producing sports (sometimes referred to as "Olympic sports") that are "overwhelmingly populated by White middle and upper-middle class students" (Donnor, 2005, p. 48). The financial needs of the athletic departments create extreme pressure to win games and places contradictory pressures on these student-athletes to excel academically while also dedicating time (20 hours a week) to their official and unofficial team activities (Beamon, 2008; Coakley, 2009; Gatmen, 2011; NCAA, 2015; Upthegrove, Roscigno, & Charles, 1999).

These pressures to perform on the field and in the classroom, create a dynamic that emphasizes winning at all costs, even at the expense of academic responsibilities (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Sellers, 2000). Existing literature reveals that as a group, African American males are overrepresented in football (Beamon, 2008; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2012; Reynolds, Fisher, & Cavil, 2012; Sellers, 2000), which is coincidentally the main revenue-

generating sport for the NCAA member institutions. Thus, as a group, African American male student-athletes are courted and recruited by universities because of their athletic abilities. However, it is argued that minimal attention is paid to whether or not these student-athletes are academically prepared for the rigor of college academia (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010; Simiyu, 2012). Consistent across research literature is the notion that high school grade point average (GPA) is a significant predictor of academic success for college student-athletes (Astin, 1993; Comeaux, 2007; Sellers, 1992). Unfortunately, African American student-athletes enter college with lower GPAs and score significantly lower on standardized college entrance exams compared to their White counterparts (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Gatmen, 2011; Sellers, 1992).

The literature also notes that Black student-athletes tend to enter college with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, from high schools with substandard academic resources, and are generally not as academically prepared as their White counterparts (Comeaux, 2007; Sellers, 1992). Once enrolled, Black student-athletes perform worse academically and graduate at far less rates than their White and Black female student-athlete counterparts (Comeaux, 2007; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013). The NCAA (2014) illustrates that from 1995 to 2007, Black student-athletes, especially football players, had the lowest graduation rate of any sport or student-athlete group on campus.

Statement of Problem

Harper et al. (2013) found that across four cohorts of student athletes (i.e., students who entered college in the same academic year), Black male student-athletes graduated at a rate of 50.2% within six years, compared to 66.9% of student-athletes overall, 72.8% of all undergraduate students and 55.5% of Black male undergraduate non-student-athletes. These

disparities have raised serious questions about the role of Black male student-athletes in revenue-generating sports and have served as a source of criticism of purpose of collegiate athletics. The nature of college systems allows athletic departments to capitalize on the backs of predominantly Black student-athletes in revenue-generating sports rosters to pay exorbitant coaching and administrator salaries while all the other sports (largely dominated by middle and upper class White student-athletes) are able to enjoy the benefits of their labor (Beamon, 2008), which include scholarships, state of the art facilities, and exuberant travel budgets. In short, institutions seem to be more concerned with exploiting the athletic potential of their Black student-athletes rather than cultivating their academic potential (Sack & Stuarowsky, 1998).

However, the conflict between athletic participation and academic responsibilities is not the only issue at hand. Black male student-athletes must contend with a host of other psychosocial factors that impact their overall collegiate experiences, especially at PWIs. Some of these factors include racial discrimination, campus isolation, prejudiced faculty, alienation, increased pressure to athletically perform, and being ill-prepared for college academic requirements (Adler & Adler, 1987; Allen, 1992; Beamon, 2008; Comeaux, 2011; Bimper, Harrison, & Clark, 2012; Comeaux, 2007; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Donnor, 2005; Gragg & Flowers, 2014; Melendez, 2008).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black football student-athletes who graduated from a Division I Power 5 institution (e.g. ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, & SEC institutions) described as "State University" throughout this study. Despite the series of obstacles and structural constraints they must overcome (i.e., campus racism, isolation, faculty stereotypes, poor academic preparation, and excessive emphasis on winning by internal and

external constituents), there are Black football student-athletes who fulfill the necessary academic requirements to graduate from their institutions (Gragg & Flowers, 2014). Much of the current research on Black student-athletes has painted a bleak picture of this population by focusing on the lack of academic persistence, disturbing graduation rates, lower GPAs, and below average pre-college academic experiences (Benson, 2000; Harper, 2009; Sellers, 1992). Though research pertaining to Black student-athletes' lack of academic achievement is well documented, "we have little to guide the development of enduring remedies" (Benson, 2000, p. 224).

While research has emerged in recent years examining the academic success of student-athletes as a group, it remains an area of study that receives minimal attention. Much of the existing research on African American male student-athletes is from the perspective of a deficit model that seeks to explain their lower graduation metrics (Benson, 2000; Gragg & Flowers, 2014). This deficit perspective implies that the lack of academic persistence (i.e., progress towards and completion of bachelor's degree) of this population is primarily the fault of the student-athlete (Benson, 2000). The counter perspective, or anti-deficit model, seeks to uncover how, despite the litany of circumstances working against this population, many have managed to graduate from their institution (Harper, 2010). According to Harper (2010) this perspective is mostly about resiliency and how the researcher frames the questions, which can drastically impact the answers given. Therefore, instead of concentrating on the deficiencies of students with the type of questions asked, the anti-deficit perspective seeks to "invert questions that are commonly asked about education disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition" (Harper, 2012, p. 5), to understand how students successfully navigate their way through the college environment.

Guided by an anti-deficit perspective, the purpose of this study was to answer the following research question: How did Black football student-athletes that played football at a State University graduate? To answer this question, this study utilized a qualitative case study approach methodology where the unit of analysis for this case study was "State University." Data were collected from individual interviews (five former Black male football student-athletes and seven faculty and staff members), documents (e.g., alumni profiles, media guides, student-athlete questionnaires), and site observations.

Two conceptual frameworks guided this study. First, Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model provided important insight to understand student-athlete academic success by addressing cognitive and non-cognitive variables and the relationship to the institutional environment. This framework is first introduced in Chapter 1. The second conceptual framework that guided this dissertation was Muwonge's (2012) organizational framework, which builds upon seminal research from Scott (2003), Thompson (1967), and Parson (1960). This framework provided an understanding for how organizations function and allowed the researcher to situate the experiences of student-athletes in the context of "State University" as the unity of analysis. This framework is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Significance of Study

As previously mentioned, the graduation statistics for many Division 1 institutions illustrates that Black football student-athletes graduate at rates lower than any other student-athlete group on campus. Essentially, Black football student-athletes are in a state of emergency. Black men already run the risk of being excessively exploited without at least being provided a legitimate opportunity to graduate. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the experiences of

those Black football student-athletes that did graduate from State University. This study was significant for several key reasons.

First, Black males comprise the majority of the football team rosters, yet they are the least likely to graduate. Prior to World War II, Black student-athletes playing football at a Division 1 institution were scarce. However, post-WWII this number grew substantially because with veterans returning from war, their access to higher education increased dramatically, which led to an increase in popularity and commercialism. This popularity and increasing commercialism of college athletics forced colleges to begin looking for previous untapped talent to fill their athletic teams (Spivey, 1983; Davis, 1994). Currently, Black student-athletes comprise the majority of football teams (especially within the Power 5 conferences). Because these numbers have continued to increase over time, Black student-athletes are overrepresented in football (Beamon, 2008; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2012; Sellers, 2000). Even more significantly, across all Division I institutions, Black males are 13 times more likely than White males to be on an athletic scholarship. That number swells to 32 times more likely if the institution is ranked in the Associated Press's Top 25 (Jackson, 2015).

Second, current research about Black student-athletes is virtually nonexistent with regards to understanding the experiences of Black student-athletes that graduated despite systematic imbalances placed on them. Duderstadt (2000) points out that athletic schedules and requirements are in direct conflict with their academic responsibilities. The core function of the football team is to produce football games, while the core function of the academic unit is to produce degree-holding students. As a result, student-athletes are the only group of students asked to navigate between these opposing core functions. This study examined the experiences of Black male football student-athletes and sought to better understand how they were able to

navigate college and graduate while managing the competing core functions of academics and athletics.

Last, understanding the experiences of Black football student-athletes who graduate can provide helpful insights for academic staff members who are tasked with working with these student-athletes. This study hopes to contribute to the literature by approaching this examination from a qualitative perspective, adding rich accounts that capture the experiences of this group. In practice, this study is not concerned with findings factors to predict student success or identifying remedies that could help student-athlete graduate. Rather, the goal of this study is to better position student-athletes to graduate and help institutions assist athletes to gain personal, social, academic, and professional success.

Predicting Academic "Success" for Student-Athletes

Much of the earlier research on student-athlete academic success has focused on predicting factors that led to academic success and failure of student-athletes. As a whole, previous research states that high school GPA and SAT/ACT scores are accurate predictors of academic success among student-athletes (Ervin, Saunders, Gillis, & Hogrebe, 1985; Lang, Dunham, & Alpert, 1988; Sellers, 1992; Young & Sowa, 1992). However, the concept of "success" in these studies can best be thought of as progress towards and completion of a bachelor's degree (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Lang, Dunham, & Alpert, 1988; Reynolds et al., 2012). Additional research has pointed out that for Black males that participated in revenue-generated sports, high school GPA (Booker, 2013), mother's occupation, (Sellers, 1992), socioeconomic status (Strayhorn, 2010), and interactions with faculty (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007) are predictors associated with academic success in college.

Unfortunately, there is very little work that has explored the Black male student-athlete experience beyond identifying variables as predictor of student success. In general, research has been concerned with cognitive and non-cognitive variables that impact student-athletes. Cognitive variables include high school GPAs and standardized test scores, which many use to predict student success in college, with varying degrees of success (Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Sellers, 1992). In contrast, non-cognitive variables can include self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, long-range goals, support person, leadership, community, and nontraditional knowledge (Sedlacek &Adams-Gaston, 1992; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1984)

Although useful, this approach is limited because it only examines cognitive and non-cognitive variables or the institutional environment, both in isolation and disconnected from how they both affect student matriculation (e.g., Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Sellers, 1992).

One attempt to move beyond this approach was Gragg and Flowers's (2013) study, which used a grounded theory approach to identify themes associated with academic success for African American football student-athletes. In their study in the NCAA Southeastern Conference (SEC), they found that family/significant other influence, institutional commitment, teammate influence/peer acceptance, self-motivation, fraternity influence, and spirituality influence academic persistence and degree attainment. However, their study falls short from establishing a theory that could illuminate our understanding of how Black male student-athletes navigate the college environment.

Today, one of the few contributions concerned with answering this question is Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) work, which builds upon previous literature focused on cognitive and non-

cognitive variables predicting academic success. The contribution of Comeaux and Harrison (2011) is that they approached the examination of student-athlete success from a qualitative tradition, calling attention to the necessity to explore the environment of the student-athletes in order to understand how they navigate college and ultimately reach graduation. Figure 1 presents their success framework for student-athletes.
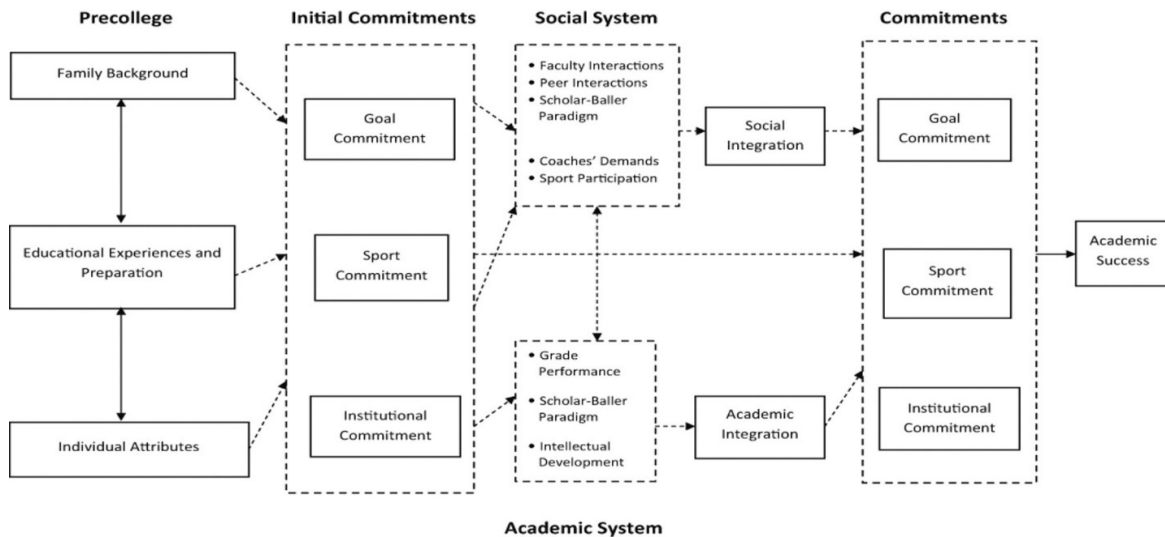
Figure 1. Conceptual framework for college student-athlete academic success
*Comeaux, E., & Harrison, C. K. (2011). A conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes. *Educational Researcher, 40*(5), 235-245. doi:10.3102/0013189X11415260

Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model "presumes that a student-athletes' academic success will be based primarily on a set of individual characteristics and dispositions, with effects from the social and academic systems within which the student-athlete operates" (p. 237). This model is segmented into several parts, which illustrates how the various aspects fit together into a cumulative model. The first aspect of this model begins with pre-college variables that include family background (i.e., parental/guardian education, parental/guardian support), individual attributes (i.e., race, gender, academic motivation), and educational experiences (i.e., high school). The pre-college variables provide a context to the backgrounds and origins of the student-athletes before they enter the university climate. In the first stage of the model, this

background is taken into account because it illuminates which factors help or hinder student-athletes as they adapt to the college environment (Lang, Dunham, & Alpert, 1988; Sellers, 1992).

Student-athletes' initial commitments make up the next stage of the model. Student-athletes' commitments include: goal, sport, and institutional. These commitments appear at the beginning and end of the model to illustrate the interaction that pre-college expectations have on the levels of commitments entering college and after the student-athlete has had some time to develop and interact with the environment. The concept of commitments is divided into three distinct categories: goal, sport, and institutional. Goal commitment identifies the behaviors with respect to educational goal setting that student-athletes bring to college and can predict how they will interact with the environment. Goal commitment can include (but not limited to) "students' educational plans and the highest level of college education to which they aspire" (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011, p. 238). For example, a student aspiring to earn a graduate degree is more likely to complete a bachelor's degree. Institutional commitment refers to the significance student-athletes place on completing their degree and satisfaction with the institution. Sport commitment refers to the amount of time (physical and emotional) the student-athlete spends on their sport.

The next stage examines the academic and social environments of the university. The ability of the student-athletes to assimilate into the various environments is an important factor in their collective experiences. The social environment includes faculty and peer interactions, along with sport and coaches' demands. The academic environment includes grade performance and intellectual development, whereas grade performance is more explicit and the intellectual development is an intrinsic reward. The model concludes with an examination of student-athlete commitments (e.g., goal, sport, and institutional) leading to academic success.

In conclusion, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) created a model that not only takes into account cognitive and non-cognitive variables, but also situates them into a web of complexities that encompasses the experiences of student-athletes. That is, Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) work consider the importance of pre-college experiences, individual attributes, and family background while also capturing particular characteristics defining the experiences of student-athletes in college. These characteristics include the institutional environment (considering both social and academic integration) and their overall engagement on campus and commitments (Hu & Kuh, 2002), characteristics that have been linked to positive and desirable college outcomes (Pascarella &Terenzine, 2005).

This aspect was missing from previous related research providing a framework to approach this examination about student-athlete success from a broader perspective. That is, "instead of the familiar 'pipeline' analogy depicted by a direct route to educational attainment, a more accurate representation is a wide path with twists, turns, detours, roundabouts, and occasional dead ends that many students encounter during their educational career" (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 7).

Although the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model establishes a valuable framework to examine student-athlete academic success, the model is limited in that it was derived from a review of literature and not from a study. Therefore, the current research seeks to expand upon previous models by diving into the lived experiences of Black football student-athletes using a qualitative approach with an organizational theory lens. This study is unique because it situates the experiences of these student-athletes within an organizational framework.

Delimitations and Limitations

According to Bryant (2004), delimitations are "factors that limit the relevancy of your study to other populations or individuals" (p. 57). Using this definition, there are several delimitations that must be identified with regards to this study.

First, this study exclusively focuses on African American male student-athletes and does not address the experiences of African American female student-athletes. Current literature suggests that these two groups of student-athletes have some similar but vastly different athletic and campus wide experiences (both academic and social) (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Comeaux, 2007; Steele, 1997).

Second, narrowing the focus to student-athletes who played football also leaves out other African American males who do not participate in the sport and who may have had different experiences altogether. One subpopulation is men's basketball, also a revenue-generating sport. In addition, only those student-athletes who received athletically-related financial aid to attend the institution were included in this study, and those considered walk-ons were excluded. According to Beamon (2008), superior athletes are often those who received athletic scholarships and are needed to "maintain team performance" (p. 353). This, in turn, leads college coaches to seek and recruit these athletes, regardless of academic background, and thrust them into an environment that imposes contradictory pressures on them (Beamon, 2008).

Third, this study seeks to examine the experiences of former student-athletes who entered the institution from 2003 to 2010 and excludes those student-athletes who are currently competing for their respective institutions. This was a caveat because the researcher wanted to understand the experience of those who had completed their degree and graduated from State University.

Last, while relevant, this study does not expand on the conversation about whether or not football student-athletes are employees of the university, nor does it seek to weigh in on the conversation of whether or not student-athletes should be compensated.

Limitations

Bryant (2004) defines limitations as "*built-in* limits of the method you use to explore your question" (p. 59). The main limitation of this study is that it focuses on a single institution that is located in the mid-western part of the United States. Because this study is limited to a single unit of analysis, according to Merriam (2009), the researcher cannot make generalizations about the larger populations based on the information contained in the study. This study was also limited by gender, exclusively focusing on Black males.

In addition, Merriam (2009) also notes that the qualitative case study approach is limited "by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator" (p. 52). Because the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, this creates a limitation on the study and the researcher is left to "rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of this research effort" (Merriam, 2009, p. 52) while being aware of biases that can influence the study. Despite the limitations of this study, Merriam (2009) does suggest that "sciences can be advanced by a single case" (p. 54), which was the goal of this study.

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Definition of Terms

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Predominately White Institution (PWI): describes institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Lomotey, 2010).

Revenue-Producing (or generating) Sports: (in most cases) football and men's basketball that produces a significant majority of an athletic departments' revenue.

14

National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA): refers to the governing body for intercollegiate athletics at the Division I, II, & III levels.

Graduation Success Rate (GSR): "GSR begins with the federal cohort, and adds transfer students, mid-year enrollees, and non-scholarship students (in specified cases) to the sample. Student-athletes who leave an institution while in good academic standing before exhausting athletics eligibility are removed from the cohort of their initial institution. This rate provides a more complete and accurate look at the actual student-athlete success by taking into account the full variety of participants in Division I athletics and tracking their academic outcomes" (NCAA, 2014).

Power Five Conferences: term used when referring to the Big Ten, Pacific 12 (PAC-12 formerly PAC-10), Big 12, Southeastern Conference (SEC), and Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) because they participate in the highest level of college football in the United States (and for basketball, includes the Big East Conference).

African American/Black: a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as Black or African American, or report entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian.

Public Ivy (or Ivies): term coined by Moll (1985) to denote public universities that provides Ivy League quality education at the cost of public school attendance. Greene and Greene (2001) expanded on this original list to include a total of 31 institutions.

Organization of Document

The remaining document was organized in the following manner: Chapter 2 presents the historical analysis and related literature regarding the academic success of student-athletes, with

15

a specific focus on African American male student-athletes. Chapter 3 contains an extensive explanation of the research methods conducted for this study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. In particular, this chapter attempts to extract themes to better understand the experience of student-athletes. Last, Chapter five presents the analysis of the findings, implications for research and practice, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter is organized into two main sections. The first section offers a review of scholarly work concerned with the history of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This sets the foundation to understand the system of intercollegiate athletics from a historical perspective and to examine the background and structure of the NCAA. This section details how the increase in commercialism of collegiate athletics and the pressure to win affects the recruitment and inclusion of Black student-athletes.

The second section situates the experiences of Black student-athletes under the lens of organizational theory literature. In broad terms, this section seeks to understand intercollegiate athletics and State University as complex systems that can impact how student-athletes experience college. This section describes and explains how different primary functions, sources of revenue, culture, and managerial activities can impact our understanding of athletics and the experiences of student-athletes. This section pays particular attention to Muwonge's (2012) organizational framework, built upon research from Scott (2003), Thompson (1967), and Parson (1960). In Chapter 2, this framework is introduced to describe intercollegiate athletics. In Chapter 3, this framework is re-introduced to further explore State University in the context of intercollegiate athletics.

History of the NCAA

One of the earliest known intercollegiate athletic competitions was a regatta held between Harvard and Yale in 1852 sponsored by Elkins Railroad Line. To gain a competitive advantage, Harvard's team acquired the help of a coxswain who was not a student at the university. This story underscores the fact that teams sought to gain an advantage over their competition from the

earliest inception of collegiate athletics, which spawned the creation of an organization to level the playing field (Smith, 2001).

In March 1906, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association (IAA) was founded with the primary purpose to reform intercollegiate athletics, specifically football (Smith, 2001). The issue of player safety was brought to national attention in 1905 when 18 football players died and 100 more suffered serious injuries as a result of their participation in football (McQuilkin, 2002; Smith, 2001). In response, President Theodore Roosevelt invited officials from the major football programs at the time to the White House to convene a special conference on player safety and to establish universal rules for the sport. Smith (2001) stated that this joint effort on part of the White House and university officials resulted in the creation of the IAA, with 62 original members. In 1910, the IAA officially changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA), with the primary function to formulate rules for various sports. Many of the issues the NCAA was grappling with during its early years included extreme pressure to win, the influence of commercialization of sports, and the need for universal rules and regulations to ensure player safety (Smith, 2001). Ironically, the NCAA still appears to be dealing with many of the same issues as they were during the early years of their inception.

Following World War II, access to higher education increased dramatically as a result of government support for returning servicemen, which propelled college athletics to unprecedented popularity (Smith, 2001). The increased interest in college athletics led to an increase in commercialism, especially football, and exacerbated the pressure for athletic departments to win (Davis, 1994). This increased pressure to win forced the NCAA to adopt several renditions of bylaws and provisions, such as the establishment of an enforcement committee to ensure that colleges and universities were complying with the adopted rules (Smith, 2001). In the early

1950s the NCAA negotiated its first contract worth an estimated $1 million, opening the door for more lucrative contracts, and clearly demonstrating the financial value of intercollegiate athletics (Smith, 2001).

In 1953, the *University of Denver v. Nemeth* ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court stated that football player Ernest Nemeth was entitled to workers' compensation for suffering football – r elated injuries. In response to this ruling, the NCAA created the term "student-athlete" (McCormick & McCormick, 2006), which was intended to characterize the relationship between the university and the athlete. By emphasizing the relationship between the athlete and the university as being a "student" first and then "athlete," member institutions could avoid being liable for paying workers compensation benefits (McCormick & McCormick, 2006). Ironically, around the same time, universities began fully endorsing athletic grant-in-aid scholarships (i.e., tuition and room & board) in order to recruit the best athletes for their athletic programs (McCormick & McCormick, 2006). Arguably, this could be considered a form of payment for athletic services. Although the purpose of this research is not to argue for the compensation of college athletes, nor does this research intend to establish that student-athletes are employees of the institution, it is important to understand the genesis of the term "student-athlete" and the importance of recruiting the best athletes for athletic programs from the earliest years of college sport governance. Student-athletes are purposefully not considered employees of the NCAA member institutions, yet they are still hailed as an important resource for college athletic programs largely due to the increased commercialism of intercollegiate athletics and importance placed on winning over time. This ultimately drives revenue for the department and increases the national exposure of the university.

Impact of Commercialism on Recruiting & Academics

According to Davis (1994), during the early 1900s, the few Black athletes that did compete for White institutions were funneled into sports such as track and field and to a lesser extent football, since these sports were viewed as "not involving the type of intimate physical contact required by basketball and swimming" (p. 632). The Big Ten Conference, as an example, allowed Black student-athletes to participate on its members' football teams but prohibited them from playing basketball until after World War II (Davis, 1994). Grundman (1986) notes that in the beginning, institutions that offered athletic scholarships to Black student-athletes did so on a selective basis and on "white terms" (p. 79), which means scholarships were only offered to Black student-athletes in specific sports the institution felt comfortable having Black players. Thus, the media gave the impression that this type of integration "would not jeopardize the mythic tradition of the scholar athlete" (p. 79). Unfortunately, their status as student-athletes did not spare them from the overt racism, institutional exclusion, and the institutional neglect they experienced (Davis, 1994).

The post-World War II era forced college athletic programs to search for talented athletes from previously untapped sources (Davis, 1994; Spivey, 1983). The war, combined with the increased commercialization and professionalization of collegiate athletics, drastically increased the number of Black student-athletes attending PWIs, even before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. The increased commercialization of football in particular provided Black student-athletes with greater access to these White institutions that previously prohibited their access. As a result of the increased commercialization of college athletics, athletic departments were now faced with more pressure to win and to "field winning teams" (Davis, 1994, p. 634). Davis (1994) also notes that after World War II, Black student-athletes

20

were now being funneled into the revenue-producing sports (p. 635). This passion to win amongst the institutions, fans, and students created an atmosphere that put aside blatant discriminatory practices to reap the economic benefits associated with the commercialism of college athletics.

Spivey (1983) notes that despite the drastic increase in Black student-athletes at PWIs, an overwhelming number of these student-athletes fail to earn a degree and only a minute amount of those athletes go on to earn a career in the professional leagues. Spivey and Jones (1974) found that at the University of Illinois, for example, 227 Black student-athletes received an athletic scholarship between 1931 through 1967. 75% of those student-athletes failed to graduate and only 14 were afforded the opportunity to play professional sports.

Comeaux (2007) discusses the current impact of the increased commercialization of college athletics by stating that "college athletics have become more commercialized with a greater urgency to produce winning seasons and secure corporate sponsors at the expense of the student-athlete's academic future" (p. 1). There is no doubt that the commercialism of college athletics has had a devastating effect on the student-athletes' academic pursuits. Gatmen (2011) sums this up by stating, "academic exploitation occurs when colleges focuses too heavily on athletics over academics, resulting in instances of academic underperformance" (p. 511). She goes on to state that while this affects numerous student-athletes, minority student-athletes are more susceptible because of their dependence on athletic scholarships to attend college.

Duderstadt (2000) agrees with this sentiment that prospective minority student-athletes are more susceptible to the allure of an athletic scholarship because the aid provides them with a means to attend a university they may not have otherwise been able to afford. Meanwhile, the participation of Black males in football and men's basketball generates enough revenue to

financially underwrite the sports overwhelmingly populated by middle and upper class White students. This creates a situation in which Black male student-athletes are performing the vast majority of the work and reaping minimal beneficial outcomes while the elite few enjoy the benefits associated with that work (Donnor, 2005).

Overrepresentation

Although a minority in the United States, Black men have become overrepresented among football players in the 'Power 5' conferences. Harper et al. (2013) found that Black males comprise 10% or less of the entire student population, yet they are significantly overrepresented in football and make up over half of the student-athletes on the team (Harper, 2006; Sellers, 2000). Because Black student-athletes are overrepresented in football and men's basketball, this perpetuates the belief that athletic achievement is one of the rare opportunities for success among Black youth (Harrison et al., 2002). What becomes abundantly clear to Black youth is "the over-representation of successful African American athletes in spite of the apparent limitations in other spheres" (Harrison et al., 2002, p. 129). Simply stated, successful African Americans are consistently portrayed as athletes, which diminishes their portrayal in non-athletic careers. Simiyu (2012) echoes this same notion that Black youth feel that "their chances of gaining respect and material success are dismal in any realm other than a few sports" (p. 43). Simiyu (2012) goes on to explain that Black youths are inspired by role models who are more than likely premier athletes, which shapes their interest towards sports such as football, men's basketball, and track and field. Therefore, this belief about Black athleticism and continued visual representation helps to reinforce the belief and importance of athletic success.

Black youth have placed a tremendous amount of importance on athletic achievement (Harrison et al., 2002), which influences how they are exploited by the intercollegiate and

professional athletic systems. Showcasing the overrepresentation of Black student-athletes in the

vast intercollegiate football arena fuels this belief that athletics is one of the few avenues to

college and professional success (Simiyu, 2012). Beamon (2008) suggests that exceptional

athletes are needed to "maintain team performance" and to produce revenue for institution,

which is why Black student-athletes must continue to participate in the revenue-generating sports

(p. 353). Overrepresentation of Black student-athletes helps to ensure the task environment,

which are environmental features that ensure a supply of resources (Scott, 2003), continues

without interruption, and allows Division I institutions to pillage the Black community for this

talent.

Supporting this claim of overrepresentation, according to the NCAA (2015), among the

Power Five conferences (i.e., ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, PAC-12, SEC), Black student-athletes

comprised the majority (48%) of the football teams during the last two academic years (2013/14

and 2014/15). Tables 1 and 2 clearly illustrate the total football student-athlete population for the

Power 5 conferences.

Table 1

Total # of Football Student-Athletes

2014-2015 Academic Yr.	Percentages	
White	3101	40%
Black	3675	48%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	25	0%
Asian	31	0%
Hispanic/Latino	182	2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	148	2%
Two or More Races	281	4%
Nonresident Alien	39	1%
Other	213	3%
Total	7695	100%

Table 2

Total # of Football Student-Athletes

2013-2014 Academic Yr.	Percentages	
White	3045	40%
Black	3604	48%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	36	0%
Asian	42	1%
Hispanic/Latino	173	2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	144	2%
Two or More Races	247	3%
Nonresident Alien	36	0%
Other	254	3%
Total	7581	100%

*National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2015). Sport Sponsorship, Participation and Demographics Search [Data file]. Retrieved from http://web1.ncaa.org/rgdSearch/exec/main

Going back to the 2012—13 academic year, Black student-athletes still comprised the majority of the football teams in the Big 5 conferences at 46%. The tables in Appendix A illustrate this pattern for the total number of football student-athletes over the past three academic years, broken down by conference and race. In contrast, Black males continued to be underrepresented when considering enrollment at PWIs (Sellers, 2000). As a comparison, Simiyu (2012) indicates that Blacks only constituted 10% of the total student body at Division I institutions, but represented the majority (46%) of football players.

Organizational Conceptual Framework

After having explored a brief history of the NCAA, the next step is to review organizational theory literature in order to better understand collegiate athletics. To begin this

exploration, it is helpful to review the three distinct views of organizations according to Scott (2003): rational systems, natural systems, and open systems. This section sets the context to later integrate these concepts when focusing on State University.

Rational, Natural, and Open Systems

The rational system perspective views organizations as "collectivities oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting relatively highly formalized social structures" (Scott, 2003, p. 27). Scott (2003) goes on to suggest that the rational system perspective views organizations as "instruments designed to attain specific goals" (Scott, 2003, p. 33). Actions of participants within the organization are purposeful, well organized, and their behavior is understood through clearly defined rules (Scott, 2003). However, this system perspective fails to account for the individuals that comprise the organization or the environment in which the organization is situated.

In contrast, the natural systems perspective introduces the human component to the organization, as Scott (2003) suggests:

Organizations are collectivities whose participants are pursuing multiple interests, both disparate and common, but who recognize the value of perpetuating the organization as an important resource. The informal structure of relations that develops among participants is more influential in guiding the behavior of participants than is the formal structure (p. 28).

Simply stated, the relationships among the participants and the informal structures that exist among most social groups are equivalent to the formal composition associated with the rational systems view. The natural systems perspective views organizations as individual people and as

collective relationships that are important to the organization but fails to consider the environment in which the organization is situated.

The last perspective to examine is the open system. In regards to open systems, Scott (2003) states, "Organizations are congeries of interdependent flows and activities linking shifting coalitions of participants embedded in wider material-resource and institutional environments" (p. 29). Simply stated, organizations can best be thought of as a collection of parts, with different functions, trying to achieve a specific task. Buckley (1967) notes that an open system does not merely engage with the environment, but that relationship between the organization and its environment are vital to the sustainability of the organization. Scott (2003) goes on to suggest that unlike the rational and natural perspective, which "overlooks the environment" or considers them "alien and hostile," the open systems perspective "stresses the reciprocal ties that bind and relate the organization with those elements and flows that surround and penetrate it" (p. 101). Therefore, this perspective considers the environment as a critical factor for the organization to consider rather than as a background element.

Combining the Systems Perspective

While organizations can embody all three types of perspectives, each approach does not apply equally (Thompson, 1967, 2003). Thompson (2003) argues, "each approach leads to some truth, but neither alone affords an adequate understanding of complex organizations" (p. 8). Therefore, Thompson (1967) adopted a set of distinctions from Parsons (1960) to differentiate between the three levels that comprise the systems perspective: technical, managerial, and institutional. Thompson (1967) suggests that these three perspectives can be suitable and applied at different levels of the organization. For example, the rational systems perspective can be applied to the technical level of the organization. The technical level deals with the core

function, or production, of the organization, essentially changing inputs into outputs (Thompson, 1967, 2003). The natural systems perspective can be applied to the managerial level of the organization because this part of the organization is essentially responsible for designing procedures, procuring resources, and allocating personnel to perform different functions (Scott, 2003; Thompson, 1967, 2003). Last, the open systems can be applied to the institutional level because this level is concerned with the organization and its larger environment, or social system, which determines its meaning or legitimacy and the boundaries of the organization (Scott, 2003; Thompson, 1967, 2003). It is also important to note here that the institutional environment also consists of both government and professional organizations (i.e., accrediting organizations) that have specific rules and regulations to which the organization must adhere in order to maintain its legitimacy (Scott, 2003). Therefore, Scott (2003) sought to combine the perspectives of Parsons (1960) and Thompson (1967) into one conceptual framework.

Muwonge (2012) and Shinn (2013) expanded upon the work of Parson (1960), Thompson (1967), and Scott (2003) to update the conceptual model of organizational rationality (see Figure 2). Muwonge (2012) pointed out a clear distinction between the institutional environments and the cultural environments, a distinction that had not been previously established. The cultural environment is concerned with constructing meaning or establishing the organization's right to exist. Organizations transmit culture to its members while engaging in specific tasks to ensure its survival. As a result, the people within the organization create norms, values, rules, and symbols to demonstrate how things are done that help people survive within the organization (Morgan, 1997).

Institutional
Environment

Task Environment

Cultural
Environment

MANAGERIAL

INSTITUTIONAL

TECHNICAL

CULTURAL
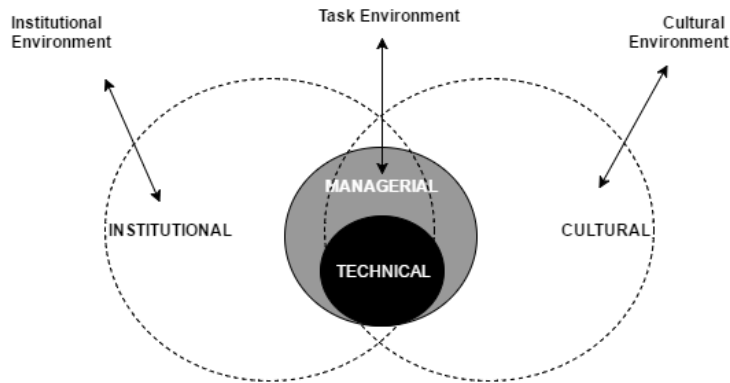
Figure 2. Levels of organizational activities.

Managerial activities. Thompson (2003) describes the managerial level as "mediating between the technical sub organization and those who use its products – the customers, pupils, and so on – and procuring the resources necessary for carrying out the technical functions" (p. 11). Simply stated, the managerial level spans the boundary between the technical core and the task environment in order to secure the necessary resources for the organization to produce outputs and gives it a reason to exist (Thompson, 2003). At State University, the managerial activities consist with administrative functions whose job is to secure the appropriate resources to change inputs into outputs (e.g. taking the talent of student-athletes and converting that into financial gain) thus creating the ability to exist. Such administrative units include athletic department, admissions, student recruiting, communications, and community outreach.

<center>**Organizational Framework Applied to Intercollegiate Athletics (NCAA)**</center>

Institutional Actor

Although intercollegiate athletics exists as a system, it is not isolated but acts as part of a larger, more complex system. Scott (2001) states that institutions are "social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience" and "are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts" (p. 48). This description of social systems is an appropriate prism to understand the institution of higher education. The important

aspect to consider is that intercollegiate athletics is situated within the higher education context. The NCAA is not an autonomous organization but is in fact an actor of the higher educational system. According to the NCAA (2016), the board of governors that oversees this organization consists of 20 members, 16 of which are voting members. The voting members consist of presidents or chancellors of its member institutions. Therefore, the NCAA is not an independent agent acting on its own. Scott (2001) elaborates on this idea by stating that "individual actors carry out practices that are simultaneously constrained and empowered by existing social structures" (p. 75). Subsequently, the actions of the NCAA are both constrained and empowered by the institution of higher education, which as previously mentioned, is a social system.

To better understand intercollegiate athletics, it is helpful to gain a better understanding of the goals and structure of this system. In the context of an organization, technology refers to "the work performed by an organization" (Scott, 2003, p. 230). Thompson (2004) suggests that, "one or more technologies constitute the core of all purposive organizations" (p. 19). In essence, the central mission or function of any organization is its technical core, or core function. As Scott (2001) suggests, "institutions come into existence because players perceive problems requiring new approaches. Participants are motivated by their discomfort in ongoing situations to devise or borrow new and different rules and models" (p. 109). The original inception of the NCAA closely mirrors this trend because the NCAA was motivated to devise new rules for the sport of football in order to minimize the risk of serious injury or death of college students (McQuilkin, 2002; Smith, 2001), which was its original core function. As the organization grew and developed because of the ongoing litigation around athlete health, the NCAA needed a defense mechanism to protect itself and member institutions. The NCAA created the term "student-athlete" in order to help its members avoid paying workers' compensation claims to athletes that

were injured as a result of their participation in playing football (McQuilkin, 2002; Smith, 2001).

Trying to protect its members through reinforcing the idea of amateurism became the other

primary function of the NCAA. It is clear from this historical perspective that from the earliest

beginnings, the NCAA was designed with the best interest of its member institutions and treated

the wellbeing of the student-athletes as a side effect. Therefore, the NCAA can best be

understood as an agent for its member institutions.

In addition, it must also be clearly understood that the NCAA as an organization is a

subsystem of higher education as a whole. Scott (2001) argues that every organization is a

subsystem of the larger social system, which legitimizes the organization and provides it with

meaning and higher-level support. This higher-level support comes from the member

institutions, which legitimize the NCAA. Yet, the core function has been convoluted by the

rhetoric of the NCAA and its member institutions. According to the NCAA, one of its central

purposes is "to initiate, stimulate and improve intercollegiate athletics programs for student-

athletes and to promote and develop educational leadership, physical fitness, athletics excellence

and athletics participation as a recreational pursuit" (NCAA, 2015, p. 1). This statement is

abstract and, unfortunately, does not remotely convey the mission of this organization but subtly

reinforces the organization's place embedded within higher education because that is the only

way its central purpose makes sense.

An examination of the financial reports reveals a troubling scenario. As the non-profit

commercial agent for the member institutions, 90% of the revenue generated by the NCAA

comes from television and marketing rights fees from the Men's Division I Basketball

Championship (also known as "March Madness"; Fulks, 2015). March Madness generates the

majority of revenue for the NCAA and can be seen as a major function of this organization.

However, as a commercial agent, the NCAA has the freedom to generate vast amounts of revenue to not only ensure the financial health of the organization itself, but also to distribute a portion of that revenue to the member institutions at its discretion.

According to the NCAA, the second purpose of the organization is "to uphold the principle of institutional control of, and responsibility for, all intercollegiate sports in conformity with the constitution and bylaws of this Association" (NCAA, 2015, p. 1). Simply stated, the second purpose of the NCAA is to create and enforce organizational bylaw for its members. The question then becomes, are the bylaws meant to benefit the student-athletes or the NCAA and its members?

The NCAA and its members operate under the guise of amateurism. This pretense is the basis for the third purpose of the organization: "to encourage its members to adopt eligibility rules to comply with satisfactory standards of scholarship, sportsmanship and amateurism" (NCAA, 2015, p. 1). Nonetheless, according to the NCAA, its fundamental purpose is rooted in education:

> The competitive athletics programs of member institutions are designed to be a vital part of the educational system. A basic purpose of this Association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athletes as an integral part of the student body and, by so doing, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports (NCAA, 2015, p. 1).

The NCAA goes on to state that

> Student-athletes shall be amateurs in an intercollegiate sport, and their participation should be motivated primarily by education and by the physical, mental and social benefits to be derived. Student participation in the intercollegiate athletics is an

avocation, and student-athletes should be protected from exploitation by professional and commercial enterprises (NCAA, 2015, p. 4).

These statements from the NCAA suggest that student-athletes' participation in their sports is merely part of the educational system; sports should not be the primary motivator to enter higher education. As will be demonstrated, these mission statements disregard Black student-athletes with blatant hypocrisy.

The fundamental issue is the inherent opposition between core functions. Since the NCAA is embedded within the higher educational system, this creates a dilemma of two competing academic and athlete functions. Each higher educational institution has its own core function (i.e., teaching, medical research) that defines the institution. However, athletics has a separate core function, which is to produce a particular or series of athletic competitions. These two functions are in competition with one another, especially as it relates to student-athletes.

Commercial Activities

According to Fulks (2015), the majority of the revenue generated by the athletic departments at each institution is predominately associated with football and to a lesser extent, with men's basketball. In contrast for the NCAA, this revenue comes from Men's Division I Basketball Championships. The revenue for athletic departments comes from ticket sales, conference distributions, donor/alumni support/contributions, and guarantees/options (Fulks, 2015). Football teams have the largest stadiums and generate significantly more revenue from the sources previously listed than all other sports combined. Subsequently, football generates the vast majority of all revenue needed for athletic departments to function (Donnor, 2005). Armed with this information, it is easy to conclude that the core function of Division I athletic

departments and specifically those situated within the Big 5 (or Power 5) conferences is to produce football games. Everything else becomes secondary.

It is important to keep in mind that just as the board of governors gives legitimacy and empowers the NCAA as an actor of the member institutions, so too does the NCAA provide authority to athletic departments of its members' institutions. The actions of the athletic departments are supported and constrained by the NCAA, which oversees the appropriate use of their legitimized authority. Scott (1987) states that a "distinct type of institutional mechanism involves the authorization or legitimation of the structural features or qualities of a local organization formed by a superordinate unit." (p. 502). Scott (1987) goes on to state the subordinate units "voluntarily seeks out the attention and approval of the authorizing agent" (p. 502). This is helpful when trying to understand the NCAA's relationship with the individual athletic departments. Dornbusch and Scott (1975) define authorization as "the process by which norms supporting the exercise of authority by a given agent are defined and enforced by a superordinate unit" (as cited in Scott, 1987, p. 502). Each athletic department is granted operations within the established rules of the NCAA and is considered a subordinate unit with the NCAA structure.

Commercial entertainment product. As student-athletes enter these systems, a common myth is that the academic counselors will ensure that the student-athletes are on track to graduate. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Former Kansas State associate athletic director for Student Services (and current University of Michigan assistant provost/academic success program director) stated during his tenure at Kansas State:

My job is to protect The Entertainment Product…My job is to make sure that The Entertainment Product goes to class. My job is to make sure that The Entertainment

Product studies. My job is to make sure The Entertainment Product makes adequate

academic progress according to NCAA guidelines (Yost, 2009, p. 13).

Here, the "Entertainment Product" is the student-athlete. Nowhere does he mention that his job is

to ensure that the "Entertainment Product" graduates from that institution. Even the NCAA's

academic eligibility requirements for football student-athletes are only designed to ensure that

the system remains intact while providing enough requirements to avoid public scrutiny. For

example, according to the NCAA, football student-athletes must be registered in 12 credit hours

but only need to pass nine to be eligible to compete in the post-season bowl game. In addition,

student-athletes must pass a minimum of 96 credits that count toward degree completion by the

start of their fifth year (NCAA, 2015). These academic requirements are only instituted to ensure

the eligibility of the student-athletes. Graduation, whether achieved or not, is simply a by-

product of the system, which may be a reason why the NCAA created its own graduation

statistical metric.

The current system of intercollegiate athletics creates a labor force built on the talents of

Black student-athletes, neglects their academic preparation and responsibilities, provides them

passive academic support, and creates a hostile campus environment that they must endure

(Comeaux, 2008; Hawkins, 1998; Melendez, 2008; Sellers, 1992; Simiyu, 2012; Simons,

Bosworth, Fujita & Jenson, 2007; Singer, 2005). The reason why the talents of Black student-

athletes are vital to the success of the intercollegiate athletics system is due to the fact that, as

Comeaux (2007) suggests, there is an increased pressure to win in order to secure corporate

sponsors. Because the NCAA, which represents this system of intercollegiate athletics, is a non-

profit organization, 90% of the revenue generated comes from television and marketing rights

fees (Fulks, 2015). This information demonstrates that the increased commercialism is

financially lucrative for the intercollegiate athletics system, which is again, built on the talents of Black student-athletes.

Task Environment of Collegiate Athletics

Now that the core functions and commercial activities have been established for both the NCAA and its member institutions specifically situated in the Power 5 conferences, which are generally similar among these institutions, the task environment must now be explored. The task environment "denotes those parts of the environment which are relevant or potentially relevant to goal setting and goal attainment" (Thompson, 2004, p. 27). Similarly, Scott (2003) states that the task environment "emphasizes those features of the environment relevant to its supply of inputs and its disposition of outputs" (p. 231). Therefore, the task environment establishes where the necessary resources originate in order to produce the outputs required for the organization. In this context, outputs generally refer to fielding winning teams in order to attract stadium spectators and media contracts. With this understanding, we can conclude that with regards to football, one of the key resources necessary for athletic departments is the athletic ability of Black male student-athletes. Historically, however, this has not always been the case.

Thompson (2004) suggests that the task environment has constraints and is dependent upon feasible alternatives. As previously mentioned, prior to World War II, Black student-athletes were scarcely allowed to compete in intercollegiate athletes at PWIs and were relegated to sports such as track and field (and to a lesser extent football). After World War II however, athletic departments began searching for talent in untapped sources to fill their rosters (Davis, 1994; Spivey, 1983). From the end of World War II to the present, the athletic talents of Black male student-athletes, specifically in football, became the resource and input that collegiate athletic departments needed. Currently, Black males comprise the majority of football rosters at

the Division I level and especially within the Power 5 conferences (Lanter & Hawkins, 2013).

This means that Black student-athletes, because of the need to field winning teams and produce

football games, have become the single most important resource for athletic departments

(Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005). This essentially creates a situation in which Black males have

become the labor force (and resource) on which the system of intercollegiate athletics is built.

With regards to the labor of Black student-athletes, Hawkins (1999) states:

> One way Black student athletes are exploited for their labor is because there is no place
>
> within Black communities where they can benefit from their athletic skills and talents,
>
> therefore, Black student athletes must contract their talents out to these institutions.
>
> Theses predominately White NCAA Division I institutions act as a monopoly where they
>
> are the only buyers of this service, except in rare cases where there is direct entry from
>
> high school into professional sports (p. 5).

Lanter and Hawkins (2013) found that in 2012, during the All State Bowl Championship

Series (BCS) National Championship game between Louisiana State University and Alabama,

Black males comprised 71% and 70% respectively (p. 87). This is one of the most popular and

revenue-generating games of the year and it is not an isolated case. The tables in Appendix A

illustrate that Black males have become an increasing population among the Big 5 conferences

over the last three academic years. Lanter and Hawkins (2013) furthermore found that of the 10

teams competing in the BCS Bowl games at the conclusion of the 2012 season, 55% of the

student-athletes were Black. Hawkins (1999) writes it best: "these institutions, in the case of

Black student athletes bear none of the cost of the reproduction of labor but they receive the

majority, if not all of, the profit of their labor" (p. 6). The talent of Black student-athletes is a

requirement and necessity to ensure the survival of the intercollegiate athletics system (Lanter &

Hawkins, 2013). These athletes are recruited to play, not ride the bench, and must be ready to play immediately once they enter college (Hawkins, 1999).

Because of the emphasis to recruit Black student-athletes for their athletic prowess, the academic preparedness and academic requirements of these student-athletes is often neglected (Beamon, 2008; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010; Simiyu, 2012). Student-athletes who are academically ill – prepared for college level academia gain acceptance to these institutions of higher education solely because of their athletic abilities (Comeaux, 2008; Simiyu, 2012; Sellers, 1992). This reality is problematic because student-athletes are the only group that must compete within both functions of the institution in which they are placed, regardless of their level of academic preparation. From the outset, academically underprepared student-athletes, regardless of caliber of athlete, are placed at an extreme disadvantage in the college environment. This disadvantage comes into play especially when these student-athletes have to compete on the field of play, while struggling to keep up with students who on average, are more prepared for college level academia.

As previously stated, supporters of collegiate athletics argue that providing athletic scholarships to these under-prepared Black student-athletes provides them with an opportunity to attend prestigious institutions (Beamon, 2008; Sellers, 2000). However, their academic preparation and requirements, in addition to maintaining eligibility status, becomes secondary to their athletic responsibilities (Simiyu, 2012), which is the essence of academic exploitation (Singer, 2005). The prevailing idea is that Black student-athletes are recruited and provided scholarships to play football and that is where their first priority lies (Lanter & Hawkins, 2013).

Institutional Rules

Operating under the guise of "amateurism," the NCAA has instituted superficial rules that are intended to restrict the amount of time student-athletes can participate in "official" sport-related activities. Scott (2003) states, "organizations performing the simplest and more routine tasks rely primarily on rules and performance programs to secure acceptable outcomes" (p. 234). Because the NCAA is embedded in higher education, these rules are an attempt to keep the student-athletes part of the general student body and ensure that an adequate amount of time is allotted for their academic pursuits. During the season, student-athletes are only allowed to participate in official sport-related activities for four hours per day, 20 hours per week and must have one day off (NCAA, 2015). However, according to the NCAA, the following are not considered athletic related activities:

1. Compliance meetings
2. Meetings with a coach initiated by the student-athlete
3. Study Hall (including tutoring and academic meetings)
4. Sport-related volunteer activities
5. Travel to and from the site of competition
6. Training room activities (including rehabilitation activities and medical examinations)
7. Training table meals
8. Fundraising activities or public relations activities

Comeaux and Harrison (2011) suggest that student-athletes often spend more than 40 hours weekly on their sport, which ensures that they have even less time for academic pursuits. This occurs while the student-athletes are trying to focus on their academic coursework (a minimum of 12 credit hours) during the semester. This system is more detrimental to Black football student-athletes because they are largely from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and are inadequately prepared for college level academia. Singer's (2008) study found that

It was common practice for the coaching staff to violate the NCAA's 20-hour rule, and it

was an unspoken rule that these athletes should ignore the NCAA's rule if they desired to

"get on the field" and earn playing time during the season (p. 405).

The fact that the NCAA mandates the 20-hour rule for student-athletes, yet considers

many of the aforementioned activities as unofficial, demonstrates what Thompson (2004) calls

the rules of the game in which organizations conform to a set of rules or "somehow negotiate a

revised set of rules" (p. 148). These revised rules allow coaches to encourage their student-

athletes to devote more time to sport – related activities in order for them to get playing time

(Singer, 2008). Establishing that specific activities are volunteer or unofficial helps coaches

guard against deviant behavior and discourages exercising discretion (Thompson, 2004), which

in turn "inhibits their ability to fully reap the benefits that are associated with being members of

the student body" (Singer, 2008, p. 406).

Bias and Stereotypes about Student-Athletes

The intercollegiate athletics organizational system also appears to create an environment

in which Black student-athletes are stereotyped, alienated, and isolated by the campus

community (e.g., faculty, staff, and students). Black student-athletes are perceived by the campus

community as a labor force who only tries to maintain eligibility while having no real academic

interest, which causes them to report feeling "mistrustful, isolated, and misunderstood in reaping

the full benefits of their educational opportunities" (Melendez, 2008, p. 442). For example,

Simons et al. (2007) found that faculty held negative perceptions of Black student-athletes and

would make open comments supporting these stereotypes and attitudes towards student-athletes.

In addition, it is not only the attitudes from faculty, but also attitudes from fellow students that

help to solidify the hostile campus environment. Simons et al., (2007) state that, "there is an

understandable resentment of athletes who are admitted with lower academic qualifications by non-athlete students who worked so hard to gain admission to the university" (p. 267). In such cases, Black student-athletes face a double stigma (i.e., being Black and an athlete), which portrays them as "inferior academically by the campus community" (Comeaux, 2008, p. 8). In the same manner, Harrison (2000) also suggests that preconceived notions, stereotypes, and stigmas about Black student-athletes propagate the plantation system in terms of the demographic imagery on college campuses (p. 37). As previous established, Black student-athletes now comprise the majority of players on football teams in the Power 5 conferences. Therefore, if you look at who is performing the work on the field, which is eerily similar to the southern plantations. This means that unlike their White counterparts, Black student-athletes are primarily concentrated in sports that generate revenue for the athletic department. Participation in the revenue sports causes more attention to be paid to the talent of Black student-athletes rather than nurturing their academic ability, which relegates them to the labor force driving the athletic department. Again, this entire picture has many similarities to the pre-civil war era plantation system to use Black talent for the financial benefit of PWI's, which are largely controlled by the White majority. Harrison (2000) also notes that Black student-athletes are concentrated in revenue sports and that they are absent from leadership. Furthermore, "the same system that promotes that 'opportunity' is endless for all, in particular African American male student-athletes – does not even graduate and/or hire individuals within the organization of sport" (p. 37). The opportunity maybe endless for some but that typically excludes Black male student-athletes.

Conclusion

This review of the literature indicates that Black student-athletes must contend with numerous challenges such as attempting to fulfill their academic and athletic responsibilities, while attending PWIs. As Duderstadt (2000) argues, it is evident that the purpose of the university and the purpose of athletics have become at odds with one another because of the increased commercialism of college athletics, particularly in football. Therefore, instead of truly being student-athletes, these students are more like athletes first, then students facing the demands of athletic commercialism and the immense pressure from coaches to win at all costs (Duderstadt, 2000).

As such, it can be argued that the system of intercollegiate athletics impacts Black male student-athletes in four distinct ways: (a) relegates Black males to being the labor force on which this system is situated; (b) creates a lack of emphasis on the academic preparation and academic persistence for these student-athletes; (c) showcases an over-representation of these student-athletes in order to maintain the system; and (d) fosters an environment in which Black student-athletes are stereotyped and isolated at PWIs by faculty and students alike. However, given apparent design and limitations of the system, there are still Black student-athletes who are able to manage these constraints and perform academically to graduate from their institutions (Hawkins, 2013). This concept is what this study seeks to explore. Chapter 3 explores the research methodology utilized for this study to tackle this research interest.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Research Tradition

The research tradition utilized for this study was framed through a constructivist paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) establish that a paradigm "represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (p. 107). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), when considering a paradigm to use for research, three questions must be answered. One of the questions that must be answered when considering different paradigms is the ontological question, "What is the form and nature of reality and therefore, what is there that can be known about it?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Constructivists answer this question by assuming that absolute realities do not exist and individuals experience the world from a different point of view, which creates multiple realities and every reality is unique (Hatch, 2002).

The constructivist paradigm best serves this study because it seeks to understand how individuals construct and interpret the world around them and how they give meaning to situations (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The next question constructivists must answer is the epistemological question. The epistemological question asks, "What is the nature of the relationships between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Constructivists answer this question by explaining that "knowledge is symbolically constructed and not objective" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Therefore, truth is different from person to person. Individuals create their own meanings and realities and their knowledge is based on those meanings and realities that become established over time.

The final question constructivists must answer is the methodological question, which describes acquiring information. Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that the methodological question

asks, "How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes is known?" (p. 108). Constructivists answer this question by establishing that researchers attempt to "reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). In order to accomplish this, researchers spend long periods of time conducting interviews with participants and observing them in their natural settings. Researchers use hermeneutic (or interpretative) principles to provide guidance in understanding how the participants made sense of their world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Table 3 illustrates the previously described information in a format that is easier to understand.

Table 3

Constructivist Paradigm

Ontology (Nature of reality)	Multiple realities are constructed
Epistemology (What can be known; relationship to knower and known)	Knowledge as a human construction; researcher and participant co-construct understandings
Methodology (How knowledge is gained)	Naturalistic qualitative methods
Products (Forms of knowledge produced)	Case studies, narratives, interpretations, reconstructions

Created from Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Researcher Subjectivity and Positionality

It is important to understand the researchers' positionality for this qualitative research. The researcher is the primary research instrument that serves to describe, analyze and interpret the data collected and make subjective judgments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2002). The researcher is a Black male and a former Power 5 track and field student-athlete who has competed at the highest levels of competition in the sport. In addition, the lead researcher is one

who has worked in intercollegiate athletics in a variety of capacities from assistant strength and conditioning coach to assistant academic counselor, and is currently an assistant director of student-athlete alumni relations at a Power 5 institution.

As the lead researcher, I currently work at a Power 5 institution. Due to the nature of my position and job duties, I have access to and have developed a rapport with former student-athletes and academic colleagues across campus that specifically work with football student-athletes for an extended period of time. This rapport provided me with unique access necessary to select potential participants for this study. These factors have the potential to cause biases in the research.

As a Black male and former track and field student-athlete, I used to believe that the football student-athletes were excessively spoiled. This perception was fueled by what I believed were additional benefits that other student-athletes were not privy to. For example, football student-athletes were provided dinner every night at training table, they were given meal cards that could be used at various restaurants on and off campus, some rarely seemed to be in class and still did well in the courses, and some were given extravagant gifts for participating in bowl games. As a track and field student-athlete, we had one of the oldest and most dangerous facilities to practice and compete in and were not provided with benefits or services comparable to those provided to the football team, like showers with warm water. Because of this unfair treatment, I had negative perceptions of student-athlete who were on the football team.

However, as I continued to learn more about collegiate athletics and became employed by the athletic department, this perspective began to shift. As an athletic department staff member, I am deeply concerned about the large number of Black student-athletes that play football and do not graduate. My position technically allows me to be an insider within the system of

intercollegiate athletics, but the goal of this study is to step away from these stated biases and assumptions to understand the experiences of these student-athletes as they lived it. In order to minimize the effects of the researcher bias, the following strategies outlined by (Merriam, 1998, 2009) were employed to enhance the validity of this study: triangulation, member checks, and peer examination. These strategies are discussed in greater detail in this chapter.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black football student-athletes who graduated from a Power 5 institution. The question guiding this research was: How did Black male football student-athletes manage to graduate while being part of a Division I team at a research-intensive institution? The guiding research question for this study dealt with trying to understand the experiences of the participants because not enough is known about how they managed the different facets of their campus experience. Therefore, this research was a qualitative study because it sought to understand how the selected participants constructed and made sense of the world around them (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research also seeks to understand how all parts work together to form the whole, from which learning and understanding can occur. Merriam (2009) states that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). The product for qualitative research is known as a thick description, which goes beyond the reporting of an event but probes to uncover a deeper meaning and understanding of situations, context, and motives (Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Last, a qualitative approach was used to explore the experiences of former Black student-athletes because qualitative research can create both practical and emancipatory knowledge that

allows researchers to gain invaluable insight into the realities of Black male student-athletes while providing information for areas of intervention. (Cooper, 2014, p. 13).

Case Study

The specific research method selected for this study represented a qualitative case study. Merriam (2009) writes that a case study can be a form of qualitative research and that case studies share characteristics with other types of research that fall into this category, such as, "the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive" (p. 39). Simply stated, this type of approach relies on data to generate new theories or methods of understanding a phenomenon. Merriam (2009) goes on to define a case study as an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). This idea of a bounded system is one of the most important characteristics for a case study and can best be described as an entity in which boundaries exist.

Yin (1984, 1994) understands that "a case study approach is the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 13). Since the guiding question for this research is a "how" question, the qualitative case study seems appropriate and in accordance with both Patton (2002) and Merriam (2009).

More specifically, the type of case study that was utilized is what Patton (2002) describes as a descriptive case study. A descriptive case study means that "the end product of a case study is a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 29) and that it lends itself toward the explanation of a phenomenon. Essentially, instead of reporting the findings, descriptive case studies have the advantage of hindsight that can be relevant in the

present, illustrate the complexities of a situation, and demonstrate the ability to analyze complex situations (Yin, 1984, 1994).

What differentiates a case study from other forms of qualitative research (e.g., ethnography, phenomenology, or narrative) is that a case study is defined not by the focus of study but by the unit of analysis (Merriam, 2009). For this qualitative case study, the unit of analysis was State University operating within the context of the intercollegiate athletics system.

The case study qualitative research approach is also necessary in this particular field. Singer (2005) expressed that there is a need for critical race qualitative research in the field of sports management because "it remains a powerful research tool for scholars to consider when conducting emancipatory research with people of color" (p. 474), and as Cooper (2014) writes, "to promote the voices of traditionally marginalized groups such as Black male student-athletes" (p. 2). For the reasons listed above, the qualitative case study approach was the research design selected for this study.

Participant Criteria

Purposeful, or criterion, sampling was utilized in selecting qualified participants for this study. This sampling method reviews and selects cases based on a predetermined set of criteria that must be met in order to be included in the study (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the target participant population for this study was African American male student-athletes who received an athletic scholarship, participated in football between 2003 and 2010, and graduated from State University. The timeframe was selected because beginning in 2003, the NCAA implemented the use of the academic progress rate (APR), to which all Division I institutions are held accountable. APR is a metric used exclusively by the NCAA to measure student-athlete retention for each academic term. Therefore, student-athletes during this time period had to contend with

both athletic and academic pressures to ensure their teams met the standard set by the NCAA to maintain post-season eligibility. In addition, participants all graduated from the institution. This study primarily focused on Black male student-athletes who received athletic scholarships to participate in football because it is the single, most significant revenue generating sport on campus. Student-athletes that received athletically – related financial support are the student-athletes who were recruited by coaches because of their athletic ability, potential to contribute to their team, and effort to maintain their athletic performance for their scholarships (Beamon, 2008).

Graduation was the key component in this study, yet the time for degree completion was only marginally significant. On average, the formers student-athlete participants graduated between three and half and four years. Participants selected for this study graduated from the Power 5 institution at the conclusion of their eligibility and college career. In the world of college athletics, it is not uncommon for student-athletes to complete their academic careers, graduate, and still have eligibility remaining. Many times, this is due to a "redshirt" year (and a litany of other exemptions) in which a student-athletes does not compete for an entire academic year but must maintain their academic course load. It is also not uncommon for student-athletes to complete their eligibility before completing their undergraduate degree. Therefore, student-athletes were selected for this study if they completed their undergraduate degree before or during the same year in which their athletic playing eligibility expired.

Last, in addition to the former football student-athletes studied, other participants included faculty and staff members (i.e., coaches, academic advisors, faculty, and academic counselors) that had or have consistent interactions with the football student-athletes, which included daily and/or weekly interactions. Because of their interactions with the student-athletes,

these faculty and staff members provided a wealth of information that served to shape the overall campus experiences of these student-athletes. The faculty and staff members have to had worked at the institution for period not less than three years, which gives them an opportunity to become familiar with the academic landscape present at State University.

Snowball Sampling

One of the challenges with criterion sampling is gaining access to cases that meet the specific criteria for a study like this because this population is closely guarded by institutional gatekeepers. The reason this population is so guarded is because of what the participants might disclose about the institution, themselves, or experiences they had while attending the university (Thompson, Petronio, & Braithwaite, 2012). Protection of the privacy for these individuals, is another reason this population tends to be extremely guarded (Thompson, Petronio, & Braithwaite, 2012). Considering this challenge, the use of snowball (or chain sampling) was utilized to select participants. This sample design relies on current participants to suggest or recommend other potential cases based on specific criteria, defined by the researcher, to be included in the study (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). This method operates on the assumption that participants have a previous relationship with other potential participant candidates who share similar characteristics. Essentially, Patton (2002) establishes that the process of snowball sampling "begins with asking well-situated people: 'Who knows a lot about__? Whom should I talk to?'" (p. 237).

Snowball sampling does have some other challenges to consider. One of those challenges is selection bias, the bias towards the inclusion of individuals with inter-relationships that can over emphasize social networks (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). To guard against this bias, the criteria previously set forth was the guide regarding potential cases that were included and those that

might be excluded. Additionally, not every potential case was interviewed for this study because it would nearly impossible to reach all the individuals that meet the participant criteria. Hence, the snowball method was used with the participants and department officials to ensure that selection biases were minimized.

Participant Selection

When determining the number of people to interview, both Patton (2002) and Merriam (2009) write that it depends on the nature of the inquiry. Merriam (2009) suggests that determining an adequate number of participants needed depends on the question proposed. However, both Patton (2002) and Merriam (2009) write that once the research has reached the point of saturation (i.e., no more new information is forthcoming and similar stories begin recurring), an adequate number of participants has been reached. Nonetheless, Patton (2002) recommends specifying a minimum number of participants given the nature of the study to be included. The reason is because qualitative research is designed to gather in-depth, rich information from participants that might otherwise be gathered quantitatively. Therefore, after considering this information, the researcher decided to interview a minimum of five participants keeping in mind that the point of saturation was the determining factor of how many participants would ultimately be included in this study. The goal of the interviews was to ensure that there was a sufficient amount of data captured to establish a thick description of the experiences of the participants and this was an important factor in considering a minimum number of participants to interview.

After all eight former student-athlete interviews were transcribed, replayed for accuracy, and sent back to the participants to verify their comments, each transcription was reviewed in significant detail. Although there was some variety in terms of family and high school

background of the student-athletes, it quickly became obvious that each had very similar experiences within the institutional environment. The researcher observed a consistent pattern across each interview as the participants recounted their experiences. Interviews were more alike than they were different and saturation was achieved. By the time the eighth interview occurred, no additional information was being uncovered that the previous seven interviews did not already address. The reason why the researcher continued interviewing participants when the saturation point was close to being achieved is because Patton (2002) recommends to sample until the point of redundancy. This was important because the researcher wanted to explore the experiences of participants that came from a variety of different household backgrounds including low-income (largely single – parent) households and middleclass (two-parent) households, to verify that the point of redundancy had in fact been achieved.

Of the eight former student-athletes that were initially interviewed, five were selected as part of this study because these five former student-athlete participants provided what Patton (2002) describes as information – rich cases in which a thorough analysis can be performed. The researcher determined that the other three did not provide the in-depth and detailed information as the five participants selected for this study.

Unit of Analysis

The Power 5 Conference institution that serves as the unit of analysis (referred to from here on as State University or SU to protect the identity of the institution) has a student population of over 30,000 students (both graduate and undergraduate). State University is considered one of the premier research universities in the world and has a nationally-recognized college football program.

Study Protocol

The researcher began the study by scheduling interviews with the associate athletic

director and the football academic counselor. These interviews informed the researcher of other

faculty and staff members that currently have or had consistent (i.e. daily and weekly)

interactions with Black football student-athletes and whose experiences could add value to this

study. The researcher subsequently emailed three of the suggested faculty members, all position

coaches on the football team, and seven staff members. Two faculty members, one position

coach, one former academic advisor, and one assistant athletic director agreed to be interviewed.

Football coaches were chosen to participate in this study because they spend a significant amount

of time with the student-athletes and have a direct impact on their experiences at college.

Similarly, faculty and staff members were selected to be participants because each interacts with

the student-athletes in a different realm (e.g., academic or athletic) and each has either a direct or

indirect impact on how the student-athletes interact with and interpret their campus experiences.

In total, seven faculty and staff members were selected and agreed to be participants in this

study. Table 4 provides an overview of the faculty/staff members that were interviewed as part of

this study.

Table 4

Faculty & Staff Information

Position	Unit	# of Years working with Football S-A	Job Function
Faculty/Former Board in Control of Athletics	Campus	20+	Lecturer & Faculty Liaison
Academic Counselor	Athletics	7+	Coordinating Academic Support for S-A
Academic Advisor	Campus (Former)	10+	Class Scheduling & Major Selection
Associate Athletics Director	Athletics	15+	Mental Health/Performance Counseling
Assistant Athletics Director/Career Director	Athletics	15+	S-A Career Counseling
Faculty Member	Campus	14+	Lecturer
Football Position Coach	Athletics	3+	Position Coach

Each of these interviews occurred in person at a location of the participants' discretion and lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the intent of the study, that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, and given the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions. Before the interview, each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form, which each did without any concern. It was important to interview the faculty/staff members before the former student-athletes because the faculty/staff interviews illuminated several topics that shaped the questions tailored for the former student-athletes. This decision was made because the student-athletes do not live in an isolated environment within the higher educational context and faculty/staff members are essential to that context. Therefore, faculty/staff members play a critical role in shaping the experiences student-athletes have on campus and serve as a critical source of information about their perception of the student-athlete experience. Faculty/staff members have a tremendous amount of influence on the student-athletes dealing with everything from scheduling of courses to classroom interactions and academic performance. Because this study sought to explore the experiences of Black football

student-athletes, specifically within the institutional environment, it only made sense to interview members of the institution that had an impact on the experiences of the student-athletes.

Only after all the faculty and staff member interviews were completed did the researcher begin contacting and scheduling former student-athlete interviews. Due to the nature of the researchers' job duties, he had access to the entire database of former football student-athletes. The researcher created a list of all former football student-athletes that met the participant criteria and solicited recommendations from the faculty and staff members. These recommendations were based on who the faculty and staff members believed met the specified participant criteria previously laid out. Recommendations were also based on trying to acquire a participants that originated from different states and had different areas of study. Upon receiving these recommendations, the researcher sent introductory emails to ten potential candidates. Of the ten former student-athletes who were initially contacted, only two responded and agreed to be participants in the study. These two participants recommended several other potential candidates. After vetting the potential participants to ensure the selection criteria was met, introductory emails were sent to these candidates. In total, the researcher was able to schedule eight former student-athlete interviews. Of the eight interviews, four were conducted face-to-face and four were conducted over the phone when face-to-face interviews were not possible.

Similarly, prior to each interview, participants were informed about the purpose and procedure of the study and given an opportunity to ask clarifying questions before being asked to sign an informed consent agreement. In the case of phone interviews, the informed consent agreement was sent at least five days before the interview and discussed immediately prior to the beginning of each interview. Each participant promptly signed and returned the form (via email if applicable). All interviews were taped with the permission of the participant using an iPhone

and an additional recording device for back-up purposes. At the conclusion of the former student-athlete interviews, each participant was immediately asked to complete a demographic survey. This happened at the end of the interview so as to not bias any of the participant responses. When possible, participants utilized the assistance of a laptop computer to complete the demographic survey. Finally, notes were kept in a notebook during all interviews and observations. The field notes allowed the researcher to refer back to information when completing the data analysis following the conclusion of each interview and observation session.

Interviews

For this study, the primary source of data was collected through what Merriam (2009) and Patton (2002) describe as unstructured/informal interviews. This interview strategy was selected because the researcher did not know enough about the phenomenon and therefore the goal was to learn from each preceding interview to formulate questions for the next interview (Merriam, 2009). In a similar logic, Patton (2002) states, "each new interview builds on those already done, expanding information that was picked up previously, moving in new directions, and seeking elucidation and elaborations from various participants" (p. 342). Merriam (2009) goes on to suggest that this type of interview strategy allows flexibility with regards to the different interviews being conducted and is well suited for case studies because case studies lend itself towards an explanation of a phenomenon. However, there are some weaknesses with regards to this style of interviewing, namely the amount of ambiguity with the type of information acquired. Patton (2002) writes, "data obtained from informal conversation interviews can be difficult to pull together and analyze" (p. 343). To mitigate the concern of participants receiving different sets of questions, Merriam (2009) suggests combining this kind of interview style with others to ensure that some standard information is captured. Therefore,

based on the initial interviews from faculty and staff members, the researcher created an interview guide to follow up with participants about themes or experiences mentioned to ensure that at least some similar questions have been asked and topics explored.

In order to reduce the influence, the researcher could have potentially had on the participants for this study, it was crucial to closely examine and review the interview questions. Patton (2002) recommends against asking "why" questions because these questions "can imply that a person's response was somehow inappropriate. 'Why did you do that?' may sound like a doubt that an action (or feeling) was justified" (p. 365). Instead, Patton (2002) suggests using "tell me more" questions as a method to probe and get to a deeper level of meaning from the participant. These techniques were utilized throughout the interviews to uncover a deeper level of meaning from the participants.

To ensure the quality of the participant responses, iterative questioning was also utilized. This line of questioning can best be described when the researcher revisits previously discussed experiences detailed by the participants and "extracts related data through rephrased questions" (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). This strategy was a preventative measure to uncover lies or fabrications that could compromise the integrity of this study. In the case in which untruths were detected, the researcher did discard the questionable data (Shenton, 2004). The reason this method was critical to the data collection process is as Pyett (2003) states, "it is not enough to accept everything the participants say without subjecting it to more detailed examination of the circumstances, structure, and constraints that have contributed to the formation of their worldviews" (p. 1173).

As previously mentioned, each interview (both for the faculty/staff and former student-athletes) was transcribed. The researcher completed two transcriptions and the remaining transcriptions were outsourced to a transcription service. The researcher did receive confirmation

via email that the information contained in the transcription would remain confidential and were later deleted once the transcriptions were completed to the researchers' satisfaction. To ensure accuracy of the transcription, the interviews were replayed and examined along with the transcription to fill in missing gaps and correct the language contained in the transcriptions. Last, participants were not privy to potential questions prior to the interview so as not to bias their responses in any way. The researcher did not want to bias the participant in any way and did not want the participants preparing answers that they believed the researcher wanted to hear. Therefore, the topic and nature of the interview was discussed with the participants but the actual interview questions were withheld until the actual interview.

Document Review

In addition to the interviews conducted and demographic questionnaire, field notes and information from the media guides were also utilized. These media guides are created by the athletic departments and capture a variety of information about student-athletes that might otherwise be inaccessible. Media guides are archived by athletic departments, which made them an abundant source of data. Such information included hometown, high school attended, major, academic awards, athletic statistics from previous years, major, and intended graduation year. The majority of this information was helpful in building a complete case since understanding high school academic backgrounds ensured the validity of the information provided by participants.

Observations

Observations were another source of data collection for this study. Because the intended participants for this research have already graduated from State University, it would not have been feasible to observe them during their tenure at State University. Therefore, the researcher

determined that the most effective way to observe a group of student-athletes outside of the athletic realm was during their "study table" hours. The researcher was able to observe current football student-athletes during their meetings with academic counselors before, during, and after their "study table" hours. "Study table" is a location in which student-athletes are required to complete assignments, receive tutoring, and schedule academic appointments. Each sport and class has a different set of criteria for study table but for football, study table is usually more stringent. In addition to the hours football student-athletes are required to attend study table, each must also check-in with the academic counselor regarding their current work load and upcoming assignments, which is not required for the other sports. The researcher was permitted to sit in on these meetings to observe the student-athletes, academic counselors, and the interactions between the two groups. However, in order to attend these meetings, the researcher agreed to not reveal any academic or personal information about the student-athletes or disclose any information the researcher overheard while performing the observations. In addition, the researcher was not privy to the academic records of the current student-athletes. Over the course of six weeks, the researcher sat in on academic meetings and attended study table for three days each week for approximately two and a half hours each time. Even though the participants being studied were not actually observed in this instance, these observations were vital to understanding influences and experiences that may not be addressed in the literature. Patton (2002) writes that there are five major strengths that direct observation presents in qualitative research:

> (a) allows the researcher to better understand and capture the context in which the interactions take place, (b) allows the researcher to be open to discovery because being on-site reduces the need to rely on preconceived notions, (c) provides the researcher with

the opportunity to see things that people in the setting are not always aware of, (d) provides the researcher with a chance to learn about things people are unwilling to discuss; and (e) allows the researcher to use their personal knowledge during the data analysis and interpretation stage (p. 262-264).

Data Analysis

After the data was compiled, completing a detailed analysis was the next and more crucial step for this research. Inductive analysis is a component in qualitative research and occurs simultaneously with the data collection, which is the preferred way to analyze data (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Therefore, the data analysis appropriate for this study was constant comparison analysis. Merriam's (2009) standpoint is that all qualitative data analysis is inductive and comparative and subsequently draws heavily from the constant comparative method originally developed by Glaser and Strauss as a method for developing grounded theory. Merriam (2009) states, "the constant comparative method of data analysis is inductive and comparative and so has been widely used throughout qualitative research without building grounded theory" (p. 175). Merriam (2009) also writes, "Findings can be in the form of organized descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data or in the form of models and theories that explain the data" (p. 176).

Data Coding

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) the inductive analysis method has five significant characteristics: (a) builds theory, (b) provides tools for researchers to analyze data, (c) aids researchers in understanding multiple meanings from their data, (d) provides researchers with a systematic process for analyzing data, and (e) allows researchers to identify, create, and see relationships among parts of the data when constructing a theme. Based on this series of

59

prescriptions, the researcher utilized the tools and processes to analyze the data. Following this step, the researcher highlighted various themes and created connections among the parts to build a framework. Moreover, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) establish that there are three main stages of constant comparison analysis.

> The first stage is open coding…during this stage the analyst is participating in coding the data, wherein the analyst chunks the data into smaller segments, and then attaches a descriptor, or 'code,' for each segment. The next stage, axial coding, is when the researcher groups the codes into similar categories. The final stage is called selective coding, which is the process of integrating and refining the theory (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 594).

Constant comparison analysis can be used along with talk, observations, drawings, photographs/video, and documents (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012, p. 13) and is an analysis technique that can be used with single rounds of interviews (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Leech and Onwuegbuzie's (2008) description of the constant comparison analysis technique mirrors the description provided by Merriam (2009) and was the analytic technique for this particular study. After each interview was transcribed and validated by the participants, each transcription followed these procedures.

In particular, data coding followed the procedure outline by Merriam (2009), whereas each segment of data in the transcription and documents was assigned a code and brief notes. After initial codes and comments were assigned to each segment of data, codes were grouped into categories, which Merriam (2009) describes as "axial" or "analytical" coding (p. 180). This process of coding was completed for each source of data and as the process of coding was underway, the information helped to inform the researcher about topics to explore with other

participants. Essentially, each participant helped to build a stronger foundation from the one before. The above data analytic and coding techniques were used to perform a thorough analysis for this study.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the primary research instrument for data collection and interpretation is the researcher (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Pyett, 2003), which causes concerns with validity and reliability. Qualitative researchers have debated over the use of credibility and validity, which are most often associated with quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Because qualitative researchers concentrate on discovering truth, credibility and reliability have been replaced with trustworthiness because as Johnson (1997) suggests, it can be defended and creates a level of assurance in the findings (Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To mitigate those concerns, a series of methods were used to strengthen the study. To minimize the risk of the researcher's previous experiences influencing the study, Patton (2002) suggests that the researcher should "report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (p. 566). Similarly, Merriam (2009) writes, "rather than trying to eliminate these biases or 'subjectivities,' it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (p. 15). In accordance with this, the researcher's bias was identified in the first chapter. However, methods to increase trustworthiness and reduce the influence of the researchers' previous biases, the research design utilized triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, bracketing, and the search for the negative case.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to using multiple sources of data in a study that are able to test for consistency (Patton, 2002). Triangulation was achieved through the use of the interview data, analysis of media guides, interviewer notes, and analysis of the completed participant demographic questionnaires. Patton (2002) describes this as a triangulation of sources, which serves to compare and crosscheck the consistency of information as data is being collected. Triangulation of sources also refers to the idea of comparing perspectives of people with various points of view. Taking this into account along with the former student-athlete interviews, the faculty and staff interviews provided a comparative perspective. Theory triangulation also utilizes "multiple perspectives or theories to interpret data… to understand how differing assumptions and premises affect findings and interpretations" (Patton, 2002, p. 562). These forms of triangulation were used to establish the credibility of the study.

Peer Debriefing

As previously mentioned, debriefing sessions were vital to minimizing researcher biases during this study. Peer debriefing essentially involves the use of impartial peers or colleagues to provide critical feedback for a study. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher acquired the assistance of peers to examine questions and review findings and supporting documentation in order to uncover any potential flaws, biases, or other shortcomings of this research that might detract from the credibility of this study. In addition to peers, the researcher's committee chairs also served as expert debriefers who helped ensure that appropriate questions were being asked to help uncover the experiences of the former student-athletes.

Member Checks

Glesne (2006) refers to member checks (or respondent validation by Merriam, 2009) as the sharing of interview transcripts, analysis, or drafts with the interview participants to ensure that their ideas are fairly and adequately represented. This was a vital component to ensure the overall credibility of the study and to minimize researcher bias. After each interview was conducted and transcribed, participants received a draft of their answers from the interview. The participants were allowed to clarify any remarks they felt did not adequately represent their ideas. Of all the faculty, staff, and former student-athlete interviews, only one faculty made any edits and the edits made were simply grammatical changes. The former student-athletes did not submit or request any changes to the interview transcripts.

Bracketing

In qualitative research, there is no uniform definition of bracketing. However, Tufford and Newman (2010) establish that bracketing "is comprised of a multilayered process that is meant to access various levels of consciousness" (p. 84). Bracketing is the process of self-discovery and setting preconceptions in abeyance during the research and analysis to minimize the risk of researcher biases influencing the analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2010). These authors also point out that there are several methods of bracketing that can be utilized during research and for the purposes of this study, the following methods were used: memo writing throughout the duration of the data collection process and reflexive journaling before, during, and after the data collection process. Journaling helped to ascertain the reflexive stance of the research and ensured that previous experiences or notions were held in check (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Negative case

Negative cases are those instances or cases that do not fit within the pattern or trend that has been identified in other cases (Patton, 2002). These negative cases are exceptions to the rule and should be sought after during the data collection process. If negative cases are found, Patton (2002) suggests that conclusions take into account the negative or deviant cases and explore alternative explanations. Therefore, negative cases were sought out during the data collection process and explored to learn what factors contributed to student-athlete graduation.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers must pay close attention to ethical considerations when performing research so as to protect participants from harm and to respect the request of confidentiality from the participants (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 51). In order to ground this study in an appropriate ethical framework, Patton's (2002) Ethical Issues Checklist was utilized. The checklist ensured that this research was conducted using these ethical considerations in order to reduce potential harm to the participants.

Since the unit of analysis was an organization where I am employed, I respected the request of the participants by not disclosing their names or the institution. This was respectful to all participants since the institution currently employs some of the faculty and staff members and the former student-athletes still have a significant amount of notoriety on campus. For this kind of research, I needed to provide details about the participants and the institution. In doing so, I acknowledge that someone may be able to identify the institution or the participants through the details I provided. This information was disclosed to each of the participants on the informed consent agreement that each signed and was reiterated at the conclusion of each interview. Each participant was given a copy of the informed consent agreement to keep, as it has my contact

64

information along with the contact information for the chair of my dissertation committee. In addition, the interview transcripts were provided to each participant and they were given the option to edit or remove items they did not want to be used in the study (Merriam, 2009). Participants' names were not used and each had the right to stop the interview at any time.

In accordance with Patton (2002), the participants had the right to know the aim of my research and it was important not to mislead them. Interviews were conducted with some individuals who I already knew either from my time as a student-athlete or in my role as an employee at the institution. It was important for me to be clear about my motivations for conducting this research as I continue to have working relationships with many of the participants included in this study. Therefore, I had a responsibility to ensure that these working relationships were not negatively affected or ruined by their participation in this study.

I anticipated that there was a minimal amount of risks for the participants in the study. I was required to submit a proposal for this study to Eastern Michigan University's Institutional Research Board (IRB; see Appendix B). The IRB agreed that this study poses minimal risk and was instructed to inform the participants that I would make every attempt at anonymity but that it could not be guaranteed. The informed consent agreement notified the participants that they could stop the interview at any time with no repercussions and could notify my dissertation committee chair with any concerns.

Theoretical Framework to Guide Study

The theoretical framework that guided this study was created by Parson (1960) and adapted by Thompson (1967) and Scott (2003). This framework sought to combine the rational, natural, and open systems because each approach lends itself to some truth of the organization but is inadequate by itself. Muwonge (2012) and Shinn (2013) further expanded on this work,

which highlighted a difference between the institution and the cultural environment and added the managerial activities to this model. This framework is represented in Figure 2.
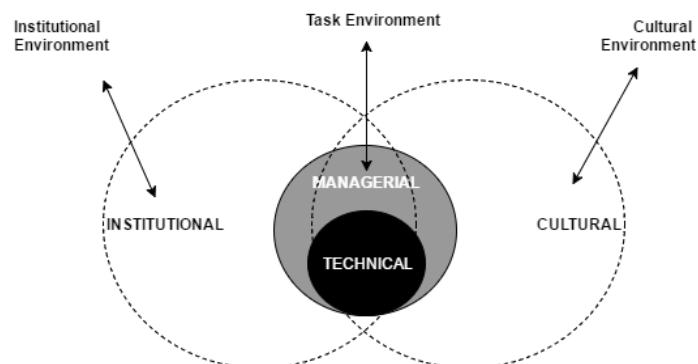
Figure 2. Levels of organizational activities

Organizational Framework for State University

Now that the foundation of organizational theory and activities has been used to explain the system of intercollegiate athletics, the next logical step is to explain State University and the football team that the student-athletes must navigate using this organizational framework. The application of this framework breaks down the complex nature of organizations, which explains the levels and functions of the organization and those that participate within it. State University is a complex organization but this framework is critical to understanding how it works and the multiple environments that have an impact on the organization. Because the following discussion elaborates on the organizational theory related to both the academic and athletic entities in which the student-athlete must navigate, it is helpful to visually understand that environment. Figure 3 illustrates the two different environments that the student-athletes must navigate within the institutional context. There are core functions related to the academic entities that are different from the athletic entities. The same goes for the managerial, institutional and cultural environments, all of which will be explored in more detail in the following section.
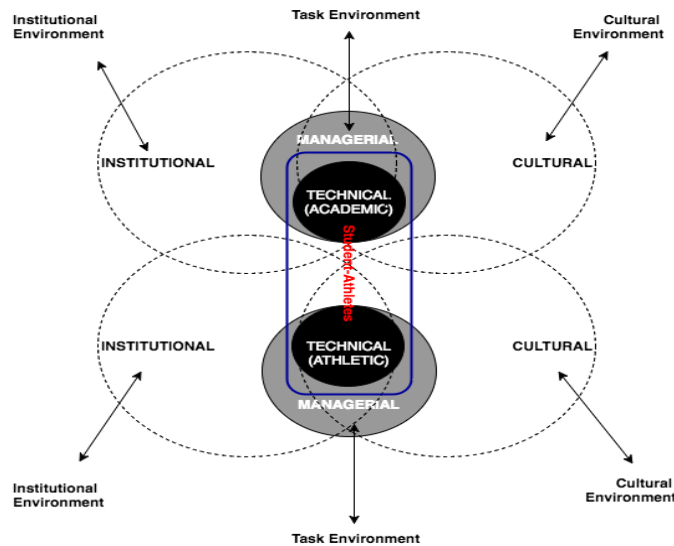
Figure 3. Levels of organizational activities (combined with conflicting technical cores)

Technical Core

The technical core of the organization essentially refers to what the organization actually does or produces. Scott (2003) states that technology in the context of an organization "refers to the work performed by an organization" (p. 230). Thompson (2004) suggests that, "one or more technologies constitute the core of all purposive organizations" (p. 19). In essence, the central mission or function of any organization is its technical core, or core function. The technical core can best be understood as the transformation of raw materials to produce the organizations primary function or objective (i.e. inputs into outputs) (Scott, 2003; Thompson, 2004). As Scott (2001) suggests, "institutions come into existence because players perceive problems requiring new approaches. Participants are motivated by their discomfort in ongoing situations to devise or borrow new and different rules and models" (p. 109). With this understanding in mind, the following discussion of the technical core is explored from both the academic and athletic (specifically football – related) perspectives housed within State University.

An effective method to understand the core technology (or production function) of any organization is to examine how the organization generates its revenue, which constitutes the task

environment (i.e. this is where the resources come from) that is elaborated on in the next section. The financial information can inform a researcher as to how revenue is generated and sustains the organization. Utilizing the information provided by State University, the core technology is to produce graduate students. It is worth noting here that State University's Health System generates approximately $3 billion annually and is certainly a core function for State University. However, outside of the health system, State University receives over $1 billion in federal, non-federal, and government-sponsored grants. Graduate student research serves as the foundation as to why State University continuously receives this level of grant support. It can be inferred that producing graduate students that engage in research is the main priority for State University.

Although the technical core of the athletic department at State University is to produce athletic competitions, the technical core of the football team is simply to produce football games. The reason the production of football games is the technical core for State University's athletic department is because 87% of the revenue is generated from football ticket sales. This means that in order for the athletic department to be viable, it must continue to produce football games in order to sell tickets.

Task (or Resource) Environment

Dill (1958) notes that the task environment, sometimes referred to as the resource environment, is broadly defined as aspects of the environment that are "potentially relevant to goal setting and goal attainment" (p. 410). The concept of task environment can be better understood as the aspect of the environment in which resources (e.g., financial, personnel, suppliers, and competitors) originate. As previously mentioned, for the academic area at State University, federal, non-federal, and government-sponsored grants denote a significant task

environment for the university. The other significant source that provides the necessary financial resources is student tuition, which generates just over $1.6 billion for State University.

With regards to the athletic department as stated above, spectator admissions (e.g., ticket sales for football) constitute the vast majority of the necessary resources for the athletic department. However, there are other major sources of financial resources that constitute the task environment. Beyond spectator admissions, contributions from the negotiated television revenue, conference and NCAA distributions, and licensing constitute the most significant aspects of the task environment, specifically pertaining to the athletic department. It is important to note here that these revenue streams are not equally distributed amongst the other sports but primarily come from football.

Students constitute the task environment. Financial resources are but one aspect of the task environment. Another component that must be explored is where the students are primarily located. Conventional wisdom would suggest that since the discussion is on students that attend State University, the students should be relatively similar and there would be no need to examine the students based on the athletic or academic side of the university. Unfortunately, as is discussed further, this is not the case.

Approximately 57% of all students that attend State University are from the mid-western state in which the university is located (Appendix D). Of the 57%, 77% of those students are from four counties in the state. In addition, 14% of these students are from foreign countries and 75% of students from foreign countries come from an Asian country (Appendix D). However, the student statistics do indicate that State University is largely dependent upon students from specific areas of the home state, which keeps the university functioning. According to the information provided by State University, over 63% of students come from family backgrounds

that make at least $100,000 annually (Appendix D). The academic background of these students is also worth mentioning. The average GPA of a freshman admitted to State University is 3.8, the average ACT score is 30 and the average SAT score is 2190 (Appendix D). For the sake of comparison, the highest possible ACT score is 36 and 2400 for the SAT. This information demonstrates the kind of socioeconomic and academic backgrounds of the average student that attends State University.

Similarly, between 35% and 45% of students that comprise the roster of the football team at State University on any given year are from the home state of the institution (Document 4). Unlike the students that comprise the general student population however, large numbers of football student-athletes are not from clustered areas but rather from areas across the state. In addition to the student-athletes from the home state, the remaining student-athletes are from across the country from various states and districts with no distinct pipeline pattern. Furthermore, unlike the vast majority of the students whose family incomes exceeds $100,000 annually, the football student-athletes come from socioeconomic backgrounds that are much more diverse. There are some football student-athletes with upper to upper-middle class backgrounds but the vast majority of football student-athletes range from the poor working class to middle class backgrounds. Last, unlike the general students, the average GPA for incoming football student-athlete freshman is approximately 2.8 with ACT scores generally 10 points lower than their non-athlete student counterparts.

Competitors of the task environment. State University competitors also deserve a mention here. Because we are examining two different core functions housed within State University, exploring the different competitors is appropriate. Focusing on the academic side first, there are many other large industries and university competitors located within 100 miles of

State University. Therefore, not only does State University have to compete with university competitors located nearby, it also has to compete with other state and national universities to attract qualified faculty members. The faculty members can attract the graduate students and together they compete for state, federal, non-federal, and government-sponsored grants, which is a critical source of university funding outside of the health system. However, competition among universities is only one aspect of the competition that State University must manage. The university must also compete with the local industry of the state, which is the automotive industry and also seeks the best-qualified staff members.

Insofar as athletics is concerned, the athletic department and specifically the football team compete with other universities locally and nationally. Not only must State University compete on the football field against other teams in the state and in the conference, the university must also compete nationally for the most talented football student-athletes to fill their rosters. There are 128 Division I football programs nationwide and State University must constantly compete with them in terms of recruiting prospective student-athletes. Competition for the most talented football student-athletes is not the only competition that State University engages in. The university must also compete with other universities and the National Football League (NFL) for qualified coaches to lead the football programs. Competition amongst institutions for coaches is in many cases as fierce as the competition for talented football student-athletes. These are the competitive football specific contexts in which State University has to compete.

<center>**Institutional Environment**</center>

Academic Institutional Environment

As with the open systems perspective, the institutional environment can best be thought of as the external environment that provides legitimacy to the organization (Scott, 2003). To put

this idea into practical terms, State University does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it performs activities that align with the various environments in which the university exists. For example, in order to be considered an elite research-intensive institution, State University must perform the necessary activities to receive accreditation from specific agencies. There are several accrediting agencies in which State University must comply with in order to maintain its accreditation. This is important to the university because without these accreditations, State University would lose its classification as an elite research-intensive university, which could have dire consequences on its ability to exist. In particular, it is the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) that provides State University with the necessary accreditation to demonstrate to the public the quality of their infrastructure that supports academic programs and other activities. Compliance with this agency is critical for providing SU with the legitimacy it needs to exist.

Along with some professional accrediting agencies, State University must also comply with federal and state regulations. Compliance with the federal and state agencies ensures that State University fulfills the necessary requirements to be considered a university while maintaining its tax-exempt status. More importantly, maintaining compliance with federal and state agencies is vital to ensure that the financial resources from grants continue to keep flowing into the university.

Black student-athletes at predominately White institutions. After previously examining the experiences of Black students who attend PWIs, it should come as no surprise that Black male student-athletes face similar on-campus challenges in addition to the added pressures of their sport participation. During their time on campus, Black male student-athletes in one study reported feeling unfairly judged by classmates, White teammates, and coaches (Melendez, 2008). In addition, Black male student-athletes, especially those in the revenue – producing

sports, indicated that they experienced double standards and value differences, separation, stigma from faculty and classmates, and unwritten rules placed on Black male student-athletes. Melendez (2008) also found that the White student-athlete counterparts did not experience the same racial stigmas and often received more favorable treatment from the campus at large compared to the Black student-athletes. These experiences, along with the emphasis on athletic participation rather than academic achievement and career development, led these student-athletes to feel as though they had been taken advantage of (Beamon, 2008).

In addition to the racial prejudices faced by Black males on campus, Singer (2006) found that Black male student-athletes must contend with a lack of leadership opportunities within their teams and being treated differently than their White counterparts. Singer's study found that Black student-athletes are often shut out from certain positions that are perceived as leadership positions (e.g., quarterback). Along with the lack of leadership positions, Singer also found that Black student-athletes experienced differential treatment between themselves and their White counterparts from coaches. One of the key experiences was class scheduling in which the Black student-athletes tended to be placed in classes that could be potentially hazardous to their progress towards graduation. Along with these factors that contribute to creating a hostile and unwelcoming environment for Black male student-athletes, Coakley (2009) also asserts that there are other contributing factors that include racial and athletic stereotypes of the campus community, spending too much time on athletic – related activities, failure of campus to capture the imagination of Black student-athletes, lack of appeal for Black student-athletes, uncomfortable White students relating to Black student-athletes, and a perception that Black student-athletes are privileged because of the resources provided.

Furthermore, similar to how the relationship between faculty members and Black students contribute to feelings of alienation and isolation on the part of the student, so too can the relationship between faculty members and Black male student-athletes lead to similar experiences. An article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that Black student-athletes often feel that professors may think the athletes are there simply to play a sport without any intention to learn, are not taken seriously by professors, receive lack of interest from the professors, and are the subjects of nasty or subtle racial comments made by professors (Perlmutter, 2003). Comeaux (2007) found that there is a stigma associated with Black male student-athletes as academically inferior by not only faculty, but the campus community as well. Experiences such as these can hinder the integration of Black student-athletes into the campus community and consequently, they want to spend as little time with faculty members as possible (roughly 89% of faculty are White at these institutions; Comeaux, 2007).

Cooper and Dougherty (2015) performed a cross sectional analysis of Black student-athlete and non-Black student-athletes' experiences at both a Division I historically Black college/university (HBCU) and predominately White institution (PWI). This analysis was situated in the post-BCS era, with the inception of the college football playoff beginning in 2014 and marking the end of Bowl Championship Series era. An analysis of the 533 Division I student-athletes revealed that race continues to play a significant role in the quality of the student-athletes' educational experience. More importantly, Black student-athletes at PWIs "reported less positive relationships, lower levels of engagement, and lower levels of satisfaction compared to non-Black student-athlete peers at the same institution" (Cooper & Dougherty, 2014, p. 91). Another major finding was that student-athletes from various racial groups had similar educational goals, which reinforces Sellers's (1992) study, which found that both Black

and White student-athletes valued the significance of obtaining a college degree. As previously mentioned, this research was limited in that the participants consisted of only male student-athletes (thus excluding female student-athletes) and only included football, which is the central revenue-producing sport. However, the last key finding suggested that student-athletes that represent racial minorities at PWI's may feel marginalized and socially isolated and less likely to engage in various on-campus activities, which can affect their overall experiences.

Academic preparation of Black student-athletes. Black student-athletes in particular tend to matriculate from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and are less academically prepared for college academia compared to their White counterparts (Sellers, 1992). Comeaux's (2008) findings supports this, as he found that the environment that Black student-athletes typically come from have inferior academic resources to adequately prepare the student-athletes for college academia. This information is critical because the previous research on academic success of student-athletes has found that a key predictor of academic success among student-athletes is largely dependent on their high school GPAs (Astin, 1993; Ervin, Saunders, Gillis, & Hogrebe, 1985; Lang, Dunham, & Alpert, 1988; Sellers, 1992; Young & Sowa, 1992). Student-athletes from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have lower GPAs than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Sellers, 1992). Therefore, if high school GPA is the single most consistent and important factor for predicting academic success among student-athletes, it should come as no surprise that Black male student-athletes have the lowest graduation rates among any student group or subgroup on campus.

There are two schools of thought that explain why this population of students has not performed well academically and why they are continuously graduating at lower rates compared to all other groups on campus. Benson (2000) notes that one school of thought is that poor

academic performance is primarily the fault of the students in question because they are deficient in some aspect and, as Ogbu (2004) suggests, that academic achievement can be perceived as "acting White" (p. 2). This perspective is commonly known as the deficit model or deficit perspective, which asserts that minority groups do not perform as well as their White counterparts in school and in life because their cultural environment is perceived to be dysfunctional and lacking important characteristics (Salkind, 2008). Ogbu (2004 further suggests that Black students do not aspire to or strive to get good grades because it can be perceived by members of that community as acting White and thus, turning against their community.

However, the counter narrative suggests that the poor academic performances of Black male student-athletes is not solely attributed to their lack of ability or actions but is also the result of trying to navigate the different technical cores of the athletic and academic environments (Benson, 2000). In addition to contending with the organizational culture at a PWI and the accompanying hostility, African American male student-athletes also reported being treated differently in a variety of ways. For example, Benson (2000) notes that these student-athletes often experience little control over their academic planning, are sometimes placed into classes that can potentially have adverse effects towards overall degree completion (Singer, 2006), and are advised to focus less on school and academic related activities as compared to time spent on sport – related activities (Czopp, 2010). These narratives showcase that this group of student-athletes faces a variety of barriers when it comes to academic achievement. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of student-athletes, examining the experiences of Black students at a PWI is a pivotal starting point.

Athletic Institutional Environment

However, unlike the institutional environment that exists for the academic side of the university, there exists an altogether different institutional environment for the athletic world of the university. While State University seeks legitimacy from accrediting agencies like the HLC and from federal and state agencies that ensure their grant money, the athletic department (specifically football) receives it legitimacy from the NCAA and the Power 5 Conference. The NCAA institutes and enforces bylaws that govern how football programs must conduct their activities, ranging from recruitment of student-athletes to the allotted practice time per week in-season. If any of these bylaws are violated, State University's athletic department could face a variety of penalties that include fines and loss of scholarships. The conference that State University belongs to has also created additional rules and regulations for its members. Compliance with these rules and regulations in particular ensures that the athletic department continues to receive the appropriate conference distributions allocated for them.

Cultural Environment

Muwonge (2012) discovered that the cultural environment is often combined with the institutional environment in the literature but they are not necessarily the same and in many cases these two environments contradict one another. In particular, Smircich (1985) says,

> The term 'culture' describes an attribute or quality internal to a group. We refer to an organizational culture or subculture. In this sense culture is a possession – a fairly stable set of taken-for-granted assumptions, shared beliefs, meanings, and values that form a kind of backdrop for action (p. 58).

Scott (2003) takes this understanding a step further by establishing that "culture may be employed either as an external variable that may infuse the organization…or as an internal

variable that characterizes the values or style of a particular organization" (p. 319). In this context, the cultural environment establishes the organization's right to exist. The cultural environment deserves a more extensive examination because it encompasses a variety of different components, each of which must be explored in order to create a better understanding of the entire cultural environment.

Academic Cultural Environment

Each technical core has a different culture built around that task (Scott, 2003). To better understand the culture of the academic side of SU, it is helpful to consider the core function along with the culture of the students involved with this core technology. As previously mentioned, because the core technology of the academic units is to produce graduate students (e.g., professionals, doctors, engineers, and lawyers), SU looks to attract specific kinds of students. The majority of these students bring with them a culture of those from upper-middle class backgrounds with them to the university setting. In most cases, the parents of these students have at least a bachelor's degree and many have graduate degrees. In addition, the vast majority of these students are White and from suburban backgrounds. The SU environment consequently resembles a cultural environment in which many are accustomed to. In addition, according to SU, 78% of the faculty and staff are White and many live in the surrounding communities, which continue to reinforce a specific culture at SU. Therefore, high academic achievement can be considered a significant cultural component at SU.

Culture relating to African Americans. Because African American football student-athletes constitute the majority of roster positions for football programs in the Power 5 conferences, it is therefore important to gain a better understanding of the overall culture of this population. In order to do this effectively, the socioeconomic status (SES), employment,

78

education, and criminal justice system are key areas worth exploration. This information will help begin to showcase the different cultural components that have an impact on African Americans nationwide.

Black Americans represent approximately 12% of the entire U.S. population and that number is not likely to change significantly by 2050 (Harris, 2010). However, becoming upwardly mobile and achieving socioeconomic parity will continue to be extremely challenging for Black Americans. Harris (2010) also writes that only 31% of Black middle class children have greater family earnings than their parents compared to 68% of their White counterparts, and that only 20% of White families have an income of $33,864 or less while more than 40% of Black families are below this income level. Unfortunately, this disadvantage continues across different measures of economic wellbeing. Black Americans 25 years old and over "have higher unemployment rates (4.3 and 8.9 for White and Black males respectively) and longer durations of unemployment than their White counterparts (an average of 12.1 weeks compared to 8.8 weeks)" (Harris, 2010, p. 245). Racial disparities are also felt when considering promotions. Smith (2005) found that Black men must work longer periods of time after leaving school than their White counterparts to earn similar promotions.

The socioeconomic status of Black Americans also has a direct effect on the education that their children receive. The National Center of Education Statistics (2010) found that Black children are more likely to attend high poverty schools than their Asian and White counterparts. In addition, Assam (2008) found that high – achieving Black students may be exposed to less rigorous curriculums, attend schools with fewer resources, and have teachers that expect less out of them academically compared to their White counterparts. Harris (2010) also found that "by age 17 the average Black student is four years behind the average White student; Black 12th

graders score lower than White 8th graders in United States (U.S.) history and geography" (p. 247). Unfortunately, these trends continue throughout college. Harper (2006) found that nationwide, 67.6% of Black men who start college do not graduate within six years, which is the lowest completion rate of any group and between both sexes. Yet, if a Black American does graduate from college, Jones and Schmitt (2014) found that in 2013, 12.4% of Black college graduates between the ages of 22 and 27 were unemployed and for all college graduates the rate was 5.6%. Jones and Schmitt (2014) also found that in 2013, 55.9% of employed Black recent college graduates were "underemployed" (pp. 5-6). Therefore, if Black Americans defy the odds against them and graduate from college, they will face multiple challenges with regards to finding adequate work and increasing their opportunity for social mobility.

Any conversation about the current status of African Americans would be incomplete without exploring the effects that the criminal justice system has on the lives of these citizens nationwide. A 2013 report from The Sentencing Project found that although Black Americans comprise approximately 12% of the United States population, in 2011 Black Americans constituted 30% of people arrested for a property offense and 38% of people arrested for a violent offense. In addition, Black males are six times more likely to be incarcerated than White males and if current trends continue, one in three Black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime. This report also notes that the common adjectives associated with Black Americans are "dangerous," "aggressive," "violent," and "criminal" (The Sentencing Project, 2013, p. 4). These characterizations and "subconscious racial associations influence the way officers perform their jobs" (The Sentencing Project, 2013, p. 4). Kutateladze, Tymas, and Crowley (2014) report the racial inequalities of legal penalization:

(1) Black and Latinos charged with misdemeanor person offenses or misdemeanor drug offenses were more likely to be detained at arraignment and (2) Blacks and Latinos charged with drug offenses were more likely to receive more punitive plea offers and custodial sentences (p. 3).

Butler (2012) also states that prosecutors "coerce guilty pleas by threatening defendants with vastly disproportionate punishment if they go to trial" (p. 2184).

Last, according to Carson (2013), "non-Hispanic Blacks (37%) comprised the largest portion of male inmates under state or federal jurisdiction in 2013" (p. 1). The information presented clearly demonstrates that Black Americans face major racial disparities at every level of the criminal justice system from arrests to incarceration rates, not to mention the socioeconomic and educational factors that create significant challenges that Black Americans must overcome daily in order to survive in the United States.

Athletic Cultural Environment

To reiterate, the technical core of the athletic side at SU and, in particular the football team, is to produce football games. The vast majority of the student-athletes that comprise the football team are from culturally dissimilar backgrounds as compared to the general student population. There are always exceptions but the majority of the football team comes from poor working class to middle class backgrounds, which also shape the culture they bring with them to SU. With regards to the athletic administrative unit (and more specifically of the football team), the culture of State University is rooted in a tradition of athletic success and of winning championships. There are powerful myths and symbols that the football team in particular hold sacred and use to reinforce their cultural environment. The tradition of athletic success gives

SU's football team the right to exist. Table 5 summarizes the aspects of the organizational

environment present at State University.

Table 5

Organizational Environment Summary (Athletics & Academics)

	Academics	Athletics (Football)
Technical Core	Produce Graduate Students	Produce Football Games
Task/Resource Environment	Grants	Spectator Tickets & Conference Media Contracts
Task/Resource Environment (Students)	Predominantly White	Predominantly Black
Cultural Environment (Meaning Construction)	57% of students come from in-state; average family income greater than $100K	Larger percentage of student-athletes are from mid-west; much more variability in home state & SES
Institutional Environment	Federal Agencies; State Agencies; Higher Learning Commission (HLC)	NCAA; Power 5 Conference
Managerial Activities	Housed within the university	Housed within the Athletic Department

Graduation Rates

Since there exists no consistent method to study graduation rates of student-athletes and

compare them against other sports and against the general student body, it is not surprising that

the data is contradictory. For example, when examining the 10-year graduation rates of students

compared to student-athletes, Ferris, Finster, and McDonald (2004) found that during this period,

scholarship student-athletes graduated at a rate of 57.7%, while the general student body

graduated at a rate of 58.8%. The mean scores of these samples were almost identical with the

student-athlete mean graduation rate of 56.7% and the mean score of non student-athlete students

at 56.6%. Ferris et al. (2004) also found that institutions with more selective admissions policies

graduate both students and student-athletes at higher rates compared to institutions with less

stringent admissions policies and that student-athletes graduate at lower rates compared to their

non-athlete student cohorts. This information appears to contradict the notion from the NCAA that student-athletes graduate at a higher rate, although nominal, compared to their non student-athlete counterparts (NCAA, 2014).

The discrepancy in graduation statistics is worth further examination. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the graduation rate data categorizes students who transfer from one institution to another to complete their degree and students who leave the institution prior to completing their degree as non completers (or dropouts) in these rates (NCAA, 2014; NCES, 2015). In order to mitigate the limitations of the federal student graduation rates, the NCAA created what is known as the graduation success rate (GSR). The NCAA states:

> GSR begins with the federal cohort, and adds transfer students, mid-year enrollees, and non-scholarship students (in specified cases) to the sample. Student-athletes who leave an institution while in good academic standing before exhausting athletics eligibility are removed from the cohort of their initial institution. This rate provides a more complete and accurate look at actual student-athlete success by taking into account the full variety of participants in Division I athletics and tracking their academic outcomes (NCAA, 2014).

The GSR also includes those student-athletes who did transfer to another institution and graduated as part of their calculations. In addition, student-athletes who depart from their institution in poor academic standing are counted as non-graduated for both the federal graduation rate (FGR) and the NCAA's graduation success rate. Examining both the GSR and FGR metrics, for student cohorts entering classes of 2007 and 2008, African American males were the lowest graduating student-athlete group on campus. More specifically, those African

American males who compete in football are among the lowest graduating student-athlete group; only men's basketball is at this rate or lower. Table 6 breaks down the major student-athlete groups and sports for the 2008 cohort and compares both the GSR (created by the NCAA) and the FGR.

Table 6

Comparing Graduation Success Rates vs. Federal Graduation Rates (2008 Cohort)

Student-Athlete Group	2008 (Cohort) GSR (%)	2008 (Cohort) FGR (%)
Men's Basketball	77	47
White Men's Basketball	90	57
African American Men's Basketball	72	41
Football (FBS)	75	61
White Football (FBS)	84	71
African American Football (FBS)	69	56
Women's Basketball	89	62
White Women's Basketball	95	68
African American Women's Basketball	84	58

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2014). *Trends in graduation success rates and federal graduation rates at NCAA Division I institutions*. NCAA.

According to the NCAA (2015), even though African American student-athletes have made significant gains over the past 13 years, they still remain the lowest graduating group of student-athletes on campus, regardless of what statistical measure is being used. Table 7 further illustrates this point by showcasing both the GSR and the FGR for broader student-athlete groups. Appendix C showcases the graduation rates across the Power 5 conferences for Black males and compares those numbers to the student body population.

Table 7

Comparing Graduation Success Rates vs. Federal Graduation Rates

Student-Athlete Group	2008 (Cohort) GSR (%)	2008 (Cohort) FGR (%)
Overall	86	67
White	90	71
African American	73	56
White Males	85	65
African American Males	69	53
White Females	94	77
African American Females	83	63

National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2014). *Trends in graduation success rates and federal graduation rates at NCAA Division I institutions*. NCAA.

There are significant limitations of the GSR and how it is used by the NCAA. According to Nagel, Sexton, and Waring (2015), because of the different methodologies and variables used to calculate the two distinct graduation rates, there is currently no comparable graduation metric for the general student body. Therefore, "the GSR and FGR measure are not comparable" (Nagel et al., 2015, p. 3). In addition, NCAA graduation rates also intend to compare student-athlete graduation rates with that of the general student body. This ideology assumes that the student body pertains to full-time students. However, Nagel et al. (2015) found that there are a significant number of part-time students that are included in the general student population. This is a major issue because, per the NCAA bylaws, student-athletes must be considered full-time students and part-time students generally take longer to graduate, which skews the graduation data (Nagel et al., 2015). Lumping part-time students into specific student-athlete requirements further skews data collection methods and analysis.

In response to this, Nagel et al., (2015) used a formula developed by Eckard (2010) to create the adjusted graduation gap (AGG). To address the bias presented by considering part-time students in the graduation rate comparison between student-athletes and the general student

body, the AGG utilizes "regression-based adjustments for the percentage of part-time students enrolled," to account "for the aggregate influence of school-specific factors such as location and student demographics" (Nagel et al., 2015, p. 3). Using the AGG, Nagel et al., (2015) found that among the Big 5 conferences for the sport of football, Black student-athletes were on average 19.4 percentage points behind their White counterparts (Black AGG= -25.2, White AGG= -6.1). This information continues to demonstrate that the gap between Black and White AGG still remains relatively large.

Harper et al., (2013) found that across four cohorts from 2007 to 2010, Black male student-athletes graduated from their institution within a six-year period at a rate of 50.2%, compared to 66.9% for student-athletes overall, and 72.8% for undergraduates overall. This study also appears to reinforce Ferris et al.'s (2004) earlier assertion that more selective institutions, specifically private schools, tend to graduate students and student-athletes at higher rates compared to public institutions and those with less stringent admissions policies. Harper et al. (2013) also found that of the top 10 institutions within the Power Five conferences, Pennsylvania State University was the only public institution listed. The other nine are private institutions: Northwestern University, University of Notre Dame, Villanova University, Vanderbilt University, Duke University, Wake Forest University, Georgetown University, Boston College, and Stanford University. Last, this study found that only 22 institutions had graduation rates equal to or higher than Black male non student-athletes. The data used for this study came from both the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the NCAA Federal Graduation Rates Database, which encompasses the same limitations as previously described regarding transfer students and those who leave the institution

early. Nonetheless, Black male student-athletes, especially those that play football, are consistently among the lowest graduating student group on the college campus.

To help provide more context about the current status of Black football student-athletes, a study recently released from the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport affiliated with the University of Central Florida found that all 80 bowl-bound institutions for 2015 reported GSRs of 50% or higher for their White football student-athletes, while 10 institutions reported GSRs for Black football student-athletes of 50% of lower (Lapchick, Baker, Quirarte, Sanchez & Toppin-Herbert, 2015). In addition, 18% of institutions had GSRs for Black football student-athletes that were at least 30 percentage points lower than their White counterparts and 44% of institutions had GSRs for Black football student-athletes that were at least 20 percentage points lower than their White counterparts (Lapchick et al., 2015). This means that of the institutions that participated in a bowl game at the conclusion of the 2015 regular season, 62% of institutions had GSRs for their Black student-athletes that were at least 20 or 30 percentage points lower than their White counterparts (Lapchick et al., 2015).

The graduation of students remains a key output for both the academic and athletic entities of the university, despite their different core functions as previously outlined ((e.g., production of graduate students is the core function of the academic side and production of football games is the core function of the athletic side). Scott (2003) establishes that the technology of the organization is the type of work that is done to transform inputs into outputs. For clarity sake, inputs can best be described as the talent of the Black student-athletes, in this particular context. Thompson (2004) writes that organizational rationality involves acquiring inputs and "dispensing outputs which again are outside the scope of the core technology" (p. 19). Simply stated, even though the outputs are technically outside the scope of the core technology,

they are nevertheless a critical component for the organization's survival. For example, in order to produce graduate students and continue receiving applications from students that have superior academic backgrounds, the academic side of the university must graduate their students. Although the core function of the athletic side of the university is to produce games, this will not be possible if the university does not graduate their students. This is due to the fact that the NCAA, which is the governing and commercial entity of the intercollegiate athletics system, will impose severe punishments for those member athletic departments who do not demonstrate success in graduating their students (NCAA, 2015). The punishments along with the potential for increased media scrutiny can have negative consequences for the athletic department to produce quality football games. Therefore, the different graduation rates (i.e., FGR and GSR) were established to align with the specific core function of the unit in question, whether that is the academic or athletic entities. Depending on which graduation rates one examines, it is apparent that the university and the athletic department are indeed successful at graduating their student-athletes (or changing their inputs into outputs). Again, this depends on which metric is being used to examine a specific core function.

Therefore, after examining the graduation rates at schools within the Power 5 conferences, it makes sense to situate this study in a Power 5 institution. The institution to be studied has one of the nation's premier football programs with the Black student-athletes graduating at lower rates than their White counterparts. Understanding the experiences of these former student-athletes that impact their graduation could be a benchmark for other peer Big 5 institutions. According to the data presented, these institutions all face similar challenges regarding the graduation rates of their Black student-athletes, specifically those who play football. Consequently, it makes sense to situate this study at an institution where there is a

tremendous amount of pressure to perform athletically, coupled with the course requirements of an institution known for its rigorous academic reputation.

Summary of Organizational Concepts for State University

The combined frameworks of Parsons (1960), Thompson (1967, 2003), Scott (2003) and Muwonge (2012) provide a logical method for understanding organizational theory concepts. These frameworks expanded upon the previous schools of thought for understanding organizations (e.g., rational, natural, and open) and combined them with the addition of the cultural environment that provides a clearer picture of how organizations function. As this framework was used to better understand State University, the issue is that there appears to be two distinct technical cores, or core functions, that exist between the academic and athletic aspects of the university. With the two core functions come different tasks, institutional environments, and cultural environments. These cores could operate independently from one another and it appears that student-athletes are the only group of students expected to navigate between the conflicting core functions. Figure 3 depicts this relationship, as the student-athletes must balance both of the core functions along with the different environments that constitute each technical core.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

According to the NCAA (2015), Black men comprise the majority of players on Division I football teams. Nevertheless, as a group they are the least likely to graduate from college. Harper et al. (2013) found that Black student-athletes have the lowest graduation rate amongst all students, all student-athletes, and their White teammates. On the other hand, there are Black football student-athletes that do graduate from their institutions and the aim of this study was to expand our understanding of the experiences of those Black football student-athletes. The central research question that guided this study was: How did Black male football student-athletes manage to graduate while being part of a Division I team at a research-intensive institution? This research was guided by the constructivist tradition, which suggests that there are no absolute realities and that individuals construct their own realities to interpret their world (Hatch, 2002). In addition, the case study approach was the qualitative method utilized for this study, as described by Merriam (2009). The unit of analysis for this case study is State University operating within the context of the intercollegiate athletics system. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black football student-athletes who graduated from a Power 5 institution. Data were collected from individual interviews (with 5 former student-athletes and 7 faculty and staff members), document collection (e.g., alumni profiles, media guides, student-athlete questionnaires), and observations. Through inductive analysis, codes and themes were refined while collecting data (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The constant comparison method was utilized for data analysis and open and axial coding methods were used as described by Merriam (2009).

Stemming from the findings in this study, the researcher developed a conceptual framework to provide additional insight into the experiences of Black male football student-

athletes at State University. Eisenhardt (1989) and Baxter and Jack (2008) both established that qualitative case study research could lead to the development of theoretical frameworks that further enhance our understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, Figure 4 depicts this conceptual model, which is introduced throughout the following sections incorporating findings and relying on data analysis to better understand the experiences of Black male football student-athletes at State University. The model is divided into five phases: Pre-College, Early College, Transition, Late College, and Post College. Each stage represents five distinct but intrinsically connected phases that capture the experiences of the former student-athletes in this study. To facilitate the presentation of the findings from this qualitative study, the model is presented early to provide a snapshot of the entire experience of the five former student-athletes interviewed. Following qualitative research methods, pertinent themes that emerged from data analysis that contributed to the creation of this model are presented and summarized in detail with rich participant accounts across each of the identified five phases.
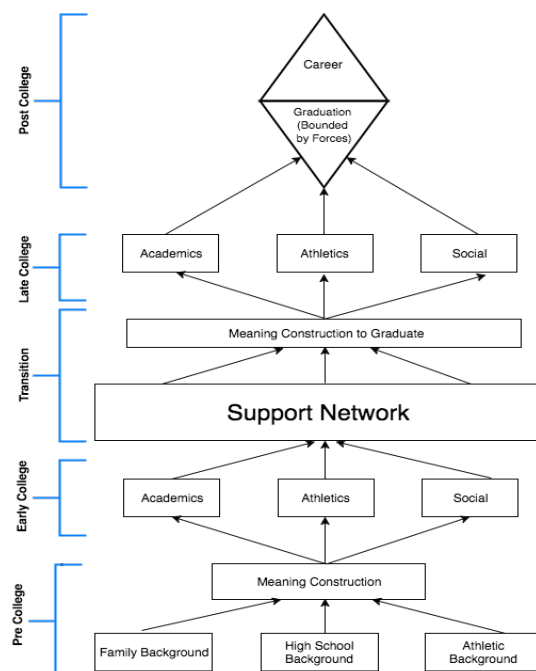
Figure 4. Porter model: Conceptual framework for football student-athlete academic success

Pre-College

Pre-college denotes the experience and backgrounds of the former student-athlete participants before arriving to college. The family background, high school background, and athletic background are all components that are part of the pre-college phase. In addition, these backgrounds are part of the cultural environment (as previously discussed in Chapter 3) that student-athletes bring with them to college. The pre-college phase sheds light on the experiences of these former student-athletes that led to their college entrance. Findings indicate that experiences during the pre-college phase shape how the student-athletes construct meaning of their experience during the early college phase. Figure 5 illustrates the pre-college phase of this model and the components that comprise this phase.
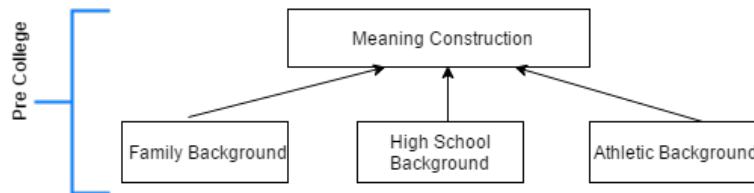
Figure 5. Porter model (pre-college phase)

Family Background

Family background represents the comprehensive background from which the former student-athletes originate. As cited in much of the literature, family background can include factors such as socioeconomic status, immediate family composition, neighborhood, education level of parent(s)/guardian, and access to resources (Barnard, 2004; Comeaux, 2007, 2011; Sellers, 1992). The data from the former student-athlete participants illustrates a wide spectrum of family background characteristics as depicted in Table 8 (Appendix D).

Table 8

Former Student-Athlete Family (FSA) Background Information

	State	Family Income	Family Background	Community	1 Gen. College
FSA 1	NC	25K-35K	Single Mom	Small City	Y
FSA 2	OH	100K-200K	Two-Parent	Small City	N
FSA 3	MI	50K-75K	Divorced Parents	Suburb	Y
FSA 4	OH	50K-75K	Two-Parent	Small City	Y
FSA 5	IL	25K-35K	Grandparent	Large Urban City	Y

This table showcases the range of household incomes, the immediate family composition (which ranged from single – parent to grandparent), the generational status pertaining to college enrollment (e.g., first generation college student), and a description of the home environment. It is important to first understand the background of the former student-athlete (FSA) participants in order to gain a better understanding of their experiences at State University.

Sellers (1992) points out that by understanding the family background characteristics, athletic departments can develop more effective support systems for their student-athletes. As it pertains to family background, one of the most common characteristics attributed to Black male student-athletes is that they come from poor/working class single – parent household (Eitzen, 1988, 2009; Sellers, 1992, 2000). This study revealed that this is not the case for every Black male student-athlete. For example, the associate athletic director recognized that, "all Black people ain't poor and from the hood and the ghetto."

This information presents a different perspective than the common notion of the Black student-athlete family background, which is typically viewed as dysfunctional and deteriorating. The assistant athletic director/career director elaborated on this in more detail by establishing that there are three kinds of Black student-athletes that she encountered:

You have your kids that come from either affluent families or well off families…they

have gone to great schools, they've been integrated into the world at a very young age.

You got your inner city kids who, everything's a challenge, they have no role

models…this is just culture shock…Then you got kind of your middle of the road

guys…they come from good families.

This assertion stands in opposition to claims that Sellers (1992) and Comeaux (2008) establish

regarding the family background of Black football student-athletes. However, many student-

athletes also do come from single – parent and/or poor households. For example, FSA 5 was

raised by his grandparents and discusses his family background by stating

[My] family upbringing was real rough. I grew up in a house with twelve, fourteen

people in it…Mom wasn't around and my grandmother raised me…so [I come from] just

a broken family…Dad [was] in and out but not consistently there. Growing up [I] didn't

have much and had to learn how to survive from an early age.

FSA 1 presents a somewhat similar description regarding his family background by saying, "[I]

grew up in a single – parent home [with] two older brothers…It was a tough neighborhood but I

felt like that was typical for people of my ethnicity." Being that he was from a single – parent

family, he also mentioned, "it was difficult at times to survive but we always seemed to

manage." These experiences reinforce the notion that many Black football student-athletes come

from non-traditional, single – parent families and backgrounds that are not viewed as conducive

for high educational attainment.

However, the single – parent and non-traditional family backgrounds are only one part of

the story. Table 8 also illustrates that at least two of the participants came from a traditional two-

parent household and another came from a family in which both parents were divorced and

remarried. In speaking about his family background, FSA 2 mentioned, "We were middle-class in a middle-class economy. Probably income was $130,000 between the two parents. We weren't wealthy by any stretch of the imagination, but we didn't really struggle for a whole lot and had a pretty comfortable upbringing." Even though FSA 2 came from a traditional two-parent household, he wanted to "get out of his environment…[because] nothing positive happened [where I'm from]." FSA 2 also stated, "Listen, I didn't come from a broken household…like both my father and mother were in my life…it was just that I didn't want to stay in [my hometown]."

Similar to FSA 2, FSA 4 stated that he grew up with two parents in his household and considered his family "very middle class" and also stated:

[My family] usually had things we needed and weren't really struggling financially…like we didn't live in the hood but it was…like a working class neighborhood. Not like the fancy suburbs that were around the area but definitely not in the slums either…at the end of the day I wanted to move on and beyond where I was from.

FSA 3 grew up in a household with divorced parents and considered his family background to be middle class and "grew up in the suburbs of [the nearby city]." He considered his family background to be "kinda normal" because aside from his parents being divorced, "there was nothing unusual about [his] family background. [His] parents and step-parents made ends meet and it wasn't a really difficult situation." When discussing his family background in more detail, FSA 3 commented:

I grew up with my father working in the auto industry. Mom worked little factory jobs also. She ended up getting into…almost like maid service type stuff…early on that was a pretty good income…not the greatest, but you're not struggling by any means...but

95

watching my dad working in the factory his entire life…I just felt that I couldn't stay in [my hometown] because I felt like I could do more.

FSA 3 therefore grew up in an environment that was technically considered a suburb of the nearby major city and grew up with divorced parents that both worked traditional blue-collar jobs.

The family background and experiences previously described showcase that because Black students originate from different environments, they cannot be treated like a homogenous group (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Each former student-athlete participant brought a variety of family backgrounds to college that was uniquely different from one another, which impacted the lens they used to view their experiences in their college environment.

During numerous instances in which the researcher was allowed to observe football student-athletes currently enrolled at State University during their academic appointments, it became apparent that just as the interviews with the former student-athlete participants demonstrated, the current Black football student-athletes are a heterogeneous group (Appendix E). Listening to them speak with one another about their backgrounds and hometowns makes it clear that not only are the current student-athletes from different states, but they bring with them different backgrounds and experiences with them to college. Being labeled as a Black football student-athlete in their minds does not account for the variety of differences among them. In addition, many of the current student-athletes attended either private or suburban (predominately White) high schools. This observation reinforces a previous statement that Black student-athletes are not all attending underfunded inner city schools. Many attend predominantly White high schools before coming to college.

One of the most common sentiments from the former student-athlete participants was that they viewed their scholarship offer from State University as a means to, as FSA 1 articulated, "get out." This phrase denotes several different perspectives. Four of the five former student-athlete participants were the first in their immediate families to attend college and believed that playing football would provide a way for them to attend college. Attending college was seen as a way to move beyond their stagnate environment. FSA 1 wanted desperately to "get out of the hood and make something of [himself]" and viewed playing football as a means to accomplish this end. It is important to mention here that even though most of the former student-athlete participants attended suburban high schools, they did not reside in those areas. For example, when FSA 1 talks about getting out of his home environment, he is not referencing the high school he attended but referencing his neighborhood. With the exception of FSA 2, who lived in a middle-class neighborhood, each of the participants lived in some form of a working class neighborhood. However, FSA 2's hometown was in fact a blue-collar city and FSA 2 felt that it was "where dreams go to die and I was not about to stay there." Therefore, the participants wanted to move beyond their surroundings, which was a key component to how their meaning was constructed before entering the college environment. As previously mentioned, current research suggests that Black former student-athletes typically are from single – parent, working-class families (Eitzen, 1988, 2009; Sellers, 1992, 2000;). Even though the family backgrounds of the former student-athlete participants varied, each of the participants discussed wanting to get beyond their hometowns and achieve a greater level of success than the underachievement, which was the norm in their communities.

High School Background

High school backgrounds can be considered in much the same manner as the family

background. The high school background can include high school location, demographics,

public/private entity, access to resources, and college preparatory classes available for students.

Much of the current research on Black student-athletes, specifically those that participate in

football, suggests that these student-athletes are underprepared for college level academia

because the environments they typically come from supposedly lack the necessary resources and

course curriculum to properly prepare them (Comeaux, 2008; Sellers, 1992). However, Table 9

below illustrates that only one of the former student-athlete participants attended what can be

considered an under-resourced underperforming high school, while the other four participants

attended predominantly White suburban high schools.

Table 9

Former Student-Athlete High School Background Information

	HS GPA	HS Type	HS Location	Ath. Sch.	College Freshman Yr
FSA 1	3.5-4.0	Public	Suburb	Y	2004
FSA 2	3.0-3.4	Public	Suburb	Y	2008
FSA 3	2.4-2.9	Public	Suburb	Y	2007
FSA 4	2.4-2.9	Public	Suburb	Y	2008
FSA 5	2.4-2.9	Public	Large Urban City	Y	2002

The assistant athletic director mentioned that the type of high school Black student-

athletes attended has to do with either: (a) home location, (b) ability to attend different schools,

or (c) receiving financial assistance via scholarship to attend a private school. She mentioned,

"private schools recruit from public schools…kids are getting scholarships in high schools." This

could change what the student-athletes are exposed to with regards to high schools. For example,

a student-athlete living in the inner city could be afforded the opportunity to attend a suburban or

private high school, partly because of his athletic ability, which could expose him to a better quality education while better preparing him for college. For this reason, the assistant athletic director, when discussing academic preparation of the student-athletes, also said that "[academic preparation is] not about innate intelligence…[academic preparation is] about the environment." This comment suggests that the home environment and more specifically the high school environment could have a substantial impact on student-athlete academic preparedness.

It is worth considering not only the different home environments from which the student-athletes originate but also the high schools they attended. FSA 3 and FSA 4 did not graduate from the high schools in which they originally were enrolled in as freshmen. FSA 3 began his scholastic career at an all-boys private school and transferred to another private school before finishing his scholastic education at a high school in his hometown. The reason he eventually left the private schools was, as he stated, "I got tired of [the private schools] because they really weren't a good fit for me." When asked to elaborate on the reasoning why he felt that the private schools were no longer a good fit for him, he responded, "I just got tired of going to an all-White boy's private school…I didn't fit in there."

When discussing high school demographics in particular, four of the five former student-athlete participants mentioned attending relatively diverse suburban high schools. For example, FSA 2 commented on the diversity of his high school:

> A decent mix of kids…You'd be hard pressed to find any high school as liberal as [State University] in terms of diversity but it was a really diverse high school, which allowed me to interact with different types of people, which prepared [me] socially [for] college to let [me] know there are other people from different backgrounds.

This experience is a common sentiment for most of the other former student-athlete participants because most went to high schools with relatively diverse student populations. Although the majority of students were White, there was a large mix of other minority populations (e.g., Black, Asian, and Hispanic). In addition to these schools being public suburban high schools, the former student-athlete participants felt that their schools were well resourced and as FSA 1 stated, "had everything that [I] needed from a high school."

Nonetheless, this was not the case from the perspective of FSA 5. He attended an inner-city school and describes his experience in the following manner:

> We just had a lack of funds…As for our text books, they were dated 1981-82…[My high school] received the older information because our school was in the back of the projects. It's really hard to get teachers to take that kind of job and the teachers that did take the job…it was hard for them to teach anyone because of the challenges of trying to get kids that were from broken families to pay attention. It was a rough environment, school-wise…I think the goal of the school was to just educate the kids as best they could under the circumstances that they were dealt. It definitely wasn't a preparatory school.

FSA 5 outlines that not only was the high school that he attended underfunded, many of the students came from situations at home that did not make education a priority in addition to many of the other challenges they were facing. This was the reality of FSA 5's high school background, which supports the traditional method of understanding the background of Black football student-athletes (Comeaux, 2008; Sellers, 1992).

High school academic preparation. Academic preparation denotes how well the former student-athletes were prepared for college level academia. High school GPA and standardized test score (e.g., SAT and ACT) are often used as barometers for determining the academic

preparation of students (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Sellers, 1992; Tracy & Sedlacek, 1984). However, in this context, academic preparation refers to how academically prepared the former student-athletes felt based on their academic experiences upon arriving at the university environment. When discussing whether or not they felt academically prepared for college, FSA 5 in particular, stated emphatically that he was not academically ready for college. He stated that this unpreparedness did not have to do with his lack of ability, but because the environment from which he originated was severely lacking in resources to adequately prepare him. In particular, he said:

> Based on the background that [I was] from, based on what [I was] privy to in [my] neighborhood, we just didn't have the accommodations. Didn't have the facilities, didn't have the computer labs, didn't have the AP classes, didn't have anything that...put [me] in [a] position to thrive at State University. As a high school student, I would say I was an okay high school student, just because of the influence…and because of the environment that [I was] in, it wasn't conducive to learning.

FSA 5 also mentioned that he wrote his first paper in blocks of text because as he said, "we didn't write papers in high school. We didn't have enough computers to type out papers and stuff, so my first paper was in blocks with very little punctuation at all." This experience supports Comeaux's (2008) study that Black student-athletes originate from environments with inferior academic resources to adequately prepare them for college level academia. However, Harper and Nichols (2008) established that not all Black male students matriculate to college from similar areas with inferior academic resources, as is the case with the other former student-athlete participants.

The other four former student-athletes presented a different perspective on this notion of academic preparedness for college. Each of these participants attended a suburban high school and each believed themselves to be relatively prepared for college level academia. Regarding his level of academic preparation for college, FSA 2 mentioned:

I felt like I was [academically prepared for college]. I base that answer off of the schoolwork that [I] had to do when I got to [State University]. I got there and being around some of my fellow teammates and fellow peers, they struggled in classes where I felt like, why is that difficult? I think that had a lot to do with the curriculum that [I] had at [my high school]. I thought it prepared me for the rigors of college. From a academic standpoint, I think I was prepared in that aspect.

As previously mentioned, FSA 4 began his high school career at one school and then ended up transferring to another because he believed his initial school was not preparing him adequately enough for college. Of the school he transferred into, he stated:

Once I got [to the new high school], I felt like the school was completely different than what I was going to beforehand, in that it really prepared [me] as far as college [preparation], practicing the ACT, the SAT and just getting [me] ready…It was funny because [I] had a State University alum as my English teacher. She said if you want to be successful, you have to do extraordinary things to succeed, like more study time. [The high school] had study tables for the [football] players and [I] would go there…[to] do homework before [I] even get to go to practice. [I] had to do a certain amount of hours a week to prepare [myself], to make sure [my] grades were right. I feel like [the high school] helped [me] start and then once [I] got [myself] to college, it was like, "Okay, well I know how to prepare myself. I know what to look for."

FSA 1 suggested that because he took difficult classes in high school and had some "very tough teachers," he stated, "I was prepared for the level of academic [courses] that was going to be presented to me at State University. He goes on to say that in retrospect, "many of the classes people struggled with, [he] found not to be that challenging." FSA 3 found some courses challenging when he first arrived at State University but quickly realized that overall the academic work was "not as difficult as [he] thought it was going to be. [He] handled most of the coursework relatively well." For the most part, the former student-athlete participants recounted experiences of being able to handle most of their course work relatively well, even though they might have struggled with a particular course early on. According to the admission material of State University (Appendix D), the average ACT score of a freshman entering the university is 30–33, while the average ACT score of the former student-athlete participants is approximately 21. Upon entering State University, they did not feel academically inferior to their non-student-athlete peers and felt they were prepared for and could handle the coursework because of their high school academic background, despite coming to State University with collectively lower standardized test scores compared to their non-student-athlete peers.

Even though four of the five former student-athlete participants felt prepared to handle the academic rigor of State University, it was clear that each former student-athlete participant had a different level of academic readiness. The observations of many Black student-athletes currently enrolled at SU seemed to have been well-equipped to handle their course work and needed minimal guidance while others required more direct supervision and assistance from their academic support staff (e.g., tutoring, counseling, and mentoring) (Appendix E). For some, it was a struggle to do the required work in their courses for a variety of reasons, such as disliking the course material, inefficient at learning the subject matter, laziness, or lack of preparation).

Others did not need that level of extensive support from the academic support staff but rather received advice with regard to maintaining an adequate number of courses each semester (Appendix D).

High school grade point average. State University boasts that the average GPA for an incoming freshman is approximately 3.8 (on a 4.0 scale). This has been true for at least the last fifteen years, which represents the elite academic profile that incoming freshman possess (Appendix D). However, in examining the high school GPAs of the former student-athlete participants in this study (see Table 9), it is clear that even though FSA 1 has by far the highest GPA of all the participants (3.7 GPA), he still falls short of the average GPA for the incoming freshman at State University. FSA 1 mentioned that in high school, he "took a lot of really difficult courses" and had "very tough teachers." He suggests that some of those difficult courses may have had a negative effect on his overall GPA but still ended up with a GPA that was very close to that of the average incoming freshman at State University. The other participants however, discuss a variety of reasons as to why their high school GPAs were not as high as they could have been. FSA 5 articulated that "it was harder to focus [in high school] because [school] was more about being cool and…it wasn't conducive to learning." He goes on to say that being smart was not the cool thing in high school, which as he stated, "caused me to underachieve in a lot of different ways" and "I didn't realize I was as smart as I was until I got to college."

FSA 3 on the other hand, when discussing his high school GPA stated, "I definitely did not give as much effort as I could have. I did what I could to make sure I got by and I was roughly a B student." He goes on to stay that his high school GPA could have been higher had he given more effort. FSA 2 echoed similar experiences concerning high school GPA, which was the second highest in this sample. FSA 2 said, "I wasn't a 4.0 student but also I wasn't a 2.1 guy

either…I knew I did as well as I needed to and I was satisfied with my grades in high school."

Although FSA 2 had a good GPA, he did not extend himself beyond the necessary requirements and was content to simply do what was needed. FSA 4 discussed that his GPA was a result of transferring to a high school that presented a more rigorous college preparation curriculum, which caused him to take more courses that were challenging for him, especially because he "was diagnosed with a learning disability [in high school] and was trying to figure out how to deal." Therefore, when FSA 4 arrived at State University he had to figure out how to manage his football responsibilities and academic responsibilities, while learning how best to adjust given his learning disability.

However, the majority of the faculty and staff members had a completely different perception of the academic preparedness of Black football student-athletes. The overwhelming consensus is that as a group, Black football student-athletes are not adequately prepared for college level academia. This perception supports Duderstadt's findings (2000) that these student-athletes have on average, lower GPAs and standardized test scores compared to the average student that attends State University. One faculty member specifically mentioned, "Many of …[Black football student-athletes] came from, I think, environments, from high schools where many of them felt ill prepared to come in and compete with a lot of the students…[Black football student-athletes] are not prepared in general." The other professors agreed with this statement and one took it a step further as he mentioned, "a lot of…[Black football student-athletes] are not prepared…this is evidenced by their writing skills and some with test scores."

If the focus remains exclusively on GPA and ACT (or SAT) score to assess the academic preparation of student-athletes, the comments made from faculty members regarding the inadequate academic preparation for this group of students would appear accurate. Comeaux and

Harrison (2011) suggest that being successful in college requires more than examining GPAs or standardized test scores. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) note that "structural inequalities in high school students' access to qualified teachers, culturally relevant curricula, clean and safe facilities, advanced placement classes, honor courses, and other college preparatory services directly and indirectly affect the students' high school GPAs" (p. 239). Therefore, individual attributes, specifically non-cognitive characteristics, are also important factors to consider beyond examining test scores and GPAs (Gaston-Gayles, 2004; Lang, Dunham & Alpert, 1988). With this in mind, only the football coach held a different perspective compared to the other faculty and staff members in regards to the student-athlete academic preparation. His belief is that GPA and scores do not always provide an accurate picture of the student-athletes' ability:

> GPA sometimes doesn't always reflect…intelligence. You're just being lazy. Doing just enough to get by. If [the student-athlete being recruited is] pretty good on his test, that's what I look at…you know it's hard to look at the grades of the kid and you can just say hey that's laziness or [the student-athlete] doing what he needs to [do just to] get by. A lot of people [place a lot of importance of GPA and test scores].

His perspective is that too much emphasis is placed on GPA and standardized scores, which does not truly provide an accurate description of the ability of the student-athlete. He notes that sometimes Black student-athletes are underprepared for college. However, the coach also thinks that a student-athlete might have been lazy or just doing enough to get by but may in fact be able to handle the academic rigor of the university. Interestingly enough, the football coach also pointed out that the hardest thing for the student-athletes to manage when they arrive on campus is the volume of demands. He simply stated that "the hard part is the volume…then also learning and having the discipline to go back to your dorm or wherever you're going back to and put the

106

study hours in." Dealing with these time demands echoes the sentiments of the participants because it was their biggest academic challenge while academic under preparedness was a close second.

Athletic background. Now that the family and academic background have been discussed, the next component of the pre-college stage to examine is the athletic background. Athletic background encompasses the recruitment process for the former student-athletes, the emphasis placed on football during high school, and the athletic goals associated with participating in football at the college level. Athletic participation during the pre-college phase was an important component in the lives of the former student-athletes because they believed that it could provide them with opportunities that they might have otherwise achieved like earning a scholarship to play football in college, earning a college degree, and potentially playing in the NFL (Edwards, 2000). This section explores the emerging themes related to athletic background to paint a better overall picture of their pre-college athletic experiences. The emerging themes include: emphases placed on football, the recruitment process, athletic goals, and leniency and special treatment.

Emphasis placed on football. Four of the former student-athlete participants discussed that participating in football played a major role for them in high school, which impacted many of their experiences and decisions they made. For example, FSA 1 mentioned that even though his high school had "great academics," the high school was "very much focused [on] sports…it was a sport – based school." FSA 1 earned a high school GPA between 3.5 and 4.0 but he was also dedicated to playing football.

As previously mentioned, both FSA 3 and FSA 4 transferred schools during their high school career because either the "fit wasn't right" as in the case of FSA 3 or as FSA 4

specifically mentioned, "to better prepare myself for college." Although FSA 3 got tired of attending predominately White catholic schools, he did admit, "part of that decision was influenced to a small degree because of football. I wanted more of a chance to show my skills [on the football field] and I didn't feel like I was getting that opportunity." FSA 4 stated, "I had a conversation with my parents that I wasn't really learning much…because the school that I went to didn't really help kids get out as far as Division I and II." As FSA 4 began to elaborate on this particular comment, he felt the high school that he was attending was not preparing him academically but more importantly was not "putting me in the best position to earn a college [football] scholarship." When asked to elaborate even more on this topic, FSA 4 commented that one of the main reasons why he felt that his high school was not preparing him to earn a football scholarship was "because there were some classes that [he] had to take to clear the NCAA [clearinghouse] and [the old high school] really didn't know or really wanted to help." FSA 4 is alluding to the fact that the NCAA requires specific core classes the student-athletes must take in high school to be eligible to compete in college (NCAA, 2015). His parents subsequently transferred him to another large, well – resourced suburban school that was relatively close to his community that also happened to have another prominent high school football team. Therefore, he transferred because it would put him in the best possible position to meet the academic requirements and earn a football scholarship.

In addition, FSA 2 clearly pointed out that "the goal in high school was to put yourself in the best position to earn a college [football] scholarship. Period. For me, that's why I put the amount of time I did in playing football." This comment from FSA 2 sums up much of what the other participants were alluding to. The academic rigor for most of the former student-athlete participants was not overly challenging and many of the choices made (e.g., high schools

attended, time spent playing football, and classes taken) were driven by the possibility of earning

a scholarship to play college football. Therefore, the former student-athlete participants

dedicated a significant amount of time to participate in football – related activities (e.g., weight

lifting, physical conditioning, film study, and practice) as compared to their academic pursuits.

In contrast, the experience of FSA 5 demonstrates a different perspective because he did

not have a heavy emphasis on playing football but rather drifted into playing football. FSA 5

mentioned:

> [My] high school…everybody plays basketball and when you're in the city it's very hard
>
> to get kids to come out to the team and then to get kids from our community…to play
>
> …it's a challenge. Just because in basketball everyone gets the chance to handle the ball,
>
> they have a moment to shine when they get a chance to score a point, that type of thing so
>
> you're trying to convert basketball – minded kids to football players where there's going
>
> to be positions like offensive and defensive line that gets no credit. Trying to convert a
>
> kid to do that is really tough…and to make matters worse…[my high school] had a good
>
> basketball team but the high school football team…was really really bad. As a matter of
>
> fact, I didn't want to play until my coach made me and I realized that it was something I
>
> was really…good at.

The other four former student-athlete participants had a major focus on playing football since at

least early high school but FSA 5 did not have that experience.

Recruitment process. In the recruiting process, there were similarities in how each of

the former student-athletes were recruited by State University football coaches. At a certain

point, usually around their junior years, the former student-athletes began receiving letters from

colleges about their interest in them. FSA 3 said:

After my sophomore year was when I started receiving college letters. The first scholarship I was offered was from [a Big 12 conference school]. After that came almost every single school [in the mid-western part of the United States]…Right after my junior season I was recruited by [more Division I] schools...I didn't receive any scholarship offers from [State University] until I went to their football camp. I went to their football camp…and beat everyone in the 40 yard dash…then [the head coach at the time] offered me a scholarship on the spot…during the recruiting process [members of the academic support staff at SU] explained to me everything would be broken down to me in a more understandable way with me being an athlete…[the staff] said they were going to have people that was part of their job to make sure I understood what I had to do on a weekly basis and all that sort of stuff.

FSA 1 discussed similar experiences with regards to his recruitment process. He mentioned:

At the time [when I was being recruited]…I wanted to be in a place that was challenging athletically as well as academically and I knew that would be [State University]…[the school] was one of the top universities athletically and academically…I also had a great connection with some of the African American coaches and some of the player…I felt like they were similar type of guys as me…I wanted to be around similar people.

FSA 4 further explained that as FSA 1 alluded to:

Oh man, it was pretty major. Even being looked at from a school out of the Big Ten Conference, and [State University] being one of the dominant programs at the college level…and having them come to your school every weekend or every week just to talk to you brought excitement for it, not just you, but for your teammates and for the fans of [State University] base. It was pretty nice.

FSA 2 also spoke about being a fan of State University and that the interaction he had with the coaches during his recruitment was what eventually sold him on SU. He said:

> What sold me on [State University]? First and foremost, with me being a coach now, I feel like it makes more sense now. My dad…was a [State University] fan for life. My brother and myself, we were also brought up as [State University]. I think, this day and age, I hope a lot of weight is about playing at schools that you're rooting for and then you have the opportunity, so it's hard to say no…. Oh man, it was pretty major. Even being looked at from a school out of the Big Ten Conference, and [State University] being dominantly one of the top programs in college level, college football, and having them come to your school every weekend or every week just to talk to you brought excitement for it, not just you, but for your teammates and for the fans of [State University] base. It was pretty nice.

Each participant experienced a certain level of excitement when an institution like SU either began recruiting him or offered him a scholarship on site. Because most of these participants dedicated so much time to their sport in high school, being rewarded with a college scholarship to play football was, as FSA 3 commented, "Icing on the cake. It was like all that hard work finally paid off." This information showcases a certain mystique or nostalgia to being recruited by State University.

However, the experience of FSA 5 was the outlier among the former student-athlete participants. As previously mentioned, he lived in the inner city and did not begin playing football until his sophomore year in high school because it was basketball that captured his interest. He mentioned, "To be honest, I really didn't know much about football but I knew everything about basketball." It was during his junior year that FSA 5 began playing in a

111

particular position really well and subsequently started receiving letters from college football

programs nationwide. FSA 5 elaborates on his experience:

> Even though my team was really bad, the good thing about playing in [the inner city],
>
> when I was in school we had 82 public high schools. It's less now, but it was 82 public
>
> high schools and [there were] four public fields to play on. With that being said, if there
>
> was a good kid, the college recruiters would come and stay all day to watch the games. If
>
> they came five hours in advance they got the chance to see three or four games. That's
>
> how I was able to get recruited. It was just by sheer numbers of everyone playing on
>
> those four fields. It was a miracle, basically, that I was able to get some attention being in
>
> such a bad school.

Even though FSA 5 was being recruited nationally, only one coaching staff met him in his home

away from the football field: "[He] went into the projects to meet my family and have dinner

with me. This experience showed me who really would get out of their comfort zone and go into

an unfamiliar place to meet with a recruit who didn't have much." Even to this day, FSA 5 still

prefers basketball to football but says, "Football provided a way for me to get out of my

environment and have a chance to be more than what I saw around me every day."

Athletic goals. Many of the former student-athlete participants in this study articulated

that when it came to goals they initially wanted to achieve, each wanted to earn a college degree

and most wanted to play professional football. For example, FSA 2 said, "[College football

players] think of going to the NFL and I was one of those guys. I thought I was going to the

NFL…that was my goal when I first got to college." FSA 4 also mentioned, "I knew I wanted to

get a degree from [State University] but I'd be lying if I said that I didn't want to play

professional [football]. That was definitely something I wanted." FSA 3 stated, "Obviously, I

always had the dream of playing in the NFL so I thought going to [State University] was going to be that perfect stepping stone for me to achieve my life goal."

However, FSA 1 added a slightly new perspective on this notion of athletic goals. He said:

> Yeah I wanted to play professional [football] but I knew that even if I didn't I was going to [find a career] that I could still be successful and earn a good living…of course I wanted to be the best at my position but it wasn't my only goal.

Not only did FSA 1 want to be a starter on the team, he also wanted to be a football player that was contending for national awards and recognitions. The athletic goal however, was situated within larger academic goals that he wanted to achieve.

Last, when discussing athletic goals, FSA 5 made a comment that unlike the other former student-athlete participants in this study, playing in the NFL was not a major priority for him. He said:

> Football-wise, I didn't necessarily have high goals. I was so focused on…those little nuggets [the coaching staff] would give us, I would focus on being the best player I could that when [my team] played a game my goal was to grade myself out of the 100% of each play. My goal was to not ever let my man get to the pile when I was blocking…it was small goals but I knew that those small goals would lead to a big thing because I was focusing one day at a time.

During the observations of football student-athletes currently enrolled at SU, many stated their athletic goals of playing professional football in the NFL (Appendix E) which support the perspective of the former student-athlete participants. Like the football student-athletes currently

113

enrolled, the former student-athlete participants in this study saw playing in the NFL as a way for them to support their families and to achieve their childhood dreams (Appendix E).

Leniency and special treatment. A recurring theme was the leniency that the participants experienced as football players in high school. FSA 3 mentioned, "teachers would overlook some late assignments and be easier on me than other students without me even having to ask...and it was definitely because I played football." FSA 2 recounted similar experiences: "Sometimes [I] would get some special treatment from teachers that even surprised me a little bit. In some cases, I don't think they were as strict as they could have been and should have been in some cases." FSA 1 contended, "now that I think about it…even though I did take some difficult classes in high school…many of the teachers were easier on me…I was never a troublemaker in high school or anything like that but I did have more flexibility than other student." FSA 4 also mentioned:

> I remember like…people would start doing things for me that I never even asked them to do…like make sure that I turned in homework or even got to turn in homework late and make sure that I had after school help with some subjects…I just thought that was normal but I guess not everyone had that experience.

What makes this lenient and special treatment theme relevant to this analysis is how the former student-athletes constructed meaning from their status in college and how that impacted their perception of college life. In discussing leniency or special treatment that student-athletes received in high school, the assistant athletic director commented:

> Another thing I saw over my years, and I still ask the question, and I still see it is…[the student-athletes] get away with so much being athletes in high school. One of the questions I was asked is, did you need a hall pass when you were in high school, and

every single kid say no. They're the kid in high school that doesn't have to have a hall pass, which just sounds so small, but to me it just sets this entitlement…like, I get special benefits, I'm an athlete and people are going to kind of take care of me underhandedly, because it's always like, no one needs to know you got that pass. No one needs to know, I've had kids tell me that the seniors used to be able to get teammates out of class when they were freshmen. Seniors have the authority to get freshman football players out of class. The challenge is, shifting their mind, it's shifting the way they think to say, you've got to be a man, you have to take responsibility, you have to become this, this, this, this. We throw all these programs, and all these things at them to try to almost change 18 years of programming and say, we're going to kind of flip this now. It's just that it's so challenging to do.

The only former student-athlete that did not share these experiences was FSA 5. He mentioned, "The teachers had other things to worry about and I don't think I received any kind of special treatment because I played football." FSA 5 suggests that he did not receive any special or lenient treatment from teachers because he attended an underfunded inner city school, where the teachers had other student concerns and behavioral issues to manage. This information suggests that for the most part, the former student-athlete participants received some form of preferential treatment from teachers because they were standout football players in their schools.

Meaning Construction

Social constructivist theory is applicable to the data here since it explores how, "The mind is the instrument of thinking which interprets events, objects, and perspectives rather than seeking to remember and comprehend an objective knowledge. The mind filters input from the world in the process of making those interpretations" (Jonassen, Davison, Collins, Campbell, &

Bannan Hagg, 1995, p. 10). Therefore, the construction of meaning occurs as individuals interpret stimuli (Leahey & Harris, 1985). Stated another way, meaning construction denotes how individuals view and make sense of their world. With regards to this study, it is important to note how the former student-athlete participants constructed meaning during the pre-college phase because that was the lens used to interpret their college experience, especially during the early college phase. In this study, three major themes emerged when describing this process of meaning making. First, data revealed that their place of residence and the opportunities, or lack thereof, in their hometown was a major factor that influenced how they interpreted what football could offer them. Three of the participants grew up in small cities, one grew up in a major city, and one grew up in the suburbs of a city that once thrived with factory jobs (Appendix D). However, each of the participants felt that they wanted to move beyond their environments that they felt were lacking opportunities. In most cases, the former student-athlete participants wanted to achieve more in their lives than what they perceived while in high school and in their own families. Being offered a scholarship to play football was seen as a way for participants to actualize their goal of going to college, possibly playing in the NFL, and achieving more than anyone thought possible.

Second, another perspective that constructed the meaning during the pre-college phase is the participant's status as first-generation college students. While the former student-athlete participants wanted to provide economic support for their families, the conceptualization that they would be the first in their families to not only attend but graduate from college was a significant point that influenced how they constructed meaning. FSA 1 mentioned, "regardless of where I came from, I was determined to show my family that we could achieve more." FSA 1 was referring to the idea that people in his family did not think they could attend college and he

wanted to change that limiting ideology. The participants wanted to do more than what they experienced and believed playing football in college was a means to accomplish that. As previously mentioned, FSA 2 specifically said that his goal upon leaving high school was earning a scholarship to play football because it was one step closer to playing in the NFL. When asked to elaborate on this, he stated, "I wanted to play in the NFL because it was how I believed I could take care of my family. I wanted to do more for them and this was how I thought I could do it."

FSA 3 previously mentioned that his parents and stepparents basically worked factory and other types of blue-collar jobs, He saw playing football at State University as an option to support his family. He mentioned:

> I wanted to make money in order to take care of my parents, especially my dad who's having some back problems and I thought playing in the NFL would give me the money I needed to take care of him.

Most of the participants wanted to use their ability and opportunity to play in college as a means to support their family and to create new expectations for them.

The final theme dissects laziness and lack of interest and engagement with the academic material. This theme helps to explain the GPAs and test scores of the former student-athlete participants. With the exception of FSA 1 and FSA 2, the other three student-athlete participants had high school GPAs that ranged between 2.4 and 2.9 (Appendix D). FSA 1 had a high school GPA that ranged from 3.5 to 4.0, while FSA 2 indicated that his ranged from 3.0 to 3.4. When discussing his grade point average, FSA 2 states, "I didn't try as hard as I could've in high school. Basically, I did what was necessary." FSA 3 takes this idea a step further: "I did not really exert myself in the classroom…because I really didn't need to." Even FSA 1, who had the

highest GPA among all participants, stated that he would have one hard class a semester, which was challenging, but he "didn't take the rest of the classes too seriously, even though [he] did get good grades." These experiences showcase how laziness played a role in their lack of academic engagement in high school.

High school did not capture the attention of many of the former student-athletes, which helps to explain their grade point averages. When discussing why he did not take classes seriously in high school, FSA 4 stated, "I really wasn't that interested in school." FSA 3 also mentioned:

> When I first got to [State University] I didn't know what I wanted my major to be…and when I saw my first college class schedule, it just didn't excite me…but [I] was told what I needed to do to stay eligible to play.

This lack of interest in class meant that they begrudgingly did only what was necessary to get by and pass their classes, ensuring they did what was necessary to ensure they completed the NCAA clearing house requirements. Approaching academic course work from this perspective, especially before entering college, shapes how they viewed academic assignments. This information suggests that the former student-athlete participants only did what was necessary in the classroom and did not venture outside of their comfort zone to select challenging classes or exert much effort on schoolwork. These participants believed that playing football in college was a means to, as FSA 1 said, "get out" of their home environments to be an inspirational example for their families. Interestingly, they did not invest significantly in their academic pursuits in high school. This lack of interest seems to be how the former student-athletes interpreted their surroundings and the meaning they constructed before entering college.

Early College

The data analysis revealed that there were distinct differences pertaining to how the former student-athlete participants understood their collegiate experience as they made sense of, experienced, and interacted with their environment when they first entered college (i.e., freshmen and sophomores) compared to when they became upperclassmen (i.e., juniors and seniors). For these reasons, the former student-athlete participants' college experience is broken up into early college and late college phases, which denotes the differences in their sense making and experiences at the two different phases.

Early college therefore denotes approximately the first two years of the student-athlete college career. During the early college phase, student-athletes encounter a variety of expectations from faculty, coaches, and academic support staff for the first time while trying to manage the conflicting demands on their time to be a student and an athlete at the college level (Buer, 2009; Simiyu, 2012; Singer, 2008). After analyzing the data collected from all the participants, three main components were identified for their importance to the early college experience. They are academics, athletics, and social components. Figure 6 illustrates how the early college phase builds on the pre-college phase of the model.
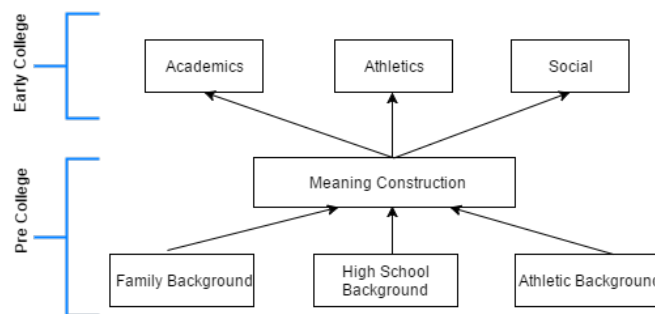
Figure 6. Porter model (early college phase)

119

Academics

Academic experiences during the early college phase is categorized into three emerging themes: (a) how the former student-athlete participants navigated their college demands, (b) the academic decisions they had to make during this early college stage (e.g., class and major selection), along with their grade performance in those courses; and (c) their academically – related interactions with academic support staff, faculty members, and peers.

Upon entering the college environments, student-athletes encounter a variety of expectations placed on them and must learn how to navigate the environment (Buer, 2009). In addition to the over 40 hours per week spent on athletically – related activities (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Singer, 2008), student-athletes must also satisfy the NCAA academic requirements in order to maintain their eligibility (NCAA, 2015). This conflict between the academic and athletic responsibilities creates a situation where the student-athletes' academic experience is determined by how well they can navigate their environment, the academic decisions they had to make (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011), and how they interact with support staff, faculty (Simons et al., 2007), and peers (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007) in the academic context. Although the academic experiences take priority in this section, the influence of football permeates throughout the academic experiences.

An observation that arose from conducting this study with a focus on the Black football student-athletes is that each of the former student-athletes wanted to graduate from State University and each wanted to concentrate in a different field of study (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Even though this group of current student-athletes had different academic interests, each wanted to become the next star football player on the team. This is what one would expect from a talented group of student-athletes. What was not expected, however, was the fact that each

participant had academic goals of wanting to earn a college degree. This is contrary to the perceptions that Black football players "only attend college because it is a necessary vehicle for a professional sport career" (Sellers & Kupermic, 1997, p. 10). Again, this is where the student-athletes begin to experience the conflict between their desire to obtain a college degree and their impetus for becoming the next star athlete on the football team as well as the stereotypes imposed on them.

        Navigating college demands. One of the most critical academic support measures in place at State University was teaching the former student-athletes how to manage their time. Each of the participants mentioned earlier that for most of them, it was not necessarily the coursework that was the most challenging; it was managing their academic course load and football requirements. FSA 5 used the word "overwhelmed" when describing his initial experiences at SU. Given these common feelings exhibited by the participants, the academic support staff was a critical aid that helped the former student-athlete participants manage their time. FSA 3 stated, "[the academic staff] would help [me] create a daily schedule with everything that [I] had to do for the day and week." FSA 2 echoes similar sentiments when he says, "the schedule [the academic staff] kept [my teammates and I] on, especially during those first two semesters, was helpful so that I could understand how to better use my time." FSA 4 and FSA 1 also observed that having someone else help them create a daily and weekly schedule was effective, as FSA 4 noted: "tutorial appointments, class schedules, practice times, and assignment due dates…having all that information in one place…helped me manage college…especially during that first year." Therefore, given the kind of academic and athletic constraints placed on the former student-athlete participants, especially early on in their career at

State University, having the academic support staff assist the student-athletes in learning how to budget their time was critical to their overall development.

Faculty and staff members also recognized the importance of the academic support offered both by the university and the athletic department. Academic services helped the student-athletes structure their time and provided necessary academic support. In regards to this, the athletics academic counselor said:

A lot of times [the athletics academic support staff] organize [the football student-athlete] study table…but there is a lot of supplemental help and support that we give them. There's mentors, tutors, counselors and those people who are supposed to help with time management, help them stay organized, do assignments when they are supposed to do the assignments.

This kind of help is necessary especially during the early years of the student-athletes' college career. Regardless of where the student-athlete may be in their academic development, as one professor stated, "many of them were able to adjust…with the support and assistance provided." He added "for the majority of the students, they couldn't have made it without the academic support provided by the athletic department." Statements such as these corroborate and reinforce the importance of the academic services provided by the athletic department to the student-athletes.

Academic support. Academic support in the early college phase was foundational for students to begin to understand college. While being recruited in high school and upon arriving on the college campus, student-athletes are introduced to an array of academic support provided to them through the athletic department (Duderstadt, 2000). Academic support provided to student-athletes includes (but is not limited to) mandatory study table, tutoring, career

counseling, mentoring, learning disability support, and athletic counseling. This support is designed to help the student-athletes manage their academic course load and requirements while maintaining eligibility. This kind of academic support seems to have played a pivotal role in the lives of each of these former student-athletes, especially during their early college phase.

Some of the relevant themes that emerged within academic support were the value that athletes attached to study tables, the importance of the interaction with academic support staff, the academic decisions the former student-athlete participants made in this early college phase (e.g., grade performance and major selection), and college demands.

Impact of study tables. Having mandatory study tables was an academic support service that resonated with the former student-athlete participants. Study table is a location in which freshman student-athletes are mandated to attend by the coach. This location is usually in a facility dedicated to providing academic support for the student-athletes. The services that study table specifically offers includes a computer lab, tutoring, mentoring, learning disability support, and athletic counseling. When referring specifically to study table, FSA 4 stated:

> One thing I really enjoyed is having study tables mandatory. I feel like if [study tables] [weren't] mandatory, a lot of guys probably wouldn't graduate because there's so much freedom after practice. You got out of practice around like 6:00 p.m. after the training table and you had the rest of the day but having your school load [to do] and having to go to study tables was very helpful.

FSA 3 echoed similar sentiments when he stated:

> Study hall was one of the big things obviously. Especially coming to [State University] as a freshman [study table] was mandatory for us [football student-athletes]. It was [helpful for me] to at least know that I have a certain time frame within a day [that] I was

supposed to be sitting down and doing work. That actually was the thing that kept me on

track when I first got to [State University].

Mandatory study tables provided the former student-athlete participants an opportunity to set aside time to focus on their academic course load, especially early on in their collegiate career. In trying to learn how to manage their time upon arriving at State University, study table was a key component in accomplishing this task. FSA 1 explained it this way:

Like my freshman year, [my football teammates] all [were] in study table…which, look,

it was helpful. It was a carryover from what your parents should have been done, right?

Like you had someone sitting there telling you, "You got to sit here for a least two hours

so you might as well do your homework or you might as well do that studying." That was

helpful, but on top of that, if you needed a resource….if I needed a tutor, I'd go ask,

'Hey, I need a writing tutor…'[the academic support staff] would [find me a tutor]. 'Hey,

I need a laptop that I can do this power point on,' they would find a way to make it

happen.

Although mandatory, study tables proved to be a critical support service for the former student-athlete participants. This service only represents part of the academic support provided to these former student-athletes.

Academic decision. The NCAA mandates that student-athletes must declare a major by the conclusion of their sophomore academic year (NCAA, 2015). However, like many college students entering college for the first time, these former student-athlete participants did not know what they wanted their major to be (Gordon, 2007). Therefore, early on in their collegiate careers, the former student-athlete participants sought the advice from academic support staff when trying to decide which courses to take. Another important fact is that the former student-

athlete participants began to understand that regardless of the major they selected, their courses had to fit outside of the required time for football – related activities, drastically reducing their major options. This section explores the reasoning behind the major selections for the former student-athlete participants, along with the grade performance during the early college phase.

   Major selection. As per the NCAA bylaws discussed previously, student-athletes must select their majors by the conclusion of their sophomore academic year (NCAA, 2015). This is the time when student-athletes focus on a specific degree program for the duration of their college career. Like many college students, the former student-athlete participants were initially undecided about what majors and career path they wanted to pursue. This is not an uncommon occurrence among college students. The National Center for Education Statistic (2011) estimated that there were approximately 16 million students enrolled in the nation's universities and colleges, with approximately 2.3 million first time college students. Of this population, roughly 14.3% of students have undeclared majors. In addition, Gordon (2007) estimates that it is actually 20-50% of new students that enter college undecided about what academic major or career path they want to pursue. However, as the student-athletes explore and experience their first year at college, their interactions with the environment gives them an idea as to which majors can accommodate the grueling time demands of football participation.

   Despite the varying degrees of academic support provided by the athletics academic support staff, all five former student-athletes had different reasons for selecting their majors. The major selections reflected their perspective and why they chose a specific degree program over another. For example, FSA 1 and FSA 5 both received their degrees in general studies but each selected their major for different reasons. FSA 1 wanted to graduate from college in three and a

half years and because of this goal, he recalls feeling encouraged to pursue a specific major that would allow him to complete that goal:

> I was a general studies major primarily because…when [I] first came into school, [the athletics academic support staff] kind of pushed [me] towards that [major] particularly because [the staff would say something] like, 'If you want to graduate in three and a half years, do this and get on this path.' I was originally in [another program] but I had to switch [programs]…Then when I got to a point where I was like, "You know what? I actually may want to be a history major or I may want to be an economic major," [but the message that was reinforced was], "that's not going to keep you graduating in the time frame you've kind of laid out for yourself." So I stayed in that major because it was flexible and allowed me to take the type of classes I wanted to take especially in business.

FSA 1's experience illustrates the kind of influence that the athletics support staff can have on major selection, especially if a student-athlete articulates that they want to graduate within three years. This timeframe matters because in order to complete a degree within this timeframe, the student-athlete will need to take classes year-round. For some majors however, the required courses are only offered in specific semesters, which can extend the timeframe. The flexibility this degree offered and the opportunity to graduate college in three and a half years were the ultimate reasons why he selected and stayed in that major regardless of the "encouragement" he received. FSA 1 understood that a degree in general studies was not the most "flashy" degree but he commented, "it served the purpose that I needed it to, which was allow me to be able to take the business courses I was interested in, while still having the time available that football required." By "flashy," FSA 1 is referring to the prestige of the degree and acknowledges that general studies is "not on the same level as chemical engineering for example but you won't find

too many of those majors on the [football] team." Nonetheless, he received a bachelor's degree in general studies and took enough business courses to earn a minor in business administration.

FSA 5 revealed some similar experiences and reasoning for selecting the general studies major as his course of study. When he first arrived on campus, he was admitted into a different program whose courses did not capture any of FSA 5's interest and he subsequently transferred out of that program. Sometime between his sophomore and junior years, he realized that playing in NFL was a real possibility and adjusted his major accordingly:

> I realized that I had enough talent to play in the NFL and that [the] only major that I felt like I could've graduated in three years was general studies in order to walk out…so I wouldn't have to miss school or miss draft training and all that type of stuff [during] my senior year, in order to be drafted. I knew by the end of my sophomore year that I was probably going to be drafted…so I wanted to prepare. I needed to graduate in three years so that the second semester of my fourth year I wouldn't have to be in school.

Similar to FSA 1, FSA 5 wanted to graduate within three and a half years because he realized that he could have a career in the NFL. However, it is important to note two things. First, FSA 5 says he believed he was not pushed into any major and made this academic decision for himself. Second, it was important for him to graduate before preparing for the NFL draft process and his potential professional football career. He would be the first person in his family to graduate from college and having that degree before leaving college was absolutely vital for him. In addition, similar to what FSA 1 suggested, the general studies major provided the flexibility that he needed in order to graduate from college within his timeframe while also exploring a variety of interests. This is important to note because FSA 5 is currently getting ready to retire from

playing and is reflecting upon those experiences in some of the courses he took in order to help him with his career transition.

When ultimately deciding on his major, FSA 3 received some guidance from his support network that shifted his perspective. He was originally going to major in general studies, like FSA 1 and FSA 5, but was convinced to take a different path by his stepmother. He recalls:

The thing that took me away from [getting a general studies degree] was my stepmom. She's a teacher and she graduated from college and she [knew] a little bit more about the college background than I did. Once I presented [my major options] to her…she was like, "No, you're not graduating from [State University] with a general studies degree. You got this far, you might as well take full advantage of [the education] while you're there." That's why I went into sociology and made sure I had some type of degree that was somewhat important to fall back on. She was the main person that made me definitely not go with the general studies degree.

The perspective and influence of FSA 3's stepmother to go beyond getting a general studies degree was a key motivator for selecting sociology as his major and African American studies as his minor. Sociology interested him more than some of the other options he was considering and he felt that he would be able to advance further in his career with this degree rather than a general studies degree. According to the associate athletic director, "nothing is wrong with getting a general studies degree, especially if the student uses its flexibility to their advantage" but FSA 3 and his stepmother held a negative perception about that type of degree that ultimately determined his selection in majors.

FSA 2 discussed wanting to be a dentist when he graduated from high school but realized how much biology and science went into that major and decided that it was not a good fit for him. He eventually became a sports management major because:

> That goal [of being a dentist] quickly shifted to sports management. It was more up my alley. I like sports from the standpoint of what [I] was learning about, what's applicable to what [my teammates and I] were going through as football players at [State University].

FSA 2 discovered an area that he not only enjoyed, but could also relate to because the major had practical implications related to his experiences on campus and that of his teammates. This was the primary force that drove him to select sports management as his major.

Finally, FSA 4 articulated that when he entered college, he wanted to go into physical education because he wanted to be a gym teacher later in life. However, the class load and football requirements became too much to handle:

> I took some classes [in physical education] and I just felt like [physical education] probably wasn't the right move for me because I felt like the class load and managing the playbook was kind of difficult for me…because I wasn't the fastest learner to have a quiz every week plus trying to study plays and everything that goes along with physical education…it just really wasn't the right route for me, so I ended up going with communications [as my major]. I felt like I could keep track with that [major] in the summer and I really got good with it because I like talking. I like writing. I felt like that was some of my strong traits and that I was going to be able to be successful in that route.

FSA 4's experience brings a few concerns to the forefront that FSA 1 and FSA 5 briefly touched on: the major selection as influenced by football – related obligations. The prevalence of these

obligations illustrates that the former student-athletes seriously considered how their time commitment to their major would impact their time commitment to football. This helps to explain why graduating in three and a half years or selecting general studies as a major seems so abundant within this group. Observing the current student-athletes during their appointments, it became clear that graduating in three and half years is a way to ensure that student-athletes attend classes year-round. This has the added bonus of ensuring they are engaged in off-season/voluntary workouts and is a way for student-athletes to graduate quickly, which makes a scholarship available for another recruit (Appendix D).

FSA 4 felt that coupled with learning the new playbook every week, the physical education major put significant mental strain on him than he could not handle, especially since he was not a fast learner. It is important to know that FSA 4 was diagnosed with a learning disability in high school and it takes him longer to understand and conceptualized new ideas. In addition, because he believed that he did not handle the time commitments from football and the physical education major very well, he was able to find a major that was more manageable with football and that he enjoyed studying.

The experiences from these former student-athletes reveals not only did each have his own reason for selecting a specific major, the obligations and requirements of their football schedule directly and indirectly influenced their major options and decisions. When discussing the major selections of football student-athletes in general, the assistant athletic director commented:

> I think the number of majors are limited by ability, not by time. I think people think that they don't have time. I think there's some [student-athletes], they're not able to do engineering, or there's some [student-athletes] that's just not going to be able to do a

foreign language. That might limit their ability to do majors…I don't think they're

limited by majors at all.

Other faculty and staff members presented a different perspective on the class and major

selection of these Black student-athletes. For example, the associate athletic director understands

that some student-athletes are certainly encouraged to pursue certain majors or take certain

courses:

> There have been times it has been clear that a student was encouraged to do something
>
> else, we may use the term discouraged and smart people are going to encourage
>
> somebody to take a different track…the bottom line is that you got a student who is going
>
> to be encouraged to pursue certain majors.

The statement of the associate athletic director reinforces the experiences of the student-athletes

who felt encouraged to pursue specific majors by some members of the athletics academic staff.

However, the athletic academic counselor interviewed for this study had a different viewpoint. In

particular, the athletic academic counselor felt strongly that he never forced any student-athlete

to pursue any course or take any major but does note that major and course selections can be

severely impacted by football related obligations. He mentioned:

> Specific about majors that conflict with practice time, that's a hard thing. [The student-
>
> athletes] do have leeway…that's one thing [athletics academic support staff] are proud
>
> about, we never forced our students in a particular direction…but there are a lot of majors
>
> that makes it hard for a lot of athletes to do because sometimes that conflicts with their
>
> practice…we have some favor [for student-athletes to select classes early in the
>
> enrollment period] a lot of times…but a lot of times, when you're on scholarships [the
>
> coaches] are paying for you to be here and the student-athletes look for other

options…[the coaches] want you to explore all other options before enrolling in a course that conflicts with practice.

This viewpoint demonstrates the conflict that exists when it comes to academic services and guidance of the student-athletes. On one hand, some student-athletes who interviewed for this study mentioned that the athletic academic support they received was adequate but felt like they were being pushed in one direction more than others regarding class and major selection. Although the athletic academic support staff members attest that they do not force student-athletes to take any class or major, the time conflict between practice and class seems to be the larger issue. The student-athletes have to be finished with classes in time to take care of their football responsibilities because as the athletic academic counselor said, "football is paying for them to be here," and that is usually where their first obligation resides. Therefore, coaches sometimes encourage these student-athletes to enroll in specific courses that do not interfere with the practice schedule.

The experiences from the former student-athletes clearly show that three of the five former student-athlete participants articulated that they selected their majors in the context of what they could handle, especially with their football – related obligations. The former student-athlete participants articulated that they were limited in the majors they could select because of the time needed to dedicate to football. As previously mentioned, football provides the resources necessary for student-athletes to attend college and as FSA 2 stated, "no one wants to do anything that might hinder that." Duderstadt (2000) agrees with this sentiment that coaches control the financial aid of the players and in many cases, the student-athletes could not afford to attend such universities or jeopardize their financial standing. Thus, if a coach perceives that football is not the central priority for the student-athletes, the coach may decide to reduce or

132

eliminate the financial aid provided to the player. Therefore, when the student-athletes select their majors at the conclusion of their sophomore year, majors that could conflict with their football responsibilities are typically avoided because they have the potential to jeopardize the student-athletes' financial support.

   Grade performance. According to Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model, the academic grade performance is an important component in examining the experience of the former student-athlete participants. During the early college phase, each of the participants recalled experiencing difficulties with their academic performance in class, which was reflected in their grade performance. FSA 2 articulated his grade performance during the early college phase:

> My academics struggle[d] a little bit. I'm trying to get into [a specific program at SU], so I had to take an [economics course]. I just couldn't stay awake in [the economics course] no matter how hard I tried it. As you know, Econ isn't the easiest class for anybody...I was falling asleep in class and I fell behind. I said, "I think I failed that class. I'm not sure but…" It was a struggle. I remember not being able to stay awake. I was like, "I'm trying." I just couldn't do it.

FSA 2 ended up failing the course and eventually having to retake the course in order to get into the academic program to which he was seeking admission. FSA 2 had additional struggles in other courses, which had a negative effect on his GPA early on his academic career.

   In a similar fashion, FSA 3 stated:

> After my freshman year I struggled [in class]. I never failed a class at [State University] but that [introductory to psychology] class, I ended up passing it was a D. I actually put a lot of time and work and effort into that class.

The experiences of FSA 2 and FSA 3 seem to be the norm, not isolated occurrences. FSA 4 had a slightly different experience, "I wasn't so serious freshman year, I could say that…and my grades took a hit." FSA 4 further explained that although he was eligible to compete, his grades were not "where they could have been…some of the classes, [he] just struggled to get by." These experiences demonstrate two components: (a) he did not take class too seriously, and (b) he struggled with the more difficult classes.

FSA 5 also shared similar experiences when he struggled in his early classes. As previously mentioned, he believed himself to not have been academically prepared for college level academia and:

> [My lack of academic preparation] became clear during that first semester…like I knew [SU] would be really hard…but when my professor came to me…it was an English course and he just handed me the paper [I submitted for class] back with no grade on it and he basically said it was awful.

FSA 5 continues, "of course my grade performance suffered at the beginning." Even FSA 1 who had the highest GPA of all the participants in high school mentioned that his grades were "not a good as they could have been…some classes weren't too difficult for [him]…but [he] was challenged with others." Although the participants did not recall what their actual GPAs were after either their first or second year, these experiences provide insight as to why most of the former student-athlete participants had final GPAs ranging from 2.4 to 2.9 (Appendix D).

When discussing the grade performance of many of the football student-athletes, especially during the early college phase, the former academic advisor mentioned:

> If [the football student-athletes] are not playing, their grades are lower. If they're playing, their grades are higher. It just seems natural. Basically, in season they get higher grades

than during the off-season…and I've also noticed that [the football student-athletes] don't do well early on especially in like the prerequisite courses they have to take. They really struggle with those.

The prerequisite courses tend to be classes the student-athletes are not really interested in and usually take the classes during their freshman year. This means that many times, not only are they not interested but this is the first time they are trying to navigate college level academia. The academic counselor discussed something different in terms of the early college grade performances of the football student-athletes. He stated:

I've noticed that a lot of our guys there they are just trying to survive. They are just trying to do whatever they can do to pass their class to get the grade they need to get and not even thinking about the actual learning part of it…when many first arrive on campus they don't really have a major they're interested in and because of that, it's really a struggle for them especially early on.

The experiences of both the on campus academic advisor and athletic academic counselor corroborate much of the experiences of the former student-athlete participants. Many of the Black student-athletes, upon arriving on campus and during their first two years, struggled with the course load they had to take. The assistant athletic director also said:

Not only do [the football student-athletes] have to get used to their new schedule, they have to take classes many are not even interested in, which makes a difficult situation even harder…that's why many don't really do that well in class, which means that they have to get better grades in the winter and summer semesters to ensure they are eligible for the fall.

This information helps to further illuminate the grade performance of the former student-athletes during the early college phase. If one solely considers the low – grade performance of the former student-athletes during their first two years on campus, it would reaffirm the views of the faculty that they are not academically prepared for college level academia. However, this perspective also opens the door to examine how grade performance can be influenced by the football demands during the student-athletes experience.

Academic interactions. The academic interactions that student-athletes have with academic support staff, faculty, and peers are important because these interactions can shape how the student-athlete perceives and further interacts with campus moving forward (Simiyu. 2012). Simiyu (2012) also writes that "facing a learning environment that is racist and discriminatory predisposes Black athletes to potential academic failure" (p. 52), which further underscores the importance of these academic interactions. This section explores the academic interaction the former student-athlete participants had with the academic support staff members, faculty, and peers, considering the importance of these interactions in aiding or hindering the progress student-athletes make towards graduation (Comeaux, 2008, 2011; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Simons et al., 2007).

Interactions with academic support staff. Interactions with the academic support staff emerged as essential to the process of navigating the college environment for the former student-athlete participants. The duties of academic support staff include tracking student-athlete's academic progress, scheduling appointments with tutors, and provide guidance for their major and class selections. Besides coaches, academic support staff members have the most frequent and constant contact with student-athletes. All of the participants recognized the importance of

this role but there were some different experiences. In speaking about his interaction with the academic support staff members at State University, FSA 5 said:

> When it came to counselors and different people like that, they did everything that they could in order to put you in the right position. We had [the assistant athletic director]…she was great with me. I think I was maybe one of the first people that passed her three-year program [to graduate] that she had. She was great with me and putting me into stuff.

FSA 2 also mentioned something similar: "…we had a phenomenal academic staff…they did an awesome job." However, FSA 2 brings up a critical point and that is that athletic departments have academic support for student-athletes that exist as a separate entity than the academic support provided to the general student body. On-campus academic support includes academic advisors for each of the schools and colleges. Regarding the school/college academic advisors, FSA 2 said:

> The person that stands out…she wasn't faculty, but if it wasn't for [the school's academic advisor], I don't know if I would have graduated from the [academic program] because she helped me out tremendously. She was an advisor in the [academic program]. She was separate from the academic center that we had for athletes, but that lady...she has since retired, but that lady helped me graduate with a [degree from that program]. I really took a liking to her and she helped me out a lot.

This advisor guided him through the program and showed him what he needed to do in order to be successful in that particular program. It appears that the former student-athlete participants took a liking to different people within the realm of academic support (both provided by the athletics department and support found on-campus) for a variety of reasons, but this academic

advisor seemed to have played an especially important role. FSA 4 stated that he informed the athletics academic support staff of his learning disability and they worked with campus partners to provide him with the necessary accommodations to help him develop each year. This illustrates the role that both academic support staffs can play with these student-athletes.

However, the relationship between student-athletes and academic staff members is not always positive and helpful in the eyes of these former student-athletes, especially regarding class selection. Two of the participants explicitly mentioned that in some instances there was some tension between how the student-athletes perceived the academic support they were receiving and how the athletics academic support staff member perceived the support they were providing. In particular, FSA 1 said of the athletic academic support staff:

"The folks who were responsible for guiding [the football student-athletes] academically, they would always kind of not blatantly come out and say it but I felt as though it was a covert way of saying, "Just take this. It allows you, from a time perspective, to meet your other time obligations and it also kind of keeps you on a path to do X, Y and Z." The only other thing that I would say to this is that they were clear to say, "Look, if you want to graduate in three and a half years, these are the amount of classes or these are the hours of credits you have to take quarterly or every semester. If you don't take these amount of classes, you're not going to graduate in that time frame." That would be the only kind of guidance…[for] my major or something to that effect."

He felt as though the athletics academic staff was not intentionally trying to hinder his academic progress but they were trying to ensure that his academic course load would be structured in such a way as to not impact his football – related responsibilities, especially practice time. FSA 3 echoed a similar sentiment:

When I first got to [State University], I wanted to go into law enforcement. She [the assistant athletics director]…I can't say it in a negative way because I don't feel like that was her intention at all. She pushed me towards classes she would know I would excel in. The one thing I felt like my freshman year, a lot of the athletes will start off in [a particular school]. Probably after that first semester, I would say over 50% transferred out of [that particular school] and went to the [Liberal Arts College]. They sent us toward [the Liberal Arts College] because they wanted us to get those [general degrees]. I felt like they just wanted us to do that bare minimum. Not take anything that's crazy hard or anything that's going to stretch us too much [but just] to do that bare minimum to get by. I felt like that's what I received a lot from that group of people.

FSA 3 believed that eligibility was the primary point of concern for members of the athletics academic support staff that he engaged with. FSA 1 and FSA 3 both alluded to the fact that they were consistently told that the type of degree did not matter, as long as they received one from State University. This was part of the reason why they believed they were being subtly pushed into taking requirements for a general studies degree versus another more rigorous program. Duderstadt (2000) recognizes that this kind of academic support is designed towards steering student-athletes into less demanding courses so as not to impact their football – related responsibilities, effectively known as majoring in eligibility. Duderstadt (2000) also goes on to suggest that the role of the athletic academic support staff, especially with regard to football is to ensure that the team is eligible to compete and pressure comes from the coaches to ensure eligibility. FSA 3 mentioned later that the experience with some members of the academic support staff "left a bad taste in [his] mouth" and because of that, he reduced his interaction with certain staff members. FSA 3 and FSA 1 both suggest that they believed the staff meant well but

as FSA 1 mentioned, "they treated everyone the same regardless of how smart you were, which kind of annoyed me because [my teammates and I] were all at different levels academically but they did not seem to recognize that."

Interactions with faculty members. Comeaux and Harrison (2008) found that academic success for student-athletes in revenue-producing sports is "to some extent dependent upon the specific nature of their interaction with faculty" (p. 207). For the purposes of this study, faculty included professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and graduate student assistants/instructors. When it came to the interaction with members of the State University faculty, these particular former football student-athletes had mixed experiences. In some cases, their overall experiences with faculty depended upon their own perception of athletics and of them as an individual student. FSA 5 captured his interaction with faculty members in the following manner:

> It was mixed. It's always mixed. When you're black, first of all you know you're probably going to be an athlete. It's a high chance because you're Black at [State University], the numbers don't lie. One out of two [black male students], one out of three [black male students] are going to be athletes…there's going to be professors that don't like you because of that, because they don't feel like you were qualified in order to get into school, it was just your athletic prowess and then there are other professors that are football fans that want to see you succeed and will do anything for you [within the rules to help] because they know [or assume] that you're unprepared but they want to see you overcome. You've got the two different sides to it. Sometimes it was a pain in the butt, but I had to overcome it, I had to get counseled, I had to go to professors and explain different things to them…faculty interactions all depended upon what type of professor it

was. For an example, a person that was really really smart and intellectual that maybe

didn't have athletic ability or talent as far as athleticism, that person is going to not have

an emotional attachment to a person that plays football because [that faculty member

doesn't] feel like [that student-athletes is] qualified or intellectual, but a person that has

some type of athletic ability or grew up watching a game or sport or something like that,

they're going to be a little bit more willing to help you.

FSA 4 encountered similar experiences with faculty members at State University. He stated:

You had professors that didn't care if you played football. You going to do the same

work as these students that they're teaching, and everything has to be on time. Some

teachers they didn't allow you to overlook, or as far as taking it Monday, so you can

leave Friday. It was like, you taking it before you leave and that is that. You have those

professors. It was very understandable because it's [their] classroom. They want their

work on time and you had to understand that. There was nothing I could do about it. You

had to compromise from both ends.

The experiences of FSA 5 and FSA 4 capture three distinct types of faculty members that

all participants encountered during their college experience: (a) faculty members that were either

fans or supporters of athletics and the student-athletes, (b) faculty members that were indifferent

towards athletics and student-athletes, and (c) faculty members who had a complete disdain for

athletics and student-athletes.

In his comments about interactions with faculty members, FSA 4 also commented:

Probably three or four professors really were on you like, "You need to do this." Like,

"I'm going to help you if you need help." They'd offer help. It was just if you was going

to take the help or not. For me, I always wanted help.

141

FSA 2 also encountered faculty members that wanted to provide help when needed and were understanding of the rigorous schedule he was trying to manage. FSA 2 stated:

> I never really had a problem with any faculty member. I never had any backlash. A lot of them that I did interact with and developed relationships with, they were always wanting to help, always willing to help because they understood the rigors that we were [faced] with.

He mentioned that he would meet with faculty members during their office hours on a relatively consistent basis and would update them about any academic concerns he was trying to manage. FSA 2 continues:

> [The relationship I developed with faculty members], that's probably what saved me my first couple semesters because I would reach out to professors. I remember doing the office hours and what not…I would reach out at appropriate times and just keep them updated on what was going on. I really didn't face any backlash or I never really had any negative experiences with faculty members in terms of being flexible or working with me.

FSA 2 also commented on how his relationship with his faculty members helped him during his senior year especially because he had to undergo surgery for a football – related injury and was unable to attend classes for a period of time. The faculty members understood his situation and were flexible enough to work with him to ensure he submitted all of his assignments and completed the necessary work. Looking back over his time, FSA 2 believed that he had a positive relationship with his faculty members but he also attributed this to the fact that he proactively established the relationship. Establishing this kind of relationship was critical to his graduation.

In addition to experiencing faculty members who were advocates or supporters of athletics or student-athletes in general, some participants also mentioned encountering faculty members that did not seem to care about athletics or the student-athletes they had in their classes. FSA 1 stated:

> There was one professor that seemed to not really care that I was a student-athlete…not sure if that was a good thing or not…the issue came when I had to miss class because of traveling and had to schedule another time to take a test…those types of professors were not really willing to work with me on that.

Although being treated like normal students could have been advantageous for the former student-athlete participants, it posed a problem with trying to reschedule exams or due dates for assignments. FSA 3 articulated:

> The problem with getting treated like all the other regular students on campus was that professors had no idea that of what [I] had to deal with everyday…and sometimes like deadlines or test dates just became a problem…[many professors] wouldn't let [me] take the exams on the road and when they wanted [me] to take the exam…the timing was just a pain in the ass.

FSA 5 also mentioned:

> One of the biggest problems with some faculty members was trying to find a time outside of their office hours to meet….many times it seemed like [the faculty members] didn't want to be bothered with [me] and made it harder to meet with them…I mean after a certain time I had practice and things for football…they really didn't seem to care about that.

The experiences of FSA 3 and FSA 5 illustrate that not only were some of these faculty members less willing to even remotely understand or accommodate the schedules of the former student-athlete participants, many were not willing to meet the student-athletes outside their traditional office hours for regular students. When asked to describe their reactions, FSA 3 clearly articulated, "oh…it was clear that these faculty didn't give a shit about [me] or meeting to help [me] understand the stuff we were going over in class…they just didn't care." FSA 1 stated that during his collegiate career, he would attempt to meet with the professors during or outside of their office hours so he could develop some kind of relationship with them. Sometimes this worked and other times he was unsuccessful regardless of what he did. To this, he states:

> Yeah, there were some occasions that that didn't work or…my desire to reach out to them and to connect with them on a personal level, made no difference. They just had a pre-disposed, or not even pre-disposed, they had seen so many different experiences with student-athletes, perhaps, that were negative that they looked at me and said, "It doesn't matter what he says or what he does in a small period of time, he is eventually what he is and that's an athlete."

This data reveals the role stereotyping and stereotype threat played in the lives of the former student-athletes. Aronson, Fried, and Good (2001) state that stereotype threat is "described as a social psychological predicament rooted in the prevailing American image of African Americans as intellectually inferior" (p. 114). Griffin (2017) established that stereotype threat "posits that the possibility of being judged has the same effects as a direct judgement; a perceived threat becomes a tangible reality" (p. 335). Griffin (2017) further establishes that behaviors of White professors toward Black football student-athletes sends a message "that it doesn't matter how hard you try, sometimes you will automatically and indelibly be placed in a role" (p. 363). The

data presented reinforces that in some instances, Black football student-athletes would be stereotyped by faculty members regardless of how hard they tried to break those stereotypes.

Professors who had a disdain for athletics and student-athletes were the last type of faculty member that the former student-athlete participants encountered. The former student-athlete participants shared that while faculty members never explicitly made negative comments directly to the former student-athletes, the animosity these participants felt was intuitive and based on the subtle comments and actions of the faculty members. FSA 2 recalled a specific comment made by a faculty member to a group of Black students sitting in class that the professor believed to be a group of football student-athletes in which the professor stated, "While all you football players get all this special treatment, real students like us actually had to work hard to get here…without getting scholarships just to play football." FSA 2 stated, "When [the faculty member] said that I was shocked…and didn't really know how to react. I'm like…this is my first class with you…how can you be judging me already." The former student-athlete participants felt that faculty members held negative biases and perspectives that directly influenced their interactions. FSA 3 shared an experience where a faculty member singled him and his teammates out in class because of the negative stereotypes the faculty member had of athletes. He said:

> [I] felt like we were being judged by the faculty members based on their preconceived stereotypes. I felt like many faculty members would back [my teammates and I] into a corner because they would make comments about how we got accepted to State University with lower test scores and GPAs.

He furthermore stated that because of these experiences, he spent minimal time with the faculty member until he actually needed some major assistance. Specifically, he mentioned, "I just

didn't want to be around those faculty who judged [me] as soon as [I] walked into their class."

Four of the five former student-athlete participants each recalled feeling inadequate because of

something a faculty member did or said. FSA 3 summed up these experiences best by saying,

"basically many professors thought that if you were Black, male and looked like you played

football that you were stupid and not qualified to be there." If something like this happened, the

participants would inform their teammates to, as FSA 3 mentioned, "steer clear" of certain

faculty members because it was perceived that certain faculty members did not like or want

Black student-athletes in their classes.

Depended upon which of the three categories, as described above, the faculty members

fell into, influenced the experiences that each of the former student-athlete participants had with

faculty members at State University and the ability of the student-athlete to develop a

relationship with that particular faculty member. When the participants perceived indifference or

animosity towards them, they minimized and reduced their interactions with those particular

faculty members. In other cases, some of the participants were able to develop a working

relationship with faculty, which helped them perform better in their academic courses.

The data collected from the faculty and staff members reiterated the same types of

interactions that the former student-athletes described, with faculty members. The associate

athletic director articulated this interaction the best:

> If I'm a member of faculty, it's not even a love/hate relationship, I don't even give a rats
>
> ass about football, just because I'm a faculty member at your institution doesn't mean
>
> I'm enamored with football…there will be some who absolutely love, who came because
>
> of the football program and they want to be in an institution…where sports and
>
> academics are stellar…there will be faculty members who resent and dislike

athletics…who will absolutely do anything to diminish the importance of football, that

will make it difficult for anyone in any sport to get any leeway that says they're traveling

or that they miss the class because they have to go on the road.

Unfortunately, this perspective does not solely come from those associated with the athletic

department. When discussing how some of the faculty perceive the Black student-athletes, one

faculty member said, "For some of them, there's resentment on some part of the professors."

Another faculty member said, "Professors make assumptions about what you know. I think a lot

of our Black student-athletes are shocked at what they're hearing and the assumptions that are

made about them." The relationship between faculty members and the student-athletes can have

a tremendous impact on the experiences of the Black student-athletes in particular (Comeaux &

Harrison, 2008). Both the student-athletes and members of the faculty and staff understood that

there are different variations of faculty/student-athlete interactions and that interaction depends

on the individual faculty member and how the student-athlete reacts.

Interactions with peers. Findings revealed that student-athlete interactions with peers in

classrooms had an impact on their experiences in the early college phase. Based on how the

former student-athletes dressed for class, many of the non-student-athlete peers assumed that

they were in fact football players. As FSA 1 mentioned, "[early on in college, I] would wear

some of the clothes and gear given to us by the football team, to class. That definitely made it

easy to identify who the student-athletes were in [my] classes." Because of this, FSA 2 stated,

"[we] were big Black guys in class, it was always assumed that [we] played football." Once the

non-student-athlete peers identified or perceived to identify who the football student-athletes

were, there were immediate negative connotations. FSA 1 said:

I felt as though at some point there were [peers] who didn't respect what the student-athlete, particularly the football player…me specifically…because typically [the football student-athletes] are people of color and just bigger, size – wise and [the peers] could easily identify.

This comment from FSA 1 describes his experience with non-student-athlete peers not respecting his intellectual ability and superimposing their negative stereotypes about the intelligence of football players onto him. FSA 2 captured this experience the best:

Basically, many of [the students at State University] thought [we] were stupid…that's just plain and simple. And sometimes [the students] would talk to [me] in particular, like I was stupid and like [I] needed all the help that I could get…I do feel like I had some turmoil from certain students about being an athlete…like I basically wasn't qualified [to attend State University] and I was just one of the lucky bunch to be presented with that opportunity. Sometimes I [felt] like it wasn't always a great situation.

Some of the animosity that FSA 3 experienced from his student peers in the context of their academic interactions centered on the fact that he was receiving a full scholarship to an institution that he was, in the students' minds, not qualified to attend. In speaking about one experience in particular, FSA 3 mentioned:

There was an encounter in particular in which [the student peer] said that all I had to do was play football to get school paid for. He had no [idea of what I had to deal with] to get my college tuition paid for…[it seemed] like many [students] were jealous of that.

This experience from FSA 3 reiterated to him that many traditional students do not realize the sacrifices student-athletes, especially football players, have to make in order to earn and maintain their athletic scholarship that pays their cost of attendance (Beamon, 2008). FSA 3's comments

regarding his experience with some non-student-athlete peers highlight this fact. The associate athletic director articulated this experience:

> I have some students who report that their classmates talk to them in such a way that is demeaning, disrespectful, and with the caviler attitude, that makes it clear, they would not be here and that they don't belong here, someone will make it clear that you wouldn't have got in here unless you were an athlete, someone else makes it clear that this person got in over her sister who has a 3.9 lottie dottie…

Beyond the financial benefits associated with receiving a scholarship to play football, FSA 4 also noted that there were some racial undertones in the interactions between the non-student-athlete peers and the football student-athletes in their academic interactions. FSA 4 said, "[in some cases] it was bad enough being a football player, but being Black [as well], that [helped to reinforce] some stereotypes of us." FSA 5 stated in no uncertain terms, "they thought [we] were stupid. There wasn't that many Black people on campus to begin with and when [I] was in class, [the students] thought they were better than [us]…I could tell based on their comments…during class discussions." Here, FSA 5 is referring to the White non-student-athlete peers as the primary source of their hostile academic interactions on campus with peers.

Athletics

As previously mentioned, current research suggests that student-athletes typically spend more than 40 hours weekly on sport – related activities (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Singer, 2008), which comprises a large portion of their overall collegiate experience. Melendez (2006) writes that upon entering college and adjusting to the environment, the student-athletes are contending with the increased time demands placed on them. The athletic component of the early college phase focuses on the experience of the former student-athlete participants attempting to

149

manage and cope with athletic expectations including football time demands, expectations (e.g., athletically related) and interactions with their coaches. As previously mentioned, the early college phase is the first time the former student-athlete participants encountered the significant increase in demands placed on their time compared to their experiences in high school. In addition, the participants had to interact with coaches and understand how the coaches viewed their academic pursuits. Three themes emerged during data analysis and are explored in this section: time demands, coaches and academics, and coaching interactions.

Time demands. When discussing challenges, they faced upon entering State University, these former student-athletes mentioned that it was not their preparation or academic coursework that was most challenging for them. For example, FSA 3 stated, "When I first arrived at [SU] I felt that the academic work was something that I could manage but the real challenge was budgeting my time and teaching myself how to study." Managing academic course load time requirements and football time constraints were the most challenging aspects for the former student-athletes to manage. FSA 1 articulated it best when he stated, "I think I was prepared for the level of academics that State University was going to present me with. I wasn't necessarily prepared for the load and the time management that was required to handle the load." FSA 1 was referring to the amount of time required to handle his academic and football related responsibilities. He went on to say:

> At [State University] the majority of my classes were fairly difficult…a tough course load and then on top of all that I had to deal with the fact that the time requirement for football was greater than my time requirement in high school…so just being more fatigued and trying to manage.

These student-athletes were never taught how to manage their time between their academic and sport – related commitments, which seemed to be one of the most challenging aspects for them after arriving at State University. FSA 2 shared the following story to help explain this dilemma. Like many freshman student-athletes, he began playing as a "true" freshman (many freshmen take a "redshirt" year but those who play immediately are considered "true" freshman). He said:

> I am getting all this playing time and I am devoting all this time to football…Academics took a little bit of a hit just because football was taking a toll on my body…Something had to give and unrightfully so, it was the academic side. I don't think I ended up flunking the class, but I didn't do as well as I wanted to do in the class. That first year was tough.

It is one matter to be overwhelmed because of the content of a course; it is another to be overwhelmed because one is trying to manage all the responsibilities that come along with being a Division I football student-athlete. FSA 2 provided the most detailed account of the daily in-season schedules that the football student-athletes had to manage:

> In season, we would have practice…I believe [it] started around 2-2:30pm, so typically [I] would wake up around 7:00 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. to give me enough time to get up and make sure I could eat some breakfast in the cafeteria and make sure I had all my materials before going to class…because I had class typically around 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. And classes usually ranging somewhere between an hour to two hours…and on a daily basis [I] would have… about 2 or 3 classes [per day]…I would usually get done with my classes somewhere between like 11:00 a.m. or 11:30 a.m. most days… Sometimes I would check – in with some professors during [their] office hours and sometimes I even go [to the] computer labs or the athletic center where we had academic

support and resources [that I could use]…and then head over to the football building…to

get prepared for practice… where we would start off with film sessions, going over new

plays and…and then head out [to] the field. Practice would normally go [until]

about…5:30 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. From there I head to [training table] or cafeteria…[to get

something to eat] and then head back to go to the academic center to do some

schoolwork. On average, I would leave the academic center between 9:30 p.m. and 10:00

p.m. and go home. I would go to sleep shortly after I got home and repeated this schedule

the next day.

This account of the daily schedule that football student-athletes have to manage is not isolated;

each of the other former student-athlete participants discussed having to adhere to virtually

identical schedules. This schedule illustrates the responsibilities that these student-athletes had to

manage. In the case of away games, FSA 1 mentioned:

[The team] typically left on Friday afternoon, for the Saturday game and returned late

Saturday evening and sometimes early Sunday morning…and then we would have to be

back in the football building sometime on Sunday for weight lifting and film study.

Therefore, trying to manage this daily schedule of class and practice was a significant challenge

for each of these former student-athlete participants, especially early on in their college

experiences when they were adjusting to the rigors of postsecondary education. As a result, they

were left little time for other activities that could strengthen their psychosocial development with

peers and faculty. While some of these former student-athletes felt that they were academically

underprepared for college, others did not necessarily share the same reflections about their level

of academic preparation. Rather, they were trying to adapt to both the academic and athletic

expectations placed on them, which were largely influenced by their football – related responsibilities.

Coaches and academics. This section on coaches and academics discusses the extent to which the coaches were involved in or supported the academic pursuits of the former student-athlete participants. It must be noted here that combined, all the participants in this study span at least three different coaching staff changes and transitions. This is significant because each coaching staff has different priorities and perspectives on academics, which can dictate how the student-athletes adjust to these expectations. In addition, each former student-athlete in this study interpreted their coach's influence (or lack thereof) on academics differently. Regardless, all of the former student-athletes identified two distinct approaches to academics from the coaches' perspective: (a) encouraged academics or (b) maintained an attitude of eligibility.

Coaches that encouraged academics were insistent upon their student-athletes graduating from the university, regardless of their playing situation. FSA 5 stated that:

> All of [the coaches] encouraged academics. That's the great thing about [State University]…all of [the coaches] encouraged education and all of [the coaches] encouraged, that maybe you won't be the best player here, but if you get a degree from here, it's a good chance that you're going to end up just fine because of the alumni and blah blah, all that stuff. All of [the coaches] would stress that getting your education is very very important.

FSA 5 experienced coaches who advocated for their student-athletes to complete their degrees. As FSA 5 experienced, many of these coaches were like teachers that wanted to develop the men entrusted to their care. FSA 1 shared similar experiences with these specific coaches. Regarding his interpretation of his coach's attitudes towards academics, he stated:

153

[The coaches] were always saying to me, "Look, if you don't leave this university with a

degree, we [the university and athletic department] just took advantage of you. We got

our four years of football out of you, making plays, bringing a hundred thousand people

to the seats in the stands. If all you leave with is that, you got taken advantage of but if

you leave with a degree that will stick with you for the rest of your life, now it's an even

trade." It was a symbiotic relationship…You spend so much time with your coaches, I

think it's extremely helpful to have a coach that looks like you, talking to you, man to

man, real to real…You know it's real when they take their time out to talk to you about

something that is not football. They keep their jobs because we win but when a coach

says something to you that's outside of football, talking about, "Hey man, how are you

dealing with your classrooms?" When you have a coach that can talk to you in that

manner, that's like a big brother almost or a father figure.

Both of these participants mentioned that having coaches who encouraged their student-athletes

to graduate was a tremendous asset. While encouraging their student-athletes to graduate, some

coaches made references to systemic issues within intercollegiate athletics, which shaped the

perspective of some of their student-athletes. Nonetheless, the encouragement from the coaches

to graduate shaped the student-athletes' academic pursuits as a key priority. FSA 4 summed up

his experiences with coaches regarding academics by saying,

[The head coach] played a hot point as far as me graduating because we talked

beforehand…during the year, I was planning on probably leaving early [to pursue a

professional football career] and he made the point that he was from the same area as me.

Having a degree would be very very strong because probably you ain't going to come

back after [you've finished your athletic career] if you leave early. It's hard to come back

after and try to get your degree. I put that in my brain and I made sure that I took notice

of it, and strived for the best. I feel like he really made a point on that because…he was a

player's coach, so…[if] you [were] missing tutor sessions, it was like…you didn't care

about the team. You didn't care about the coaching. You didn't care about the team, you

didn't care about your parents or nothing like that. It was just being…disrespectful.

Coaches who took an active interest in the academic pursuits of their student-athletes, had a

meaningful impact on their lives. This kind of investment helped the student-athlete refocus on

life after football and on graduating from State University.

On the other hand, the nonchalant stance toward the student-athletes' academic

requirements by the majority of the coaching staff was the most common theme that defined how

the former student-athlete participants perceived and interpreted the attitudes of their coaches.

Some participants in this study reiterated experiences that suggest that as long as the former

student-athletes were maintaining eligibility, the coaches did not seem interested in any aspect of

their academic experiences. One of the reasons for this, FSA 3 explains, is because the athletic

department had an entire staff dedicated to academic support for the student-athletes. He stated:

The reason I say that is because I feel like [the coaches] had all the [athletic academic

support] people that was…supposed to worry about [academics]. Now if we slip up in a

class…I've seen some coaches get onto some of the other athletes for…the seriousness

they take inside the classroom. Having the academic center, they have people that do that

job for them. They don't have to worry about the discipline and factors from it. If a

student wasn't taking academics seriously that it would be on the coaches to discipline

him in that aspect.

FSA 3 essentially explains that with the academic center and support staff available to ensure that the student-athletes were completing their academic requirements, the only real reason for the coaches to be involved was for disciplinary reasons. Otherwise, the coaches were not significantly involved. FSA 2 shared a similar experience when he stated, "Coaches weren't really involved in making sure you got your study tables hours in each week." The discipline was a result of student-athletes not completing the required study table hours, missing or being late to class, and missing or being late to tutoring appointments. However, there were no rewards set up for student-athletes that excelled academically. These experiences showcase that the main priority of the coach was on eligibility rather than academic achievement.

When discussing the coaches' involvement with the academic experiences of the Black football student-athletes, the associate athletic director provided a viewpoint that illustrated this dynamic:

> I think the coaches have no choice but to be invested in academics, if they want to have people eligible. But there are some coaches who are absolutely invested and there are some coaches that just want the student-athletes to be eligible. One of the problems is that the coaches…just wants [the student-athletes] to be eligible, you may graduate, you may not graduate but I will get my 4 years out of them and some coaches are happy as long as you are eligible.

It is clear from this perspective that the coaches have to be invested in the academic pursuits of their student-athletes to some extent if they want their student-athletes eligible to play. However, when asked if coaches go beyond this minimum standard, the associate athletic director simply stated, "Some will, some won't." This accurately captures the interactions some of the participants experienced with their coaches.

Nonetheless, both the athletics academic counselor and on-campus academic advisor maintain that, whether right or wrong, coaches are "the biggest influence on the student-athletes." The issue becomes when the coaches believe that the academic resources and support staff provided are solely responsible for the student-athletes academic progress. The academic counselor mentioned:

A lot of the coaches do care…a lot of them look at it like, I got him in the institution, where he has the opportunity to take advantage of the education and it's our [academic services] job to make sure that happens.

The coaches have an undeniably significant influence on the academic pursuits of the student-athletes. Yet, in many cases, they pass off that responsibility to the athletics academic support staff. When they are involved, it is sporadic. This experience was corroborated by the football coach interview. He mentioned that some of his fellow coaches "are just not invested on the academic side of the guys. Some coaches are only concerned about the guys staying eligible, that they don't care about much else." Regardless of how influential the coaches are on the academic pursuits of the student-athletes, the fact remains that some coaches will be more invested than others. This is important since student-athletes quickly pick up on the perspective of the coaches they interact with.

Coaching interactions. Beyond the focus on academics (or lack thereof) experienced by the former student-athletes, coaches have regular interactions with their players. However, in many cases, these interactions created barriers between most of the coaches and their student-athletes. FSA 3 mentioned:

When you're being recruited, the coaches will basically try to be your best friend and tell you everything that you want to hear. Even coaches at State University came to visit my

house and even mailed cards to my house for my birthday or whatever else. But when [I]

arrived on campus, I realized that not only was I at the bottom of the totem pole so to

speak, that most of the coaches that I interacted with were White. In the beginning, this

wasn't a problem but as time went on, these coaches couldn't relate to me or what I was

going through and that created a barrier. [I] realized that all the stuff the coaches were

saying during the recruiting process was bullshit.

FSA 3's comments best captures the experience of the former student-athlete participants.

During the recruiting process, the coaches do and say whatever is necessary in order to get the

recruit to sign their national letter of intent. However, once the student-athlete arrives on campus,

they find that they are no longer a priority and it becomes difficult to engage with their position

coach. FSA 2 stated:

When [I] first came in, I was at the bottom of the totem pole and that the buddy-buddy

relationship the coach was trying to establish during the recruiting process…once I got

here they damn near didn't want anything to do with [me] outside of football.

This comment reinforces the different levels and standards of treatment from the coach between

the recruitment process and being on campus.

FSA 5 also noted that he would watch how the coaches interacted with some of the

players and disrespectfully speak to them. He also mentioned that "there was a clear difference in

how [the coaches] interacted with the White players versus the Black players. Not only were they

easier on the White players but could [better relate to them]." In such instances, the participants

would spend more time with the Black coaches because they felt that the Black coaches could

understand them and relate to them on a cultural level. FSA 1 previously articulated that he had a

Black position coach who reinforced the importance of earning their college degrees and not to

leave college without it. It was not only the content of the conversation that attracted FSA 1 to

this particular coach but as he mentioned, "[this coach] could relate to me on a different level

that the rest of the coaching staff couldn't…and that made all the difference."

When discussing this topic of coaching interactions, FSA 2 stated:

Listen, now that I'm a college football coach, I get how the game works…you have to

sell your program to the kids you are trying to recruit. But the thing is, as a coach you

have to care about the kids beyond what they can do for you on the field. And that is how

I felt about my experience at State University. There were only a handful of coaches who

[I] could genuinely tell cared about the players…and those were the couple of Black

coaches that [were on the coaching staff]. But for the majority of the coaching staff, [I]

knew they only cared about how [my teammate and I] played on the field. They really

didn't give a shit about much else.

This perspective illuminates a critical point that even though most of the former student-athlete

participants had a positive interaction with one or two coaches on staff, the vast majority of

interactions between the players and coaches were based on the performance of the players. FSA

5 summed up this perspective by suggesting, "If all you care about is how well I'm playing, why

would I care about anything else the coach had to say? All it tells me that I'm only as good as my

last performance." The former student-athletes realized during the early college phase that their

on-field performance dictated how they were treated by most of the coaches.

In some instances, as long as the players were performing well, the coaches overlooked

some off – field issues they were having. In particular, FSA 1 said, "there was a young guy on

the team who was playing really well but then got in trouble for [violation of team rules]. His

punishment was to sit out a game against a team [we were heavy favorites to beat]." Situations

like these reinforce to the student-athletes that athletic performance is the main goal for the program, which is contradictory to the message of their recruiting process.

How coaches interacted with their players was made even more apparent as the researcher observed the academic appointments of current student-athletes. When the student-athletes came to these meetings, either individually or in groups, to reflect on how practice went or anything related to football, they would consistently discuss the advice or input from one coach in particular (this coach was interviewed for this study; Appendix E). The current football student-athletes mentioned that the reason they liked talking to this specific coach was because, as they said, "he's real and he gets it." When the researcher mentioned this to that particular coach during the interview, he said:

> I let them speak and we talk and we…go through things but I think that's the first point of it all is you have to be able ... I wouldn't say come down to their level but they have to be able to see what you see. You can only do that if you can see what they see. You got to be able to identify.

This coach identified the impact his empathy had on listening to his players and relating to them. He says, "The [Black student-athletes], regardless of the position, listen to me because I can best relate to them…some of the other coaches don't have that ability and the [student-athletes] can pick up on it quickly." He goes on to say that because he can relate to the student-athletes, they trust his perspective. This particular coach is Black and did play Division I college football. Because he was in a similar position as the current student-athletes, he has a better understanding of the demands that Black student-athletes must manage.

The perspective of the current student-athletes and the coach helped to elucidate the experiences of the former student-athletes. To a large extent, the coaches as a collective group

could not or did not relate to the former student-athletes, which caused some hostility between the coaches and players. However, there were select coaches that the players could relate with and take guidance from, most of which happened to the Black coaches. Nonetheless, the former student-athletes felt a clear disconnect between the coaches because they believed their level of treatment was based on how well they performed on the field, regardless of positive or negative instances, that happened off the field.

Social

The social interactions of the participants are classified in four emerging themes. Their interactions with non-student-athletes represented the first set of social interactions. Interactions with the Black students on campus represented the second set of interactions. Third, interactions with other student-athletes, in particular their teammates, represented a majority of their social interactions. The last emergent theme was their interaction with student groups across campus.

Previous research has established that there are positive benefits for student-athletes that have "increased campus engagement" with campus and student peers (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009, p. 329). Findings in this section support some of those positive interactions and also shed light on the negative interactions with members of the campus community as well. These interactions with the campus community are both positive and negative, which offers opportunities and challenges for the student-athletes and shapes their experiences on campus.

Interaction with non-student-athlete peers. The vast majority of the social interactions that Black student-athletes have with their non-student-athlete peers are plagued by racist behavior, mircoaggressions, stereotyping, and being treated as nonmembers of the campus community by the predominantly White campus peers (Allen, 1992; Harper, 2006; Smith, et al., 2007; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). FSA 1 suggested,

"[from my time on campus] it was clear that many of the White students didn't have much interaction with black people. [I] could clearly tell that based on their [interactions with us]…they just weren't used to it." Whether the origin of the hostility generated from the White students was rooted in lack of familiarity, envy, or a sense of academic superiority, their interactions with the former football student-athletes fostered an environment that was not welcoming for the participants. FSA 3 made a critical observation with regards to the climate on campus for Black football players during and after football games. He says, "when you think about it…it's kinda funny…when [we] win football games…all the students want to be around us and call it 'their team' but when Monday comes around…those same students want nothing to do with [us]." This comment articulates what the other participants experienced during their time on campus. When the lights were on and the game was on the line, many of the non-student-athlete peers were fans and supporters of the football team. After the game when it was time for class, many of these same peers held stereotypical views of this population, which manifested in their everyday hostile interactions.

Even though many interactions with the non-student-athlete peers were antagonistic, especially with the White students, not all interactions fostered a hostile environment for the participants. There were many interactions that made a positive impact on the football student-athletes. For example, FSA 4 commented:

The students were great. The people that [I] stayed with during the summer term [before my freshman year]…in the dorms…and getting to meet all the freshmen, I feel like that's when we first connected…[I] got to meet friends and later on, I saw them as classmates…and if I needed help, they were there to help me, so it was great…To this

162

day, I still talk to the majority of my freshman classmates…Whenever I talk to them or whenever I text them, we just pick up from where we left off.

FSA 4 described positive experiences with many of his non-student-athlete peers. The relationships he built during the summer program for incoming freshman continue to thrive in his life today. When probed further, however, FSA 4 did reveal that some of the non-student-athlete peers that he keeps in close touch with are also Black, which only make up 4% of the institution (Appendix D). Notwithstanding, FSA 4 did communicate very positive experiences with his peers throughout his entire time on campus. Similar to FSA 4, FSA 3 had similar experiences on campus with his non-student-athlete peers. He met a variety of peers during his freshman year in the dorms that expanded his social circle and led to self – discovery:

I can remember one experience [during] my freshman year in the dorms, I met a kid from New York. You could tell [that] we came from two totally different backgrounds, didn't even listen to the same type of music…I don't think I would have ever spoke to a person like that if he wasn't in my dorm. It was actually kind of cool. It was a nice interaction. I feel like I learned a lot about myself and other people.

These experiences demonstrate that especially during their freshman year, living in the dorms exposed these former student-athletes to a variety of people who they might not have met otherwise. Living in the dorms helped the former student-athletes create lasting relationships with and learn from students that were from different states and backgrounds. This contributed to a positive learning environment for the students and the student-athletes.

Interactions with Black students. Even though FSA 4 and FSA 3 mentioned that they had relatively positive experiences with their non-student-athlete peers, most of those positive experiences on campus were with the Black non-student-athletes. FSA 4 was not alone in this

regard. FSA 1 felt that many of his White peers did not respect his intellectual ability and instead found comfort interacting with Black peers. He mentioned:

It's funny when you think about it because outside of football and class I found myself hanging out with other Black students who I shared a common interest with and now that I think about, many of my friends ended up being Black, even though I did not plan that way. It kinda just happened.

FSA 1 was not alone with this recognition. Although many of the former student-athlete participants discussed both positive and negative experiences with their non-student-athlete peers, often the more positive interactions took place with students of color. When asked about this, FSA 2 mentioned, "I think it was due to the fact that there weren't a lot of Black folks on campus and many of us were experiencing similar things, especially trying to adjust to life at State University. The experiences of FSA 5 concur with the other former student-athlete participants. Specifically, FSA 5 mentioned, "when [I] would see other Black students on campus or in my class, it was just welcoming. [I] could tell from some conversations that we were all experiencing similar things on campus…that helped establish a bond." The shared experiences of being a Black student on a predominantly White campus created a bond between many of the students regardless of whether or not they were a student-athlete. These shared experiences became even more evident as the former student-athlete participants recalled the people they had positive or welcoming interactions with on campus.

Interaction with other student-athletes. FSA 3 commented that after reflecting on the group of friends he has now and those developed during college, most of his friends were on the football team or were student-athletes. He stated:

Now that [I] think about it, most of the people that [I] hung around with [in college] were student-athletes…I think that's because…those were the people [I] was around a lot…when [you] are around people for a period of time...you naturally create relationships with them.

FSA 3 was not alone in this assessment. Each of the former student-athlete participants made a similar observation. Many of their close friends were student-athletes because they spent the most time together and as a result, got to know them better. FSA 2 mentioned, "[I] took classes with other student-athletes…and especially with group projects…and things like that…they were the most understanding because…it seemed like we were all trying to adjust and manage."

FSA 4 stated, "For me, taking classes with other student-athletes was great…it was easier trying to set up group meetings or study sessions for tests because they had similar schedules and they wouldn't get mad because [I] had to meet up late." FSA 4 added that his student-athlete peers were more flexible and understanding of the schedules that he had to adhere to because of their own practice schedules, especially during the season. FSA 1 also mentioned, "student-athletes just had a better idea of what [my teammates and I] were dealing with from a scheduling and adapting standpoint because a lot of them were going through similar things…it became like a small community." These comments capture the fact that the former student-athletes did experience welcoming environments from their Black non-student-athlete peers and other student-athletes because they shared similar experiences when trying to manage and adjust to the different expectations and challenges early in their college years.

Interaction with teammates. A key component to a welcoming college environment was the former student-athletes' interactions with their teammates upon arriving on campus at State University. For student-athletes, it is common that their roommate will also be a teammate.

Because football student-athletes arrive on campus much earlier than traditional students to prepare for the season, they are provided an opportunity to build a community with their teammates, many of whom eventually become part of their social groups. For example, FSA 1 mentioned:

> Before actually starting school there, I came up and stayed with [one of my teammates], who was going to eventually be my roommate… I stayed with him and his family so I felt as though I at least knew one person at the school that I was familiar with.

Having that familiarity with at least one person before school started created a community for student-athletes and reduced isolation. As stated by FSA 4,

> When you arrive on campus for the first time…especially your freshman class…those guys are your brothers. You hang around each other because you are familiar with them and…[there is a sense of comfort] with people you know are going through similar things as you.

Another emerging theme associated with the opportunity that student-athletes have to spend long periods of time together is that they can get to know each other in deeper ways. Since a large number of football student-athletes came from various areas around the country, they were able to learn about different people and places. With regards to this, FSA 3 stated:

> It was like a brotherhood, a bond I've never been something so strong or a part of. I've made some great friends with people I'm still friends with today. I feel it's almost like my family. It was a great experience, the whole overall situation. It brought such a different culture together. I never knew it would be so different. I figured going in, I'll just go around and be around a whole bunch of football players like myself. I started to learn a lot about people from all over the United States. I had no clue it was so different. Our

aspects of life, the way we were brought up or the music we listed to or the different

accents that we had. It was a great bond and a great relationship in time in my life I'll

cherish always.

This experience accurately captures how interactions with the teammates fostered an

environment in which the former student-athletes could gain a diverse level of understanding and

appreciation for differences among their teammates. Interactions such as these created a family –

like culture that was especially important during the early college phase when the student-

athletes were trying to manage the variety of expectations placed on them for the first time.

Finally, the relationship among teammates was an important source of information

exchange in which the student-athletes could learn how to deal with certain coaches, classes, or

specific staff members. In particular, FSA 2 mentioned:

Some of the older guys especially were good for bouncing ideas off of…or figuring out

how to deal with Coach X or one of the [academic support staff members]…Because they

have been through it already, a lot of information was passed from the older guys to the

freshman, which for me was valuable.

Some of the older teammates passed along experiences about coaches, classes, or life at State

University in general that was an asset to these former student-athletes when they arrived on

campus. The participants stated that they were able to utilize some of that information to better

adjust and manage during the early college phase at State University.

Interaction with student groups. The last major point that emphasizes social

interactions on campus is interactions with student groups. Numerous football obligations and

the challenges of adapting to their new environment reinforced the belief during the early college

phase that the former student-athletes did not have time to participate in any campus functions or

organizations, especially if they were held outside of the athletic department. When asked if they participated in any campus organizations or functions early on their college career, each former student-athlete participant said they had not. FSA 1 elaborated, "I just felt like there wasn't enough time in the day to deal with class, practice, study table and then be involved with a campus group…that just wasn't going to happen."

With regards to the limited amount of time these former student-athletes had to venture outside of the athletic department activities and their teammates, the associate athletic director stated:

> The opportunities to meet people from all over the world are diminished, the opportunity to join social organizations, to be involved in volunteer work in the community. The worst part is internships, field trips and international studies are not something [the Black student-athletes] get a chance to do. There's always an outlier and exception to the rule who insist on having a life outside of football, and that's a rare bird. And it's very few who are encouraged to have a life outside of football.

As the assistant athletic director mentioned, football student-athlete schedules require them to be preoccupied with football or class because it "keeps them out of trouble." Keeping these former student-athletes "out of trouble" seems to be one of the biggest motivational factors for keeping their schedules as stringent as they are. The assistant athletic director mentioned that people inside the athletic department are concerned with the activities football student-athletes might engage in and try to mandate or "encourage" specific events, activities, or study time to ensure that they stay out of the spotlight of negative attention. This information explains why student-athletes did not have enough time to do much else besides play football and homework. However, once these former student-athletes became accustomed to their surroundings, they

were better able to venture off and explore the campus. This aspect is explored in greater detail in the following section. The faculty member who was also a former member of the board in control of athletics at State University agreed with this sentiment when he stated:

> But the reason the [football student-athletes] are not involved [on campus] is that we worry that they're going to get in trouble. So they're not [involved]….So you don't get much farther than [the football building]…that's about as far as you get….So the [football student-athletes] not involved in campus, and in fact, as I said, I think [the university] works pretty hard at keeping them from being openly involved on campus.

The experiences of this particular faculty member, who was more involved in athletics than any of his colleagues, illustrate the intentional isolation of the football student-athletes. Much of this isolation stems from the fact that the entire university does not want to make front – page news because of the actions of a select few student-athletes. Therefore, the football student-athletes are kept preoccupied with football and their academic coursework, which is supposed to keep them out of trouble.

Transition Phase

As previously stated, findings suggested that the college experiences of the former student-athlete participants are divided into two main phases: early college and late college. However, it is difficult to make a clear – cut distinction as to where one phase ends and the next one begins. In depicting the nature of the experiences of the student-athletes, it appears that a transition period occurs somewhere between the conclusion of their sophomore year and the beginning of their junior year. This transition phase depicts the rich experiences of the student-athletes interviewed in this study. Beamon (2012) recognizes that only 1% of collegiate athletes become professionals and three and a half years is the average length of a professional football

career. These statistics are important because it is during this transition phase that the student-athletes critically assess their opportunity to play professional sports and weigh them against careers that do not involve playing sports (Beamon, 2012). Integral to the transition phase is the student-athletes' interaction with a support network. The support network is important because it provides academic, career, and emotional support (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Carter-Francique, Hart, & Steward, 2013). The support network ultimately influenced and refocused the former student-athletes meaning construction to graduate. This section discusses the experiences that the former student-athletes had with their respective support networks and how that influenced their meaning construction. Figure 7 depicts where the transition phase is located in the model and its two central components: support network and meaning construction to graduate.
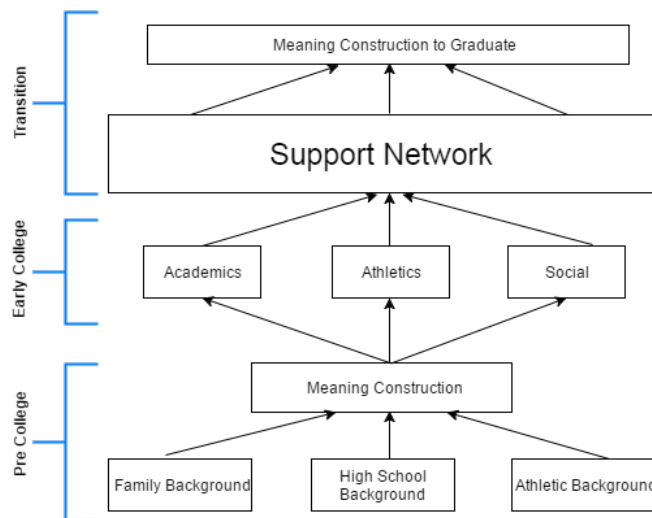
Figure 7. Porter model (transition phase)

Support Network

The transition phase of the model described in this chapter addresses the importance of the presence of social support. Members of this network help the student-athlete adjust to various aspects of life as a Black male football student-athlete and provide guidance to them during their

collegiate career. In this study, data analysis revealed that this kind of support came from a variety of individuals both internal and external to the university. Along with academic support, guidance centered on other aspects of the student experience in college, such as career or life choices.

Guidance with regards to non academic issues seemed to have played a major role in the lives of the former student-athlete participants, which is the foundation that describes their social support system. In the literature, social support is described as an exchange of resources designed to enhance the overall wellbeing of an individual (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984). It furthermore "serves to meet a recipient's needs for venting feelings, reassurance, and improved communication skills. It also serves to reduce uncertainty during times of stress, provides resources and companionship, and aids in mental and physical recovery" (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984, pp. 8-9). Social support can also be described as "the existence or availability of people who we can rely, people who let us know that they care about, value, and love us" (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983, p. 127). For student-athletes, social support came from a professor, counselor, or associate athletic director. In other cases, the support came from family members, teammates or a specific coach in the form of a helping hand. Regardless of its source, the support provided seemed to have been paramount to ensuring that these former student-athletes graduated. All five of the former student-athlete participants in this study discuss a variety of social support they received during their time at State University.

Building trust. The observations with the current football student-athletes revealed an interesting dynamic between some members of the academic support staff and the current student-athletes. Besides discussing many issues related to the student-athletes' academic requirements and course load, select members of the academic support staff who the student-

athletes trusted provided a variety of social support to these student-athletes (Appendix E). In several instances, before conversations about academics could begin, the select members of the academic support staff would listen, counsel, and guide the student-athletes on concerns ranging from dealing with distractions at home to managing coach expectations. Some of the sessions were one on one, while others were in a group setting with teammates. During some of the group sessions, several student-athletes would congregate in the offices of their trusted athletic academic support staff member, talk, and decompress before beginning their work (Appendix E). It seemed paramount to the student-athletes to have someone who they could not only talk to but also someone who they could relate to because it provided a sense of familiarity and trust. Having this level of familiarity seemed important for the student-athletes to receive the necessary guidance they were seeking. These observations reinforce the idea that a strong support network for student-athletes is vital to their overall wellbeing at State University. In many cases, specific academic support staff members became part of the support network for the student-athletes. The select academic support staff members provided a variety of support to help these young men manage the numerous requirements, obligations, and situations that come with being a Black football student-athlete on a predominately White campus.

Building trust for the football student-athletes currently enrolled at State University meant that whoever they were speaking with would share the details of the conversation with anyone else, especially a coach. This was also true for the former student-athlete participants as FSA 3 articulated:

> [I am] not going to talk to everybody…because there were just things I didn't want
> getting back to coach or to my teammates…really some of the stuff I would talk about

with [people in my support network] was no one else's business. Trust was a major thing

for me.

FSA 2 agreed with this sentiment and took it a step further when he said, "Once [I] was able to

trust someone…my mindset was 'they better not let me down'…I mean because if I couldn't

trust you, I wouldn't listen to you and I think that [people in my support network] knew that."

Adapting to a new environment. In some instances, advisors used academic concerns to

catalyze and provide the support the former student-athletes participants needed but did not ask

for. For example, FSA 5 believed himself to be an introvert and due to his environmental

background, had a difficult time trusting people. He stated that:

I grew up real tough and I grew up not trusting people so for me, I don't feel comfortable

with that position [of having a mentor] because everyone that I ever had that was in that

position failed me at one point. At that stage in my life, it was real hard for me to be

mentored. I would rather do it on my own because I felt like I was the only person I could

trust.

Despite the fact that he did not trust anyone when he first arrived at State University, he did rely

on a specific athletic academic counselor to guide him through his collegiate career. In addition

to trusting this academic counselor, FSA 5 discussed an experience about writing his first college

paper in blocks. He stated:

A professor pulled me to the side and said, "Hey man look, you're going to get kicked

out of school with this [kind of writing]. This is not acceptable. You can come to my

office and I can show you how to start.

Under the guise of academic assistance, FSA 5 found people that he was able to connect with

during his tenure at State University. The guidance described above ultimately contributed to his

graduation from college. Despite his introverted nature that prevented him from proactively seeking assistance, he was still able to adapt to his new environment with the help of others. Specifically, he was able to listen and adhere to the counsel of a faculty member who demonstrated how to complete assignments that upheld the standard of the university.

FSA 1 actively sought out people that he believed could help him to "shape the type of person [he] wanted to be." When speaking about his support system, he said,

Some of our mentors…one of our football coaches, he was a defensive back coach for a while. He was a Cal (Berkeley) grad and he would share with me the importance of getting a degree. Another coach was a [State University] grad and he would share with me the importance of getting a degree and then I had other mentors. I had a guy who was an affiliate of the university and I would spend time with him and he would show me the importance of being on time and being prompt…I said I wanted to be this kind of person and had people to call me on it and say, "Hey, you were supposed to do this. You said you wanted to do this but your actions don't match that."

The support FSA 1 describes goes beyond adjusting to campus life or the academic requirements and centers on preparing the student-athlete for life after football and college. FSA 1's interaction with his support network helped him realize what qualities were needed and how he should behave in order to successfully transition out of college and into the job force. Being held accountable was especially critical for his personal development, which is what his support network helped him to do.

In some instances, the former student-athlete participants needed help dealing with life transitions, such as preparing for life without football, choosing career steps, and learning how to network with people. FSA 3 stated:

[The assistant athletic director] was one of the main ones that continued to ask what I

wanted to do after college...[The assistant athletic director] took an active interest in

making sure like I knew how to talk and network with people, where to look for jobs that

I might be interested in…that sorta thing…it was definitely helpful.

Decompressing. FSA 3 identified an associate athletic director, professor, and an

academic staff member that supported him during his collegiate career by helping him

decompress and providing a safe space to release stress. Though it may seem mundane, this

function was essential to the stability and wellbeing for all of the former student-athletes. When

speaking about a specific academic staff member he interacted with, FSA 3 recalled:

He honestly was that person that whenever times got tough even when it had to do with

sports, I'd go see him. I'd be like "Man, I had a tough day and practice, today. Honestly, I

don't feel like doing anything." He's the type of person to give you that motivation to

say, "I know it's hard. I know it's tough but you got to get it done. This is just as

important as being on the football field. Obviously, if your grades aren't up to par, you're

not going to graduate…" He was the person I went to for that small talk and that little bit

of motivation that I needed.

FSA 3 clearly suggested that having those people who understood him on a personal level and

knew about the experiences of being a student-athlete in his environment was "very helpful."

FSA 4 had similar experiences with many of the same people as some of the other former

student-athletes in this study. The reason he established his support network was because he was

homesick. Since he missed his home environment, he sought areas where he could feel

comfortable, which was why he gravitated towards certain people. He stated, "I'd just go into

[the assistant athletic director's office] and just talk. I was home. I felt like being away from

175

home, I was at home because I could talk to [them] about anything." He experienced a lot of stress trying to keep up with his academic requirements while still being a star wide receiver. Having this outlet of people that he could confide in was critical to his experience and ultimately to his graduation.

The importance of the support network provided to the student-athletes is not lost on the faculty and staff perspective. Some faculty and staff members not only understood but also supported and encouraged this kind of assistance. The on – campus academic counselor said, "Having that person [they] can confide in, that's where I think advising is so important." In regards to the support network, the football coach simply stated, "pressure bust pipes…and it's going to find the path of least resistance. Wherever that kid's the weakest, it's going to come out somewhere. So yeah, you need the release."

According to select faculty and staff, having someone that the student-athletes could vent to and find support from that did not revolve around their football and academic responsibilities was paramount to the wellbeing of the student-athletes. The associate athletic director said it best that the support network helps keep the Black football student-athletes "sane in an insane place." He continues: "these Black student-athletes are in an environment in which over 75% of the people they encounter are White and it's helpful for them to know that what they are experiencing isn't just their imagination." From the experiences of the former student-athlete participants, it becomes clear that the role of those individuals that comprise their support network was to help them balance, adapt, manage and maneuver through their athletic, academic and social environments.

Balancing life away from home. As previously stated, sometimes this support came from people that were not associated or affiliated with the university in any way. Some of the

176

most influential people for FSA 2 were his parents. Regardless of his situation, his parents put a positive spin on his circumstances. For example, he commented:

> Never once did my dad or mom ever tell me "You had a bad game. You had an awful game." They said, "You did this really well" or "Yeah you did this" or "Yeah you made this play. Yeah you may not have played like you wanted to play." They'd never tell me that I did an awful job. I think that went a long way, just their positive energy and their positive attitude, and just encouraging me. They always seem to be able to talk me off the ledge a little bit. They did that a lot, especially during my freshman year. [My dad] just talked me off the ledge and tried to look at the positive side of everything.

Having his parents available for him to vent was a key factor for his support system. He had a variety of experiences while on campus and having those individuals who he could confide in provided the necessary guidance and support he needed. He stated that having this kind of support system was "a blessing…because not everybody has that." Each of the former student-athletes easily identified those people that supported or guided them through their college experience and ultimately towards graduation.

FSA 4 also articulated an experience in which he initially had some trouble adapting to the campus environment and was able to get some help from a specific staff member. He said:

> I'd just go in [the assistant athletic director's] office and I'd just talk…I was home...I felt like being away from home, I was at home because I could talk to her about anything…I had a lot of stress. I was homesick even though [my family was] four hours away.

Adapting to a new environment can be nerve-racking and in order to manage that stress, FSA 4 found a particular staff member with whom he could develop a rapport with and feel comfortable enough to disclose his struggles. This was vital for FSA 4 in part because he did not know

anyone at State University when he arrived and it was the first time he had ever been away from home. Because he was able to find someone to help him balance the new transition of being away from home, he not only managed but also thrived in his environment.

FSA 3 lived within an hour from State University's main campus and was able to travel home more than most of his teammates. When asked about living so close and being able to go home, he mentioned:

> It was cool because sometimes I just needed a break from [State University] and see my folks…they always helped to keep things I was dealing with in perspective for me…it's weird, too, because I was better able to adapt being so close to my family and a lot of guys didn't have that.

Competition among teammates. A prevailing theme that emerged from this research is the idea of competition among teammates. It is no secret that student-athletes compete on the field for playing time and for positions on the depth chart. However, the former student-athletes in this study identified that this kind of friendly competition carried over into the academic realm. Academic competition among teammates served as a motivational factor for the participants to not only beat their teammates on the field but also to beat them in the classroom. This kind of competition was not always apparent to the teammates but served as an internal motivational factor for some of these former student-athletes. In addition, this type of competition served as a support system to push each other to excel. The support of having teammates going through the same struggles and encouraging each other to persist was a key factor to helping some graduate. In referring to this kind of competition, FSA 5 said,

> I started making it a competition between my teammates…about grades and it wasn't that I even approached them about it, but it was something that I needed to do in order to

become successful at it. When I went to [State University] I couldn't type. I couldn't type at all…but because I was so competitive I would stay up two days to get something done that it probably took somebody about five hours…I probably did the most all-nighters of any football player in history. Not because I was going out all night, it's just that I had to because I didn't have the ability to type stuff quickly, to do all the research, I didn't have all those tools that everyone else had in high school. What I would do is spend more time, I never would miss a class because I realized that I wasn't prepared enough to miss a class and just read the textbook. I needed to go to every class, take down every note everyday, and read the textbooks, and go to tutoring.

This is but one example of the kind of academic competition that helped some of these former student-athletes continue to persist academically. FSA 1 explained it this way:

If I want to be better than you, I got to out work you first. Then once the competition starts, I'm confident that I know I've out-worked you, but I also got to do the extras in the competition, so that you know that I outworked you. It's not only to beat somebody, they got to know that you beat them. I wanted guys to know. I'd be like, 'What did you get in the paper?' I'd be like, 'I got an A-.' They'd be like, 'Man you didn't get no A-.' I was like, 'Look.' They're like, 'How did you get that A?' I'm like, 'I looked at this one book and I added some of the stuff in there from this one book and cited it and the whole deal.' Other people knew, 'Man, he's doing a little more than I'm doing,' and I got pride out of that. Like I said, I was competitive. I wanted you to know I beat you, I wanted you to know we were competing and I won, I got the A and you didn't.

FSA 1 competed with teammates to push his own academic excellence. This seems to have been a common strategy because all of the former student-athletes in this study reiterated that in order

to have made it to a Division I institution to play football, they had to have a competitive edge. When used for positive purposes, this competitive edge drove them to achieve more success in the classroom.

The academic competition, regardless of whether it was spoken or kept silent, propelled the former student-athletes to perform better academically. Having teammates who experienced similar academic pursuits was another kind of support system for these former student-athlete participants. These teammates did not let each other fall victim to laziness or complacency. Regarding this, FSA 1 explains it best by saying,

Having other guys who were just as committed to getting a degree as I was around me was great because just like anything else, when you get tired and you're telling yourself you don't want to quit, it's much easier not to quit when there is another guy sitting right beside you and he ain't leaving either. That competition, that pushing of one another as the scripture says, 'iron sharpens iron, so as one man sharpens another.' Having brothers who were in the same fight helped me.

FSA 3 explained this relationship like "a band of brothers." Having teammates all striving to be better than one another while encouraging one another to persist was an experience that they say propelled them to graduate. FSA 4 also captured this experience by saying, "You didn't want to be the odd man out of your group of teammates that didn't graduate and get that degree." The healthy competition served as a way to keep teammates on task and focused even during some of the more difficult times during their collegiate careers.

Faculty and staff have also noted the importance of teammates encouraging each other to succeed academically. Having those teammates provide support or encouragement is how some

of these former student-athletes continued to persist. The on – campus academic advisor

mentioned, "I think they rely on their teammates a lot."

In addition to competing with each other, having a familiar face, especially in a class that

is predominately White, provides a sense of comfort for the former student-athletes. The athletic

academic counselor notes, especially during the first week of class, that the Black football

student-athletes will ask to be in classes with some of their teammates and many of them will

"pick classes based on whose is in there with them." FSA 4 and FSA 5 both mention that early

on in their college experience, they selected specific classes because they knew some of their

teammates were also in the same classes. FSA 5 explained, "Early on…it was just easier to select

classes that [my] teammates were in…because [we knew that] we could all work together on

[assignments] and the [professor] wouldn't give us a hard time for just being football players."

FSA 4 mentioned, "Not knowing anyone at college besides my teammates…I was just

comfortable in class with [my other] teammates." The assistant athletic director also noted

however, that if the teammates are no longer aligned in their approach to academics, the Black

football student-athletes "will pick classes that his teammates are not in because [he] does not

want to be distracted." The reason for this is because even though some teammates find safety in

numbers, others find it distracting when too many teammates are in the same class. Both FSA 1

and FSA 2 said that initially they took classes in which many of their teammates were in but

quickly ventured off into other areas because as FSA 1 said, "sometimes guys…weren't paying

attention…and [I] couldn't help but be distracted…so I started taking classes…that [my

teammates] weren't in…because most didn't have an interest in the same kinds of things that I

did." FSA 2 also concluded, "There were still other [student-athletes] from other sports in my

classes, there weren't a lot of teammates…which was cool because sometimes they would play

games or sit in the back and talk." FSA 3 noted both sides of the spectrum regarding teammates.

He said:

> Honestly…it was good to have teammates in some of [my] classes…if [I] missed
>
> something or…we had a group project to finish…it was good…and other times…it was
>
> kind of a relief to be away…that way [I] could focus on what I needed to do.

The findings suggest that in some regards, teammates were an asset to the participants by helping

out with class materials or projects and even serving as a guard against potential

microaggressions from faculty. On the other hand, the former student-athlete participants felt that

some of the teammates became distractions and sought classes that their teammates did not

select, which represents the duality of teammate interactions in the classroom environment.

Meaning Construction to Graduate

As previously mentioned, meaning construction refers to how the inputs from the

external environment are processed and interpreted (Jonassen et al., 1995). With this in mind, it

becomes abundantly clear that each former student-athlete had a reason to graduate. It is

important to understand that it is the interaction the former student-athlete participants had with

members of their support network that helped them reinterpret or solidify their meaning

construction as opposed to the views they had upon entering the collegiate environment for the

first time.

Interviews revealed that each former student-athlete crafted their own reasoning with

respect to graduation. In particular, what distinguished this meaning construction process was the

source of motivation that helped participants to understand why finishing their degree was

important. Relying on this source of motivation also seemed to act as a catalyst that kept pushing

these student-athletes to graduation. Some of the emerging themes included being the first person

in their family to graduate, dealing with an injury, not wanting to be one of the former players hanging around that did not graduate, and being an inspiration in their home community.

Fear of returning home. FSA 5 explained his desire to graduate arose from the lack of support system at home. He elaborates:

It's not a game to me, it's not something I'm doing for leisure. If I don't make it, I don't have anything to go back to. My mom and dad are not going to write me a check for a gap year to go and have fun. My mom and dad are not there. They're not going to pay a down payment for a car or a house. If I don't make it there's no other way for me. I've made up in my mind that this is it. I'm not going back to the hood. I'm not going to sell drugs, I'm not going to do anything crazy…this is my opportunity. God blessed me with it so I'm going to channel all of those negative emotions and what I experienced and I'm going to channel it into being a fiery football player and even a more fiery academic student.

For FSA 5 this was his driving force to continue to not only manage the academic struggles he faced, but to excel and persist until he graduated. He utilized this opportunity to advance far beyond what he originally thought possible.

FSA 1 came to State University on a football scholarship, but before stepping foot on campus, he said, "I had a desire to get my degree from [State University]. I knew I wasn't going to leave school until I got that degree." This motivation stemmed from his background as he watched other athletes go to college who didn't graduate and had to take low – paying jobs. When recalling this experience, he said:

I also saw guys go on to college who were great high school football players, who didn't finish school and they were back home in [North Carolina], working at some little…what

I deemed…job that was beneath them because they were intelligent people. It had

nothing to do with their intelligence… they were working at Footlocker and all that type

of stuff.

Similarly, FSA 2 mentioned that he did not want to be one of those former football

student-athletes that went back to their hometown without having graduated from college. He

mentioned:

What scares me the most and still scares me to this day is, you go back to [my

hometown] and they're like, 'Oh, what's up? What you doing these days?' I'm like, 'Oh

I'm back in [my hometown], and I'm not doing anything.' I did not want to go back to

[my hometown] at all. Still don't to this day. Didn't want to go back to 'Damn you

played for 4 years and you didn't graduate? What the hell did you do up there?' I think

that scared me to death. I didn't want to do that. That was always an unconscious

motivation.

It is not necessarily the fear of failure but the fear of being perceived as a failure after having

earned a scholarship to a Division I institution to play football and earn a college degree that

refocused some of the former student-athlete participants.

Serving as a role model. Being the first in the immediate family to graduate from

college served as the motivational force for FSA 3. There were extended family members that

graduated from college but FSA 3 was the first in his immediate family. In regards to being the

first person in his family to graduate from college, he said:

That was a big point for me as a male and my whole immediate family, period, not just

my parents. I'm talking about cousins and uncles and all that sort. I put that pressure on

myself though to make sure I got to that point because one of my cousins had brought it

184

up to me before and she said there's several girls that have done it on our family. She's

like, You're the only male in our family that has ever done this or gone this far.' That

gave me that spark in my head, to make sure I get this done.

This only served as part of the overall motivational factor for FSA 3. He also introduced another

component that had an impact on his meaning construction to graduate. He wanted to be a role

model for the young boys in his hometown. He said that many of the jobs in his hometown are

either in the automotive industry or independent businesses in landscaping. FSA 3 also wanted to

show that there was a different way to earn a living. He mentioned:

I feel especially like the young boy athletes in our community and I'm the perfect role

model…[to show] that it's possible and it can be done. Somebody from such a small city

like ours could go on, get a college degree, go play in the NFL and make that realistic for

those types of kids.

FSA 3 wanted to use his experience as an inspiration to show young kids an alternative route to

succeed.

FSA 1 also explains that the motivation to graduate from college came from the fact that

he also would be the first in his family to graduate from college. He mentioned:

Nobody in my family ever graduated from a four-year college, so I was setting precedent.

I was changing the floor in my family. It wasn't just, 'Oh you know, you go get an

associate degree or…you wait 15 to 20 years and then you go on and move on to get an

accreditation,' or something to that effect…I had to finish for myself, to prove something

to my family, to set a new precedent.

Similar to FSA 3, FSA 4 shared experiences that being the first one in his family to graduate

college was a pivotal motivational factor when he arrived at State University. This motivation

185

only increased and strengthened the closer he got to graduation. Because of the opportunity afforded to him, he utilized these key moments to focus on graduation.

Alternatives to football. In addition to being the first person in his immediate family to graduate from college and acting as a role model for the young boys in his community, FSA 3 realized that watching his father perform labor jobs his entire life provoked him to seek an alternative career path. FSA 3 witnessed his father deal with health issues related to his employment: "I knew that wasn't something I wanted to do. I would say that was definitely something that made me want to go to school and get my education." FSA 3 believed that getting an education and ultimately graduating from college would put him and his family in a better situation where they did not have to work physically demanding jobs.

Part of FSA 2's motivation to graduate from college came after he suffered an injury playing football. When explaining this motivation, he stated:

> I always felt like graduating high school and graduating college, it's something that you should do, like it's part of the process. As I got older, as I became more aware, it hit me especially when I got my injury…I definitely think the injury accelerated things for me because I knew I needed a plan B. Once I [got injured] I was like, 'Oh I'd better start doing that now rather than later.' The NFL is not guaranteed. It was definitely a changing point from that aspect.

FSA 2 mentioned that he did not want to be another football player who was given the opportunity to come to college and did not graduate. He discusses about his predecessors and teammates who did not graduate and were unable to transition to life after football. Witnessing these types of situations was the last factor in his motivation. He said:

People are going to stop asking you for your autograph…walking down the street, nobody's going to stop and ask for a picture. For some guys, that's tough. They have a hard time transitioning. A lot of times too, it's all those same guys that didn't get a degree, that can't do anything else, and don't know anything else.

He continues to explain that he would see other former student-athletes that did not graduate come back to visit the academic center to get career advice about what they should do. Regarding this, he said:

I always told myself, I was like, 'I do not want to be one of those guys [who is not able to transition from playing football to real life].' I do not want to be a guy that graduated three years ago and gave the NFL a shot, didn't graduate, and now you're coming back. They were in the same position we were in as college students. I'm like, I didn't want to be that guy and I didn't want to be the guy that hung around the program because he, (a) has nothing else going for him and, (b) he couldn't move on from the college lifestyle, he couldn't move on from being a college football player because he didn't establish an identity. I always told myself that I am not going to be those guys. I'm not going to be the guy that didn't graduate and now he's back trying to utilize his college resources because he can't do anything else, because he didn't graduate or he doesn't have that diploma to work in his favor.

FSA 2 mentioned an interesting point that must be explored in greater detail. During his collegiate career, FSA 2 mentioned that he suffered a significant injury that forced him to "reevaluate [his] priorities." Suffering this injury was a "wake-up" call to begin figuring out a "plan B" if he could not play football any longer. This experience forced him to lean on those in his life that were part of his support network for guidance so he could manage how to deal with

the injury and create a "plan B" career path. The faculty member and former member of the board in control of athletics mentioned, "Suffering an injury is the first time a student-athlete realizes that there is a limited time on their playing career and that is when they truly explore campus and figure out what they want to do after football." Even though the other former student-athlete participants did not experience such injuries, this issue was important to explore because as a former student-athlete, the researcher understands that this is a common occurrence in college sports, especially at State University. This faculty member underscored the fact that either an injury or the lack of playing time can drastically alter the reality of the student-athletes: "I suspect for some students…if they're halfway through and there are injuries, I call that a forced shift. That is, they're forced now to begin to think about something other than what they came here for." Injuries underscore the importance of building one's support system before they enter a crisis, not after.

Refocus on graduation. Regardless, of where the reasoning originated from, each of these experiences illustrate that there was a specific motivation that drove these participants to graduate from State University. There are similarities with regards to the reasoning, but ultimately the individual determines why he wants to graduate. It must also be mentioned that there was a clear reason for wanting to graduate for many of the former student-athlete participants as they entered the college environment. However, it appears that as they interacted with individuals that were part of their support network, their reasoning for wanting to graduate intensified and became a driving force in their experience. This new more defined reasoning helped the participants refocus their attention not only on their academic course work but also on preparing themselves for life after football. As we shall see in the late college phase, the former student-athlete participants began to take a more active role in selecting their courses, interacting

with faculty, participating in campus groups, and attending campus functions to develop psychosocial skills on campus. This was all part of the forced shift that the former student-athletes experienced during the transition from the early college to the late college phase.

The athletic academic counselor and on-campus academic advisor both suggested that this forced shift is also impacted by the amount of playing time the student-athlete receives. If the student-athlete is not playing as much as he hoped, he will usually turn his focus towards graduating because he begins to realize that football is not guaranteed. Either way, the student-athlete has his own reasoning for wanting to graduate upon entering college and a shift happens over time for a variety of reasons, such as injury, lack of playing time/efficiency, or consistent interaction with a support network. This forced shift refocuses their attention on preparing themselves for life after college and after football.

Late College

After the first two years of encountering and building the support network to refine and refocus the meaning construction, late college essentially begins when the student-athletes have reached enough credits to be considered a junior, or redshirt sophomore where the student-athlete is academically considered a junior. At this period, the student-athletes have experienced two football seasons (and off-seasons), selected their majors, dealt with different types of coaches and faculty members, and have constructed a group of people they can rely on for guidance and who can help them balance, adapt, manage, and maneuver their environment better than when they first arrived on campus. Table 10 illustrates the graduating college grade point average, final major selected, current career, and number of times the former student-athlete earned a varsity letter.

Table 10

Former Student-Athlete Major, Current Career & Letterwinner Status

	GPA	Major	Current Career	Letterwinner Status
FSA 1	2.4-2.9	General Studies	Affordable Real Estate Developer	4x
FSA 2	2.4-2.9	Sport Management	College Football Coach	4x
FSA 3	2.4-2.9	Sociology	HS Associate AD/Head Football Coach	4x
FSA 4	2.4-2.9	Communications	College Football Coach	4x
FSA 5	3.0-3.4	General Studies	NFL Free Agent	4x

In addition, Figure 8 illustrates how the late the college phase fits with the entire model. One point worth noting is that while meaning construction is graphically depicted as a part of the transition phase of the model, it has deep influences on setting the foundation late college phase interpretation. This section explores the academic, athletic and social components as they relate to the experiences of the former student-athlete participants during this phase in their college experiences.
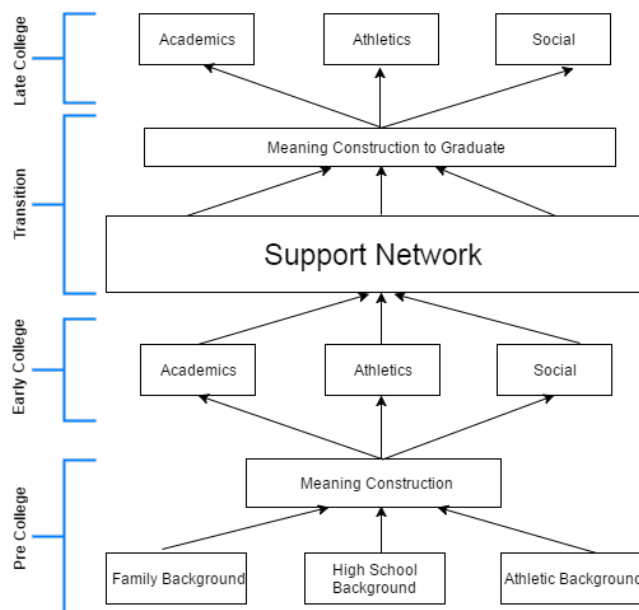
Figure 8. Porter model

Academics

As the former student-athlete participants became more accustomed to their environment, understood their academic expectations, sought more autonomy with class scheduling, understood how they learned individually, interacted with their support network, and moved beyond the initial core requirements, they were better able to manage their academic environment. When examining the academic component of the late college phase, it is also important to note the various graduation metrics for the former student-athlete participants. Revisiting these graduation rates is necessary because it displays the large number of Black football student-athletes that are still not graduating, despite the obvious progress being made. Table 11 provides an overview of the federal graduation rates for Black football student-athletes, the graduation success rate (used by the NCAA) for Black football student-athletes, the federal graduation rate for all student-athletes, and the graduation success rate for all student-athletes. The table also illustrates the expected graduation percentage for these former student-athlete participants.

Table 11

Federal Graduation Rate & Graduation Success Rate for Freshman Classes

	College Freshman Year	FGR (Blk/FB SA)	GSR (Blk/BF SA)	FGR (All SA)	GSR (All SA)
FSA 1	2004	45%	63%	76%	82%
FSA 2	2008	86%	69%	85%	89%
FSA 3	2007	60%	58%	79%	88%
FSA 4	2008	86%	69%	85%	89%
FSA 5	2002	58%	63%	65%	79%

Academic support. Each of the former student-athlete participants discussed requiring less academic support provided by the athletic department as time went on. Although it was

needed early on, as the former student-athletes progressed through their careers, they did not

need as much guidance from the academic staff members. FSA 2 best articulated this point:

> I remember it, this wasn't a pivotal point where I was a junior and I didn't have to go over
>
> [to the academic center] that much. [The academic counselor was] asking me 'Why
>
> haven't you signed up for classes? You need to come in you need to lead.' I finally told
>
> him one day, I'm like 'Look…no disrespect but I know what I need to do. I don't need to
>
> come in here and explain what I'm doing on campus. I know what I need to do. I
>
> appreciate the help and all. But I don't need to come in here, if I need your help I'll
>
> come.' And it wasn't to be an asshole, but it was almost like 'Hey…I got this. I know I
>
> need to schedule my class. I know I need to get priorities straight. I know all this.' I felt
>
> like he needed to go and help the guys that needed it. I felt like I didn't need it at that
>
> point in time. After that it wasn't in an overly rude manner. You know, he respected it
>
> and they backed off. If I needed to be in there I scheduled my own tutor. I'd do what I had
>
> to do. The first few years I definitely spoke to them more than I did my last years. It was
>
> never negative.

In the late college phase, study table is no longer mandatory, which means that the former

student-athlete participants have more flexibility in determining when and how to complete their

assignments. The student-athletes take a more active role in all things that deal with their

academic pursuits. FSA 1 specifically agreed with this sentiment:

> The [athletic academic support staff] were doing their job as it was probably described or
>
> as it was laid out as of, 'Hey look, if you need something, you need a computer? We got
>
> you. You need tutor? We got you. You need a writing tutor? We got you.' But when I

became a junior [I] took care of most of that stuff myself. If I needed extra help for a class or something like that, I would set it up with the professor.

Although the academic support initially supplied by the athletic department is vital for many student-athletes when they arrive on campus, their reliance on the support services is greatly reduced as they progress through the phases. They now have a better understanding of their environment and academic requirements and are in a better position to deal with their academics with less guidance.

Major/class selection. At this point in their collegiate careers, the student-athletes have already selected their major and they are making progress towards a degree with the classes they must now select. Unlike the early college phase, each of the former student-athlete participants noticed how they were better able to adapt to their academic course load after their first two years in college. FSA 3 observed:

It was like I was learning more about how I could base my studies [on topics] I was interested in. Once I was able to do that and get rid of all my original core classes, everything started to click for me. It started to make sense and everything became a lot easier for me. I was actually learning about stuff that I wanted to learn about.

FSA 3's experience also helps to highlight that once the former student-athlete participants completed their core requirements for their majors, they were able to select more courses that they had a genuine interest in. This also helped the former student-athlete participants maintain an academic focus while they enjoyed their scholarly pursuits.

Understanding their individual academic interests and weaknesses proved to be a key component in helping these former student-athletes survive, adapt, and thrive in their academic environment. Even when the specific major track proved to be too challenging for FSA 4, he was

able to shift academic directions to something that he was interested in and could manage from physical education to communications. FSA 4 also suggested that he was comfortable in switching his academic focus because he knew where his strengths were and which track would play to them. He said, "There is no way I would've felt comfortable doing that when I was an underclassman." It is clear that the student-athlete participants gained confidence in their academic navigation during the late college phase.

FSA 2 spent his late college phase taking more business – related classes to complete his minor and stated, "Just because I couldn't be a business major doesn't mean that I couldn't take business classes…and that's exactly what I did." Not only were the participants better able to adapt to their academic requirements, they were also free to take classes that interested them instead of focusing simply on the prerequisite classes. This made a significant difference in terms of grade performance in the late college phase.

Grade performance. As previously mentioned in the early college section, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) establish that academic performance is an important component in accessing the intellectual development of the student-athletes. However, they also note that "literature on student-athletes and intellectual development is scant" but do establish that "evidence in general suggests that student-athletes' intellectual integration into the academic domain is related to academic success" (p. 242). Essentially, how well the student-athletes develop intellectually is also connected to their academic success. With that being said, it should be noted that during the late college phase, grade performance of each of the former student-athlete participants improved. Most notably, FSA 5 commented, "I was a better college student than I was a high school student." When asked to elaborate on this comment, he stated, "Well it was two part…First I was able to select classes that interest me…and I [now] knew how to write better

papers and study and that sort of thing." Having the autonomy to select classes of interest along with being better able to do the required coursework was a great asset for FSA 5, which helps to explain why he believed he was a better student in college than in high school.

FSA 3, who previously mentioned that things began to "click" for him as he was able to get beyond his core courses, also noted, "after I was in college for a couple years, [I] realized how to do the work the professors wanted [me] to do…it really wasn't that hard." FSA 3 alluded to his development as he concluded by saying, "I easily got better grades during my junior and senior year…it wasn't even close."

Similarly, FSA 2 had academic struggles early on in his college experience and even failed a class. During the early part of the late college phase, he mentioned, "it was a bitch trying to get my grades up and all that but I finally did it and was accepted [into my preferred degree program." FSA 2's GPA at the conclusion of his sophomore year was not good enough to get him into the degree program he wanted. However, it was his ability to refocus during the late college phase after the previous failures and increase his GPA to gain acceptance into the program. He also said, "After having failed before, I knew what I needed to do and I got it done."

FSA 1 recalled that somewhere around his sophomore year, he started making his grade performance a competition with his teammates. However, it was not only the competition with his teammates for grade, but "the ability to know what the professors, GSIs (Graduate Student Instructors) or whoever was looking for…I think that was the biggest difference." His previous experiences taught him how to best complete his assignments to the satisfaction of his professors. He continues, "my grades weren't really all that bad during [the early part of my college career] but they really improved [in my] junior and senior year."

Last, with regard to his grade performance in the late college phase, FSA 4 had a slightly higher academic grade performance compared to his grade performance during the early college phase. As previously noted, he did switch majors from physical education to communications and this shift "helped [him] because [he] felt that [he] was a stronger communication major than a [physical education] major." He comments, "I felt that communications were geared to my strengths as a student." Following this switch he noted, "My grades went up because I felt like I knew what I was doing in those classes." FSA 4's boost in grade performance illustrates that he developed as a student as the result of his growth and combination of major/class fit.

Faculty interaction. In this phase, the former student-athletes were better able to manage and foster their relationships with faculty members and created a more conducive learning environment. FSA 1 specifically mentioned the type of faculty members he sought out:

> Not at the highest level, but just lower level faculty members that I could just go and talk to and get some good interesting insights…That only came after I felt comfortable with football and just going to class, doing papers and that thing.

When dealing with faculty members, the former student-athletes indicated that they were able to find, interact with, and develop relationships with faculty members that were willing to help and share perspectives with the former student-athlete. FSA 2 observed that once he got into his major, the professors were supportive and accommodating to his football responsibilities. In particular, he stated, "I really enjoyed some of my [major] professors. They were very kind…and helpful." This became particularly evident when FSA 2 suffered a significant injury and had some physical difficulty attending class. With this particular situation, he mentioned, "The professors were generally accommodating if you showed interest and willing to work…I sent them an email after the surgery and they continued to show their support and willingness to work

with me." These kinds of experiences highlight the fact that as the former student-athletes progressed through the last two years of their academic experience, they were wiser and better equipped to find supportive faculty members to aid them in a variety of different situations. The improved faculty interactions seemed to have been a major factor for these former student-athletes.

Of the former student-athlete participants, FSA 3 did encounter some unreceptive behaviors from a professor but was able to turn it into a learning experience. FSA 3 stated:

Going into my senior year I took the Spanish double accelerated one so I did it the fall and the winter one where you get one full credit. [I] needed two to graduate. That was probably the most time I actually spent with a professor at [State University]. I spent a lot of time with my Spanish teacher to make sure I passed that class…. I do feel like there were certain times she didn't want to spend her time with me. Honestly, I could say because I was so far behind in that part of my education especially with Spanish. I took it in high school but it was very minimum and then going three years with absolutely no Spanish that's something you lose over time. Going into my senior year I was like a high school kid with my Spanish and I was dealing with this teacher who's used to teaching kids that can probably speak it fluently. I could definitely see her irritation with me with that. At the end of the day, she still was very cooperative and worked with me.

The experience described by FSA 3 showcases his ability to deal with a faculty member that did not seem to want to be bothered with him. This experience highlights his development from the early college phase to the late college phase. In the late college phase, the former student-athletes arrived at the late college phase and did what was necessary to achieve their desired academic outcome, even when dealing with faculty members who were not the most receptive.

Athletics

The athletic component examines how the former student-athlete participants managed their athletically – related requirements and interactions during the late college phase. This section explores how the participants dealt with the demands on their time, the perspective coaches had towards academic pursuits of the participants, and the interactions the participants had with the coaches in the late college phase.

Time demands. As the former student-athletes grew accustomed to not only the practice schedule but also how practices operated, it was easier for them to manage their overall schedule because they knew what was expected of them. FSA 1 stated:

Same thing with football, I don't have to be sitting in the meeting room 15 minute early. I can come right when the meeting is about to start…[and know that] I'm good. I know what's going on and your coaches respect you.

FSA 4 mentioned that "the coaches needed to trust you…trust that they know what kind of player you are and that you'll be ready for the game." Coaches' trust and understanding of their players only came as a result of the former student-athletes demonstrating their abilities during the early part of their collegiate career. FSA 1 said that when he was a freshman he would arrive at the football meetings 15 minutes early but realized that "[he] wasn't getting no extra brownie points for arriving that early." As he began to better understand his surroundings and demonstrate his ability on the field, he was able to meet the expectation of the coaches relatively easily, which meant that he had more time available to devote to non-football activities.

One factor that guided the development of participants' time management was learning from older teammates. When asked how they learned to manage their time during the late college phase, FSA 3 mentioned, "I learned by experience…and watching some of the older guys…they

really showed [me] how much time [I] really had." FSA 3 specifically referenced learning how the meetings, practices, and lifting schedules were usually structured during the year. He also says, "The older guys knew how long the meetings and practices were supposed to last and…were able to negotiate different times for things like lifting and film study." The participants watched and emulated how the older teammates were able to negotiate different times during the day to complete their football—related requirements. FSA 3 later mentioned, "I remember trying to negotiate a different time to watch film…and the coaches were okay with that, which kind of surprised me." Not only watching, but trying out some of the tactics the older guys demonstrated helped the participants create a schedule in which they could better manage the demands on their time. FSA 5 adds:

> I used to watch the older guys take [practice or opponent game] film home after practice…while I was in the football building doing the same thing…it wasn't until I became an upperclassman, when I asked the coach for the game films so I could watch it on my own time.

Again, this experience showcases that by watching other teammates, the participants learned how to manage their coaches and football requirements. This, in turn, allowed time to participate in campus activities and groups or to devote to academic pursuits.

Organizational skills also increased during the late college phase as participants had more time to hone them. FSA 4 said, "I used some of the same stuff…I learned during my freshman year…it really kept me organized." FSA 4 was speaking about the tools and techniques that he learned from the academic support staff early on during his collegiate career, like creating a schedule for himself that listed everything he had to do. FSA 4 goes on to say that what he learned "really helped [him] to be able to manage [his] time."

Those experiences highlight three emerging themes that helped the former student-athlete participants better manage their time during the late college phase: (a) experience, (b) watching teammates, and (c) using the lessons learned during the early college phase. The former student-athlete participants were able to put the experiences and lessons learned into action during the late college phase, which helped them to better manage the time demands placed on them.

Coaches and academic pursuits. In the late college phase, the only role that some coaches played in terms of the academic pursuits was to encourage the former student-athletes to graduate, if they played any role at all. As previously mentioned, FSA 4 stated that his head coach encouraged him to finish his degree before trying out for the NFL. This is an important point to consider because during the early college phase, it was noted that the majority of the coaches had a nonchalant attitude towards the academic pursuits of the student-athletes. As long as the student-athletes were doing what they needed to do in order to pass the class, the coaches were not significantly involved. Therefore, it is significant that FSA 4 discussed having a head coach who encouraged him to finish his college degree.

In a similar manner, FSA 1 had a coach continuously stress the importance of obtaining his college degree. However, besides the select coaches that continued to encourage the student-athletes to graduate, there was no interaction regarding the coaching staff and the academic pursuits of the student-athletes. FSA 2 observed, "it seemed like the older guys were expected to…handle their business in the classroom." This may help to explain why the coaches were not actively involved in the academics of these former student-athlete participants. However, FSA 1 commented that "the coaches…I guess…really only focused on the younger guys and the recruits…there really wasn't too much interaction from the coaches…in terms of academics." These comments underscore that there was not much interaction of the coaches with the

academic matters for these former student-athlete participants. The participants alluded to the coaches paying more attention to the younger guys on the team and simply expecting the older guys to take care of their academics.

Nonetheless, one thing that remained consistent for a majority of the coaches was that they were only involved in the academic pursuits of their student-athletes if punishments needed to be rendered for skipping class or missing tutoring appointments. FSA 3 observed, "Now that I think about it…I don't think I had any conversation with any coach about how class was going or what I wanted to do after football." Although the coaches could have taken a more prominent role in the educational pursuits of the student-athletes, the experiences of the former student-athlete participants illustrate that most coaches do not ask or get involved with the academics of the student-athletes.

Coaching interactions. The sustained consistent performance of the former student-athletes along with their understanding of how to best deal with the coaches played a vital role in helping them to manage their athletics responsibilities during the late college phase. By the time he became an upperclassmen, FSA 5 commented, "I knew what the coaches wanted from me…and I knew exactly what I could receive from them…[which was] not very much…but I had a better understanding of that." FSA 2 made a similar observation:

> Once I established my position on the team…everything else was much easier for me…I
> learned how to deal with the coaches by watching some of the older guys when I was a
> freshman…and when [I] became an [upperclassmen]…I was able to really put some of
> those lessons in action.

Because FSA 2 had been receiving a tremendous amount of playing time since his first collegiate football season, he understood what the coaches expected of him and how to best manage those

expectations. FSA 3 observed that by the time he began a junior it was clear that "as long as [he] was messing up in class and playing good on the field…the coaches pretty much didn't bother [him]…but messing up at practice or at the game…got their attention real quick."

The former student-athletes not only recognized the level of performance that was expected of them, but they also knew what kind of help, if any, they could expect to receive from the coaches. In most cases outside of dealing with football, this help was minimal at best. FSA 4 clearly noted that the interactions from the coaches largely depended on the on – field performance of the student-athletes. He mentioned:

> If I had a good game…like you would be cool with the coaches. You had a lot more
> flexibility [in the football building] because the coaches knew what kind of player you
> were and it showed on the field…I didn't have to participate in every rep at practice and
> could go check-in with the trainers.

The challenge with what FSA 4 alluded to is that if the student-athlete had a bad performance, they would run the risk of being degraded by the coaches or benched. FSA 1 observed that "if you played well…you were the coach's best friend...if you don't…you were the worst person." These kinds of interactions remained consistent throughout the collegiate careers of the former student-athletes because as FSA 2 mentioned, the football coaches are there to "win games. Anything else is a fantasy." Therefore, even in the late college phase, much of the interactions with coaches centered on the performance of the student-athletes.

Social

The social component in the late college phase focuses on how the former student-athlete participants managed their environment during their later years on campus. By this time, the

participants would have spent at least two full academic years on campus and this section discusses their perspective of the environment as upperclassmen.

During the late college phase, all five of the former student-athlete participants began engaging with more campus activities compared to when they were in the early college phase. In addition, the participants recognized which non-student-athlete peers they could engage with and build effective relationships without being concerned about any prejudicial perceptions about them.

Environments. Experiencing both the hostile and welcoming environments during the early college phase helped the former student-athlete participants adjust during the late college phase. They understood that every interaction with non-student-athlete peers may not have been positive, but they were able to manage that environment much better compared to the early college phase. When discussing about engaging with non-student-athlete peers, FSA 2 mentioned:

> I could relate to the Black population and the White population. A lot of times there are guys that I play with on a team that were also men that couldn't identify with a White crowd. I was like 'You guys are going to have a rough time growing up in the world that you don't know how to relate, and talk to, and carry a conversation with somebody that you [don't] think you have anything in common with'…I'm like 'If you can only talk to one race, or one type of person, or one demographic area, you are limiting yourself in terms of what you can do for the rest of your life.' I never wanted to be that guy where I was like 'I'm always talking to Black people, I'm always talking to people that I have the same interest in.'

These experiences highlight the fact that these former student-athlete peers wanted to get out of their athletic bubble and interact with their peers in a variety of different settings.

Similarly, FSA 5 mentioned that as he began to meet and interact with other students, especially those that shared his religious beliefs, he became to develop deeper and more positive relationships with his non-student-athlete peers. He mentioned:

> I began to hang around people that [were] more beneficial for success…it wasn't necessarily faculty, it was more [of] other students. God began to put different students around me that I looked up to and that were headed in the same direction…that I could take advice from them and it was more of a student-to-student type of ministry and encouragement.

The late college phase is when FSA 5 moved on from dealing with the hostile environments that were created by interactions with some students and was able to develop stronger relationships with non-student-athlete peers that held similar beliefs and interests. Staff members also believe that many football student-athletes are better able to interact with their environments in the late college phase. The assistant athletic director mentioned, "I think that once [the football student-athletes] get out of their comfort zones, they get forced to go meet professors and learn how to deal with other students that don't look like them…and this doesn't usually happen until they are juniors." The academic counselor also noted:

> Sometimes [the football student-athletes] feel intimidated by other students because those students might sound smarter in class or whatever…and because of that our [football student-athletes] won't engage much in class because they don't want to sound dumb…but I think that later on...as they get more comfortable with campus, they create better relationships with students on campus.

FSA 1 also stated, "Besides my teammates, the more I got to interact with students on campus, I had some great experiences and discussions with them." As he began to interact more with students he noticed, "[the students] had general stereotypes about football players and when I noticed that and the more I hung around them, their stereotypes and ideas began to change." These responses demonstrate that the former student-athlete participants were able to deal with the environment at the late college phase, which had a positive impact on their overall experiences. The former student-athletes figured out how to deal with students and find environments that consisted of non-student-athlete peers that helped the former student-athletes learn, develop, and enhance their experience.

Teammate interaction. As noted previously during the early college and transition phase, teammates played critical roles in helping the student-athletes adjust to the college environment. Similarly, during the late college phase, in many instances teammates develop friendships that last long after they leave college. FSA 2 and FSA 3 both described that connection like a brotherhood or bond that was created. Even of the younger players, FSA 4 said, "when you become a older guy, you now have to look after some of the freshman like the older guys looked after you." It appears that the student-athletes were well aware of the role the teammates played in guiding younger teammates, just as they were guided by their older teammates.

Teammates were helpful to the former student-athlete participants, as previously discussed. However, if certain teammates were not on a similar developmental path as the former student-athlete participants, they begin to separate themselves from those teammates as they progressed through their collegiate career. FSA 5 explained this experience with teammates this way:

A lot of my teammates, even to this day would say that I'm kind of standoffish. I'm not

necessarily standoffish, I understand that hanging around certain people will get you in

certain situations…I just began to hang around with people that were aspiring to be

architects, that were aspiring to be engineers, that were aspiring to be doctors and

lawyers…just hanging around these people gave me the encouragement that I needed to

overcome, especially as some of my teammates and I began taking different journeys.

Even though FSA 5 was close to some of his teammates, he began to distance himself from other

teammates because they were prone to find trouble. Therefore, teammates played a vital role in

the lives of the former football student-athletes. There were some teammates whose goals and

aspirations aligned with these participants and whom they could draw strength and support from.

Regardless, the former student-athletes created symbiotic relationships with some teammates and

learned what not to do by watching others.

Student groups. Involvement with campus groups and attending campus events also

proved to be a valuable learning experience for the former student-athlete participants. However,

it must also be noted that only when the participants became comfortable with their environment

and managed their academic and athletic requirements did they venture outside the athletic

department and explore other events and campus groups that provided value to their collegiate

experience. Participating with campus groups and attending campus events proved to be a

valuable experience because it exposed the former student-athlete participants to previously

unknown aspects of the social life at State University. The experience of FSA 2 accurately

captured how he perceived his interaction with the non-student-athlete peers and with the

campus community at large:

Events, I would randomly go to different things on campus. More so from like the sports, business side. I was really intrigued by that. There would be a couple [events that] I would go to, with some other people. I'd just try to learn stuff. No [I didn't participate in any groups]…but [I would try to attend as many events as I could.]

FSA 1 was also able to find a campus group, with the help of an on campus staff member that shared some of his interests and incorporated that into his athletic life. He stated:

We ultimately put together a really cool like men's day [program]. We brought in some speakers. We had it down in the athletic department. It was really a cool thing. I couldn't attend. I had knee surgery that day but we actually ended up putting something together, not for the student athletes but athletes in general, that was focused on ... It was a male – centric organization that was talking about what our position was supposed to be in the world and moving forward in the world…it was really cool.

FSA 1 was able to bring two of his passions together into a program that he helped to organize. He enjoyed being part of this group because it "helped to introduce [him] to new people and new ideas." This seemed to have been an invaluable experience for FSA 1, especially during his late college stage when he did not have to really worry about his status on the team.

Similarly, FSA 5 mentioned that during the late college phase he began to "get together with people from [the gospel group that he was apart of], [he] began to reach out to other teams not just within the football realm." FSA 5 also found a student group on campus that he was passionate about and began not only meeting new people but was also able to create lasting beneficial relationships with those non-student-athlete peers.

Although FSA 3 and FSA 4 were not significantly active with student groups on campus, they each found ways to engage with the campus community. FSA 3 mentioned that he

participated in some community service events and intramural sports so that he could "be around other normal [students] on campus and [did not have to be around] football players all the time." FSA 4 took the advice of people from his support network and began to engage with faculty and students who he had a shared interest. He mentioned this was critical for him because "it was going to [better prepare him for the future]."

Post College

While the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of former Black football student-athletes, their experiences made it clear that an exploration of the post college phase was warranted. Specifically, the post college phase is the last section of this model and denotes the period of time after the late college phase when the student-athletes graduate from college. Two themes emerged from this study regarding this last phase, graduation bounded by forces and careers. Findings indicate that even though the former student-athlete participants graduated from State University, specific forces had a direct impact on their degree completion, which ultimately bounded their graduation. This section will explore this concept in greater detail along with current careers of the former student-athlete participants. Figure 4 illustrates how this last component fits together with the overall model.
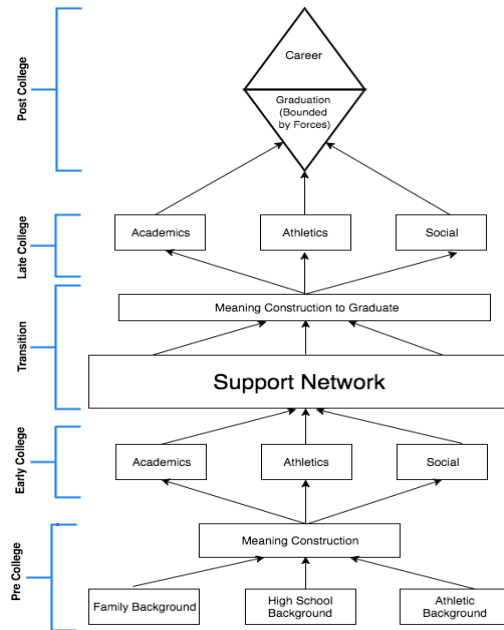
Figure 4. Porter model: Conceptual framework for football student-athlete academic success

Graduation (Bounded by Forces)

As previously discussed, the time commitment the former student-athlete participants were required to dedicate to their sport coupled with their academic requirements was a challenge for them throughout their collegiate careers. Even classes that the participants were required to take had to fall outside a specifically designated time period that was solely for football – related activities.

Although during the late college phase, the former student-athletes articulated experiences of being able to better manage their athletic and academic requirements, football was still an influential force. FSA 2 had one of the most profound comments regarding this topic. He stated:

> As I think about it now…yeah my senior year I knew what I needed to do in the
> classroom and I wasn't stressin' about anything football related…but no matter how
> much [I] tried to get away from it…football controlled damn near everything…like if I

209

wanted to get another major…could I really? I don't think so…well…as along as it didn't conflict with practice.

FSA 2 refers to the impact that football had on his daily activities during college. He continues, "For example…when I graduated…yeah I did a lot of good things at college but it was almost like football was the dark cloud over [my] head controlling everything."

FSA 1 previously articulated that he initially wanted to major in business and graduate in three and a half years from the institution. However, he also mentioned that because of his football – related responsibilities, he was not going to be able to major in business. Exploring this idea in more detail, FSA 1 stated:

Think about it like this…it's like a prescription…or like a mold…where you have to fit inside and sports tries to control your entire life. On one hand it's a great opportunity but on the other…I don't think people realize how…it's not just football but the system controls life. So yeah…you want to graduate but no one tells you that there are some majors that won't work with your football schedule.

In a similar manner, FSA 3 commented, "Yeah, many of [my teammates and I graduated] but we still didn't have the [flexibility] that everyone else has…and it's like even when we graduate football was still there controlling everything." Football dominated their academic, athletic, and social experiences. For them, it was the reason that allowed them to attend State University. So, in essence, football was their college experience, creating a path where football was at the center of every decision athletes made, for better or for worse.

Many participants noted the centrality of football in their academic experiences. When discussing his decision to transfer from physical education to a communications major, FSA 4 said, "Like I just said, [PE] was getting too much for me because of football and everything…but

if it wasn't for football, I wouldn't have made it to [State University]…so they basically got you by the balls." FSA 5 commented:

> Whether you want to or not…[the football players] are directly and indirectly influenced by what football allows…I realized that after graduation because I was listening to how my friends [spoke] about all the things they did in college…and I couldn't do any of that.

The comments of the football coach helps to clarify what the former student-athlete participants describe in their experiences. He stated:

> I'm [going] to tell you like this…I tell all the guys they need to graduate and that is first and foremost because without that they won't get far in life. When guys get older like around their junior year, they realize that they football controls most of their life…and that's when we have another conversation. So I say to them, 'Listen here…this system is designed to control damn near everything about your experience here. More importantly, the majors you select have to fall outside practice time…so even when you graduate…it's almost like [you are] graduating in football…because that is what the system is designed to do.' Many times the guys seemed surprised that I said it to them like that…but then they realize like 'yeah coach…you right.' The point is that when everything a kid does in college revolves around making sure he's at practice and that nothing conflicts with practice, even graduation is controlled by the system because it lets you know when/how you can graduate.

Football exerts a significant amount of influence over the academic schedules and major choices of the student-athletes. This means, even though a student-athlete graduates, they do so in a major that could accommodate their schedules.

211

Career

An unanticipated finding from this study relates participant majors to their current careers. Table 10 illustrates the current careers of the former student-athletes included in this study. Four of the five former student-athlete participants are currently engaged in careers that involve football despite concentrating on different majors. This was a new finding and was not related to any previous literature concerned with the experiences of student-athletes. As previously mentioned, most of the participants discussed wanting to play football in the NFL when they arrived to State University while simultaneously being unsure of what major to select.

Table 10

Former Student-Athlete Major, Current Career & Letterwinner Status

	Coll. GPA	Major	Current Career	Letterwinner Status
FSA 1	2.4-2.9	General Studies	Affordable Real Estate Developer	4x
FSA 2	2.4-2.9	Sport Management	College Football Coach	4x
FSA 3	2.4-2.9	Sociology	HS Associate AD/Head Football Coach	4x
FSA 4	2.4-2.9	Communications	College Football Coach	4x
FSA 5	3.0-3.4	General Studies	NFL Free Agent	4x

Findings revealed that while football limited major choices for student-athletes, they at least engaged in determining their career interest after college. However, exploring what to do after college was only an afterthought. At times, this only occurred after confronting an event that impacted the participant's ability to fully engage with football during college or after college. For example, when discussing his current career and how he discovered his interest, FSA 2 mentioned it was not until he suffered an injury that he began to truly consider what he wanted to do after his playing career was finished. He stated:

[After my injury is] when I started to [reach] out to people that I knew and I got an internship and figured out that the coaching route was the route that I wanted to take but

[initially] I never wanted to be a coach…when I suffered my injury examining career options gave me something to do while I was at rehab…I tried some different things…I did a half day of my shadow internship at this…financial advising [company] and I wanted to blow my brains out about an hour into it…I had a couple experiences like that, just trying different things.

When he ultimately settled on pursuing college coaching, he stated, "I love football and realized coaching was something I could be good at…and still be around football."

After college, FSA 4 discussed a similar experience with regards to ultimately deciding on his career path. He stated:

I tried out for the [NFL] and made some practice squads but never really made it on [the active roster]…one of my coaches said that I could be a good college coach because of the way I understand [my position]…he was the first one to put that idea in my head…and I ran with it…I've been involved with football from an early age and this was a way I could be around something I enjoyed doing.

In a similar way, FSA 2 tried to play professional football in the NFL and CFL (Canadian Football League) before returning to his hometown:

Upon returning to work [at my old] high school, he began working with the athletic director in [monitoring] the budget…then received some guidance counselor type of work…specifically helping kids [apply] for college scholarships…then ended up getting the head football coaching job [and] also took the head track coaching job.

He selected this career path because as previously mentioned, he wanted to be a role model for the kids in his city and believed that "This is the perfect way to help [the kids] realize they can come from [our city], go to college, and achieve their dreams." When asked about his feelings

towards his job, he stated, "I can coach football and be around to inspire the kids…it's a win-win situation."

Of the four former student-athlete participants, only FSA 1 is not currently in a football –related career. It was, however, his first choice, as he tried to play professional football in the NFL. One aspect that still illuminates how the deep bonds football has impacted these student-athlete's careers is that his current employer is a donor to State University and a fan of the football team. When discussing his current employment, he stated:

> I tried to play in the NFL for a couple years…but during that time I stayed in contact with [my current employer] who I originally met while playing football at State University…When I realized that my playing career was over…because of the injuries I suffered…I originally got a job at [a rival company] and when [my current employer] heard about that, he told me to come work for him and that he would call the CEO of the rival company...[my current employer] has a significant amount of influence with the NFL and that's how I was able to strengthen my relationship with him.

Although football is not an active part of FSA 1's current career, football was still used as a means to be introduced to and meet his current employer. Therefore, whether directly or indirectly, football played a role in the graduation and on the current career choices of all former student-athlete participants.

Summary of Model

The model of football student-athlete academic success that has been built throughout this chapter organizes the football student-athlete experience into five phases: pre-college, early college, transition, late college, and post college. The pre-college phase elaborates on the family, high school, and athletic backgrounds of the student-athletes. This is helpful in obtaining a

complete understanding of influences and how they construct meaning as the student-athletes enter the college environment. The early college phase is the first time when the student-athletes encounter the conflicting requirements of their academic and athletic requirements. The student-athletes also experience a variety of interactions from faculty, staff and their non-student-athlete peers. These experiences are both positive and negative but all create a context in which the student-athletes have to figure out how to navigate their environment. The early college phases typically encompass the first two years of the college experience.

Between the early college and late experience lies the transition phase. During the transition phase, student-athletes encounter and develop a support network that provides them with academic support and a safe place to vent, helps them to better navigate the college environment, balance life away from home, and provides guidance for life after sports. These interactions not only help the student-athletes but also further shape and refine how they construct meaning as they approach the late college phase.

The late college phase of this model examines the academic, athletic, and social components, similar to the early college phase. However, the difference at the late college phase is that the student-athletes are better able to manage their academic and athletic requirements while also having improved interactions with peers and faculty members.

Last, the post college phase framed the graduation of these former student-athletes as being directly influenced by football. This point was previously alluded to in the previous phases but explored in more detail. However, it is not only graduation but also the current career choices of the former student-athlete participants that seemed to have been directly or indirectly influenced by their participation in college athletics.

The experiences of the former student-athlete participants were instrumental in creating the model developed throughout this chapter, which helps to bring clarity to the experiences of the participants in this study. The model suggests that the pre-college characteristics shape how the participants constructed meaning before entering college. The early college phase is when the former student-athlete participants began to experience the conflicting pressures imposed on them from both their academic and athletic responsibilities while managing a variety of different interactions from faculty and peers. This phase lasted approximately the first two years of their college experience when they are learning how to best navigate their environment. Following the early college phase is a transition period in which the former student-athlete participants develop and engage with a support network of people that provide a variety of assistance that solidifies their meaning construction to graduate. The late college phase is where the former student-athletes take what they learned during the early college phase and from their interactions with the support network and apply it to the academic, athletic, and social components of their collegiate experience. The post college phase is the last phase of this model and is where the former student-athletes graduated from the institution and began exploring career options and realized how much of their experience was influenced by football.

Much of the current research portrays dire graduation rates and college experiences of Black male football student-athletes (Benson, 2000; Harper, 2009; Sellers, 1992). While the end result of the Black former student-athletes in this sample was degree completion, the purpose of this study was to analyze and offer detailed insight into the process of how Black student-athletes navigated their environment and managed the conflicting pressures of their academic and athletic responsibilities to graduate from State University. The following chapter further elaborates on this discussion through organizational theory lens. Utilizing the organizational theory lens is

critical in analyzing the experiences of these former student-athletes in the context of the

organizational systems because it affected every aspect of their college experience. In addition,

this perspective foregrounds the system as a whole, the variety of parts inherent within the

system, and its full impact on Black football student-athletes.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

According to statistical data, Black male student-athletes graduate at the lowest rates of any student-athlete group on the college campus (Harper et al., 2013; NCAA, 2014). Harper et al., (2013) found that Black male student-athletes graduated from their institution within a six year period at a rate of 50.2%, compared to 66.9% for student-athletes overall, and 72.8% for undergraduates overall. Previous research on Black male student-athletes also found that these student-athletes "matriculate from high schools and environments with inferior academic resources and tend to be less academically prepared" (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007, p. 207). In addition, Beamon (2008) notes that the need to continuously recruit highly talented student-athletes to maintain team standing and performance creates contradictory pressures, which causes conflict between the student and athlete roles of these individuals.

Despite this outlook, this study focused on those Black male student-athletes who completed the necessary academic requirements, graduated from a Division I institution, and established professional careers. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black football student-athletes that graduated from State University. The question guiding this research was: How did Black male football student-athletes manage to graduate while being part of a Division I team at a research-intensive institution?

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, this study is significant for several key reasons. First, current research regarding the experiences of Black football student-athletes who were able to graduate from their institution, despite the demands that student-athletes face, is significantly lacking. Second, current trends illustrate that Black men comprise the majority of players on Division I football teams nationwide are least likely to graduate from their institution (NCAA, 2015). This issue is problematic and therefore needs to be addressed. Last, understanding the

experiences of Black football student-athletes who have graduated could help faculty and academic support members with insights when providing support to these student-athletes.

This research was designed and conducted as a qualitative case study in accordance with Merriam (2009). Merriam defines the qualitative case study as "an in-depth analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). The "bounded system" can also be thought of as the unit of analysis. Hence the unit of analysis for this case study was State University operating within the context of the intercollegiate athletics system.

There were two conceptual frameworks that guided this dissertation. First, Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) student-athlete academic success model provided important insight to understand student-athlete academic success, discussing cognitive/non-cognitive variables, and the relationship to the institutional environment (Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Hu & Kuh, 2002; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Sellers, 1992). This model illustrates how these variables do not exist in isolation and all play a role in the overall experience of the student-athletes.

The second conceptual framework that guided this dissertation was Muwonge's (2012) organizational framework, built upon research from Scott (2003), Thompson (1967), and Parson (1960). This framework provided an understanding for how organizations function. Because the unit of analysis for this case study was State University, having a foundational understanding of organizational theory was critical to situating the experiences of the participants in context.

Criterion sampling was used to select qualified participants for this study. A total of five former student athletes and seven faculty/staff members were selected for this study. The criterion for the former student-athletes was as follows: (a) identified as African American or Black male, (b) received a full athletic scholarship to play football at State University, (c) played

219

football between 2003 and 2010, (d) and graduated from State University. The criteria for the faculty and staff members selected for this study was a minimum of three years as an employee at "State University and daily or weekly interactions with football student-athletes. These interactions included time during class, academic advising appointments, and football practice at the institution. During this selection process, in accordance with the snowball sampling method discussed by Patton (2002), the researcher solicited recommendations for faculty and staff members to select participants that could provide rich insight about the experiences of these student-athletes.

Each interview with former student-athlete participants, faculty, and staff members lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The decision was made to interview the faculty and staff first because they played a critical role in shaping the experiences of the student-athlete (Comeaux & Harrison, 2008). Their insights and comments were considered to formulate questions for the former student-athlete participants. Only after all of the faculty and staff interviews were completed did the former student-athlete interviews take place. After all of the former student-athlete interviews were finished, each former student-athlete participant completed a demographic survey.

By nature of his job responsibilities, the researcher had access to the alumni profiles, player profiles, media guides, and a demographic survey. These were the documents used to verify information provided by the student-athletes. Last, the researcher was permitted access to observe football student-athletes currently enrolled at SU during several academic counseling appointments, which further provided additional information.

Each of the interviews were transcribed and sent back to the participants for review. Once approved, the interviews and documents were coded for analysis following the guidelines that

Merriam (2009) presented. Open and axial coding methods were used to complete the analysis. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher utilized the following methods explained in detail in Chapter 3: triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, bracketing, and the search for the negative case, which was capturing the experiences that were counter to the narrative.

Model for Understanding Black Student-Athlete Academic Success

In Chapter 5, the researcher discusses the findings by explaining and discussing the Porter model created in Chapter 4 (Figure 4). To facilitate this discussion, Chapter 5 is organized by each of the five phases of the Porter model, providing additional insight into understanding the experiences of these former student-athletes. To situate this analysis within the context of organizational theory, the proceeding section discusses the experiences of these former student-athletes as a part of a larger system (i.e., the system of intercollegiate athletics) while attending and graduating from State University. At that point, the researcher situates the findings in the work of Thompson (1967) and Scott (2003) as well as later concepts expanded by Muwonge (2012) and Shinn (2013). This allows the researcher to discuss findings through the lenses of organizational theory. To end the chapter, implications for research and practice and concluding thoughts are presented.
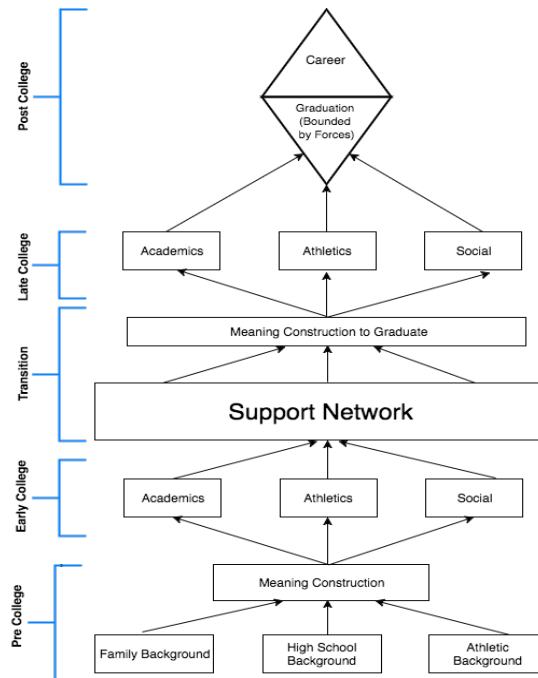
Figure 4. Porter model

Pre-College

The pre-college phase denotes the experiences and background of the student-athletes before beginning their collegiate career. Similar to Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model, the pre-college phase is the starting point for the Porter model. One difference is that Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model's pre-college phase includes the following components: pre-college, educational experiences and preparation, and individual attributes. Drawing from the findings of this study, the educational experience component was renamed to high school background. This decision was made because the educational experience component did not accurately capture the experiences of the former student-athletes presented in this study because it was not as encompassing as high school background. This research found that educational experiences could be influenced by the high school background, which was missing from the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model. While the researcher does concur with Comeaux and Harrison (2011) that high school GPA can be impacted by "access to qualified teachers, culturally relevant

222

curricula, clean and safe facilities, advanced placement classes, honors classes, and other college preparatory services" (p. 329), there are deeper connections from the high school experience that link grade performance to "motivation, aspirations, and expectation of college" (p. 239). Though Comeaux and Harrison (2011) discuss these aspects as part of the high school experiences, this research situates motivation, aspirations and expectations of college as an idea that extends from high school and contributes to the meaning construction component of the pre-college phase in the Porter model. In particular, the model suggests that meaning construction occurs throughout the student-athletes' development.

Another missing component in Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model was an examination of the athletic background. The data revealed that the athletic background played a major role in the pre-college phase for the student-athletes, considering the amount of time and significance they attributed to playing football.

Figure 5 illustrates that the pre-college phase includes family background (e.g., family socioeconomic status, family composition, and educational level), high school background (e.g., high school location, resources, diversity, and college academic background), athletic background (e.g., coaching experience, playing experience, and performance), and the meaning construction components.

Family Background

Previous research on the academic preparation of Black male football student-athletes, especially those that attend a PWI, suggests that these student-athletes enter college from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and from high schools with substandard academic resources (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Comeaux, 2007; Hawkins, 2010; Sellers, 1992, 2000). It is suggested that these factors play a significant role in the college academic preparation of Black

student-athletes. This study reveals several areas that should be reexamined when discussing this subject.

This study finds that not all Black football student-athletes originate from similar family or socioeconomic backgrounds. While it is true that many do come from single – parent households, this study reveals that other family compositions are also present. Harper and Nichols (2008) agree with this observation and found that Black students originated from a wide range of home backgrounds, in their study. Therefore, just as Black students comprise a subpopulation with many characteristics, this also holds true for the student-athlete subgroup. Reynolds, Fisher, and Cavil (2012) reinforced this notion by stating that "African American students come from a variety of home settings: the basic two-parent families, single-parent families, some are raised by grandparents, while others are raised by different family members" (p. 97).

In this study, FSA 5 grew up in the inner city and mentioned that he "grew up in a house with 12 to 14 people...[his] mom wasn't around, grandmother raised [him]…[he] came from a broken family [and] dad's in and out but not consistently there." FSA 3 grew up in the suburb of a major city and his parents were divorced and remarried. FSA 2, on the other hand, grew up in a traditional two – parent home whose income was just over $100,000 annually. The information presented in Table 8 illustrates the variety of family incomes and family backgrounds of the former student-athlete participants in this study.

Table 8.

Former Student-Athlete Family Background Information

	State	Family Income	Family Background	Community	1 Gen. College
FSA 1	NC	25K-35K	Single Mom	Small City	Y
FSA 2	OH	100K-200K	Two-Parent	Small City	N
FSA 3	MI	50K-75K	Divorced Parents	Suburb	Y
FSA 4	OH	50K-75K	Two-Parent	Small City	Y
FSA 5	IL	25K-35K	Grandparent	Large Urban City	Y

Therefore, the common sentiment that many Black student-athletes originate from low – income and single – parent families should at least be examined to challenge the belief that Black student-athletes are a homogenous group. This stereotype undermines the experiences and differences that exist among this group. Of the five former student-athlete participants, only one was raised by a single parent. The other participants were raised by a grandparent, two parents, and divorced parents. This diversity of family structure resists the pervasive stereotypes of Black male student-athlete backgrounds.

High School Background

In this study, findings suggest that high school selection can have a direct impact on student-athlete's college preparation. In contrast to the literature, this study illuminates the emerging roles that school choice policies and high school athletic recruitments play when discussing high school background. These aspects have the ability to drastically alter the common notion of ill-prepared Black student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007) because it provides these student-athletes and their families with more access to better-resourced high

schools. School choice, for example, allows parents and students the ability to select schools throughout the district where they reside or to select schools outside of their resident districts (Abdulkadiroglu & Sonmez, 2003). School choice policies have afforded students who live in the inner city the opportunity to attend schools across or outside their home district (Abdulkadiroglu & Sonmez, 2003). This shift in policy is important to note because not all student-athletes are satisfied with their residential district schools and many select or transfer to different schools before or during their interscholastic career, as this research has demonstrated. This is relevant because research has noted that Black students, especially males, typically do not have access to adequate educational systems (Hodge, Harrison, Burden & Dixson, 2008). However, attending more adequately – resourced schools located in the suburbs that offer a rigorous curriculum has also been "associated with higher grades and academic achievement for African American students" (Griffin & Allen, 2006, pp. 479-480). Consequently, school choice and unofficial high school recruiting are increasing the ability for Black student-athletes to attend better – resourced schools.

To illustrate the reasons for high school transference, FSA 4 admitted, "I felt like [the high school wasn't] preparing me for college." Instead of attending the high school in his home district, he was able to attend one of the larger and more resourced high schools in the city. This school also had a good football team. In all, three of the five participants discussed attending schools that were outside their home districts and two utilized the policies of the school of their choice to attend the high school they believed would be the best fit. Again, the idea that Black football student-athletes enter college in droves from under – resourced inner city schools may have been the dominant experiences in previous research, but blanket statements and suggestions such as these are no longer accurate.

226

High school recruiting is another aspect that changes the high school interscholastic landscape, especially for Black student-athletes. Barr (2008) notes that recruiting by high school coaches resembles that of college coaches. High school coaches scout youth leagues for the best players and try to persuade coaches, parents, and players to visit their schools. One of the former student-athlete participants initially began his high school football career at a private high school known for producing Division I football players. He mentioned, "I started at [this one private school] but then transferred because it wasn't a good fit for me." From an early age, this participant was funded to attend private school because of his athletic talent in little league football. As schools continue to dedicate more financial resources to their athletic programs, recruiting among high school coaches is heightened (Barr, 2008). Essentially, high school students from low-income backgrounds can be recruited to attend private high schools to enhance the football team's performance. For many private schools, providing athletic scholarships are prohibited but "need based scholarships" can still be provided (Barr, 2008). It is important to understand these two dynamics because school choice and high school recruiting does have the ability to change the high school environment from which student-athletes originate.

High school selection and recruitment impacts college student demographics. The assistant athletic director stated that because of these two aspects, colleges are starting to see three different kinds of Black student-athlete high school backgrounds: (a) student-athletes from low socioeconomic family backgrounds that attend schools in their residential district, (b) student-athletes from low socioeconomic family backgrounds that attend private or suburban schools outside their district, and (c) student-athletes from middle to upper socioeconomic family backgrounds that attend suburban or private high schools. Therefore, a student from a lower

socioeconomic background would be, at the very least, exposed to high schools that are better resourced if they opt out of attending the lower performing schools in their immediate district. The issue here is that research exploring these different backgrounds and the high schools that Black student-athletes attend is virtually nonexistent. Strayhorn (2010) found that "Black men in suburban neighborhoods/schools had higher aspirations than those in urban schools" (p. 723). Therefore, the policies that allow students, especially Black males, to attend private, cross districts, or out of district schools are critical for understanding the academic preparation of Black male student-athletes.

Nonetheless, with the amount of diversity that exists within this group, Harper and Nichols (2008) suggest that it is inappropriate to regard Black male students as a single homogenous group both in research and practice. Establishing that Black male football student-athletes are by and large not academically prepared for college level academia, as much previous research suggests, discounts and discredits the wide range of experiences that these student-athletes have before entering the college environment.

Athletic Background

Football played a significant role in the high school careers of four of the five participants. FSA 1, for example, attended a newly established high school that presented a rigorous academic curriculum, but even he admitted that the school was "very much focused on sports." He acknowledged that in high school, he spent a tremendous amount of time during the school year and summers performing football – related activities. He mentioned that "football [activities didn't just happen] during the school year…it was almost year round." The former student-athletes essentially dedicated a significant amount of time to their football activities in hopes of earning an athletic scholarship.

228

Football was the catalyst for both FSA 3 and FSA 4 to transfer to different high schools during their high school career. On the surface, their reasoning was that either the school was not a good fit or the school was not preparing them academically for college. However, as they continued to discuss their high school experiences, it became clear that their participation in football was the driving force behind the decision to transfer schools. FSA 4 commented that the first high school he attended was not preparing him to earn an athletic scholarship. Therefore, the former student-athlete participants transferred from schools they believed were not putting the participants in the best position to earn athletic scholarships. Those former student-athletes that did transfer, reenrolled in another school that they believed would provide them a better opportunity to earn athletic scholarship to college.

The impact of football went beyond influencing where these former student-athlete participants attended high school. It also had an impact on the amount of effort expended in class. FSA 2 mentioned that although he had above a 3.0 GPA, he stated, "Did I put my full time and effort into school? Probably not, but I knew I did as well as I needed to and I was satisfied with my grades in high school." He was neither a student who received low grades nor did he fail to meet his academic responsibilities. Yet, he and his teammates did not allocate their full attention to academics, either. As he discussed his experiences playing high school football, it was clear that he wanted to do everything he could to help his team be successful on the field. He stated, "I had no problem pushing guys' buttons in high school and trying to get the most out of guys." Simply stated, the same kind of focus and effort that was directed towards football was not given to academic requirements.

Only FSA 5 did not fit this mold, which presented the search for the negative case and had a unique high school experience. FSA 5 lived in an inner city where playing basketball, not

football, was the primary sport of choice. FSA 5 mentioned that growing up he did not know much about football and did not really become a more focused player until approximately his junior year in high school. Only when he began playing exceptionally well and started being recruited by some of the major Division I schools did he begin to really focus on football as a viable possibility to get out of his home environment.

Throughout this research, the recurring theme that emerged is that the focus on football was driven by a need to "get out." It was understood that playing football could provide a lifeline for each of the participants to gain an education and move beyond their home environments. Once the thought that football could provide a way out occurred to these participants, they devoted the necessary time and effort to fulfill that dream. FSA 2 emphatically mentioned that he wanted to get out of his home area because "nothing positive happened there" and viewed his potential scholarship as a means to accomplish this goal. Such is the case with each of the other former student-athlete participants. Each wanted to experience more than their pre-college surroundings, which helps to explain why a considerable amount of time was dedicated to football throughout their high school careers.

Meaning Construction

As previously stated, meaning construction is a concept developed by the social constructivist theory that understands the mind as an instrument that seeks to comprehend an objective knowledge, thus filtering input from the world in order to interpret the environment (Jonassen et al., 995; Leahey & Harris, 1985). The meaning construction that the student-athletes developed during the pre-college phase (i.e., family, high school, and athletic backgrounds) is the lens in which they initially interpreted and viewed their college experiences when they first arrived on campus. The former student-athlete participants arrived on campus with a variety of

pre-college experiences that shaped their early college experiences and interactions. Three themes emerged from the data. First, the lack of opportunities associated with their hometown was a contributing factor in how they interpreted what participation in college football could offer. Each of the participants mentioned wanting to move beyond their home environments to achieve more than they initially believed possible and understood participating in college football was the vehicle to do that.

Second, four of the five participants were first – generation college students, which helped to solidify the importance of obtaining a college degree. This study found that the participants understood the importance of earning a college degree (Sellers, 1992) and, more importantly, viewed the scholarship offer more as a means to, as they said "get out" from their home environment. Sellers (2000) and Singer (2008) both note that athletics provides an opportunity for student-athletes to attend an institution they might not have otherwise been able to afford or gain acceptance. The results from this study support the notion from both Sellers (2000) and Singer (2008) that the former student-athlete participants recognized the opportunity and importance of obtaining a college degree.

The lack of interest and engagement with the academic material is the final point regarding the meaning construction in the pre-college phase. Throughout their high school experience, the former student-athletes discuss only doing what was necessary to complete their high school academic requirements. FSA 1, who had the highest high school GPA of the participants stated, "I didn't take the rest of the classes too seriously, even though I did get good grades." FSA 4 expands on this by stating, "I really wasn't that interested in school." This lack of interest in the academic material played a role in how the former student-athletes approached college. FSA 3 mentioned, "When I saw my first college class schedule, it just didn't excite

231

me…but [I] was told what I needed to do to stay eligible to play," which support Benson (2000) assertion that Black student-athletes are not actively engaged with the academic curriculum.

The present study found that the former student-athlete participants came from a variety of backgrounds but viewed their scholarships and participation in football as a means to earn a college degree, to play football, and in some instances, to become the first in their immediate families to graduate from college. Each of the participants stressed wanting to get out of their current environments and looked forward to the opportunity that playing football at State University presented them. It is important to recognize that all of their experiences during the pre-college phase impacts how they interacted with and interpreted the different aspects of the college environment. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) only briefly discuss the pre-college component of their model. They suggest that the background of the student-athletes can influence their expectations from college (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011), but their model does not explore how the background affected how the student-athletes interpreted the college environment. To extend their foundational results, this study revealed that the meaning construction component is critical to our understanding of the overall student-athlete experience and emerges throughout the student-athletes' time on campus.

Early College

Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model begins with pre-college before discussing initial commitments (i.e., to goals, sport, and institution) and systems (i.e., social and academic). Based on the findings of this research, the model illustrated in Figure 6 depicts the early college phase as the next logical step. The data from this study revealed clear differences in how the former student-athletes understood their experiences when they first began their collegiate career and

when they became upperclassmen. For this reason, it was necessary to separate college experiences into early college and late college phases.

During their first two years on campus, the former student-athlete participants spent time trying to adapt to their new environment and their intense academic and athletic responsibilities. Therefore, the early college phase consists of three main parts: academics, athletics and social. The academic component concentrates on experiences related to their academic exposure on campus (i.e., faculty interaction, academic decisions, academic support, grade performance and interactions with academic support staff). The athletic component deals with time demands, the interaction with the coaches, and how the coaches dealt with non-football related requirements of the student-athletes. The social component addresses the on campus interaction with non-student-athletes, Black students, student-athlete peers, teammates, and participation in student groups.

Another fundamental difference with the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) model is the introduction of the support network. This support network came into play between the early college and late college phases of the model, which has been established as the transition phase of the Porter model. This research found that during early stages of college, the student-athletes are trying to adjust to their environment and the new expectations placed on them. The data revealed that student-athletes begin to embrace and use their support networks to help them find balance and manage the variety of stressors they encounter.

Academics

One of the most significant emerging themes from this research focuses on the interaction between the faculty members and the Black football student-athletes. Previous studies exploring the interactions and relationships among faculty members and student-athletes in the revenue –

producing sports find that academic success is "to some extent dependent upon the specific nature of their interaction with faculty" (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007, p. 207). This study found that faculty members who encourage student-athletes to consider graduate school contributed to the academic success of student-athletes (Comeaux, 2008; Comeaux & Harrison, 2007). However, other research has found that faculty members, especially at predominantly White institutions, hold prejudicial views and stereotypes towards student-athletes because they question the academic preparation, academic profile, and the student-athletes' ability to meet classroom expectations (Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995). Faculty members especially question the academic preparation of males in revenue – generating sports (Engstrom et al., 1995). Unfortunately, the prejudicial views and attitudes of faculty members do in fact hinder the quality of their engagement with student-athletes (Comeaux, 2011). Because of these interactions, Black student-athletes may spend as little time as possible with the faculty members and instead choose to spend their time with their support networks (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007).

The results discussed in the previous chapter also showcased a different perspective on the student-athlete/faculty interaction. The present study found that the relationship and interaction between faculty and student-athletes was not an either/or type of relationship where either the faculty members held prejudicial views towards the student-athletes or they did not. Rather, results indicated that participant's interactions with faculty members fell into one of three distinct categories: (a) faculty that were advocates/fans of athletics, (b) faculty that essentially did not care about athletics, or (c) faculty members that despised athletics.

First, the faculty members who were fans/advocates of athletics had a better understanding of conflicting requirements (both athletic and academic) and provided additional guidance and support for the participants. Second, faculty members who did not necessarily hold

negative views towards athletics and student-athletes, or simply did not care, tended to be less flexible when it came to the travel schedules of the participants. These faculty members generally held an assumption that students who attend State University mostly had similar academic profiles and if that was not the case, the faculty provided some academic assistance when the student asked for help. Last, those faculty members who despised athletics and preconceived judgments about athletes purposefully devalued the academic aptitude of the participants and rejected any attempt by the participants to develop a working rapport with the faculty member. Regardless of the effort the participants exuded during the class or the amount of time spent in office hours, there were some faculty members who held negative views about student-athletes, their ability, and athletics as a whole. These faculty members seem to have been on a mission to assert their dominance over the participants, which created an unwelcoming and hostile environment for the participants. Some participants shared experiences that certain faculty members would automatically assume that because they were late to class or had to miss class that they did not respect the faculty member. In return, the faculty member acted on those preconceived notions and exhibited much more unwelcoming behavior towards the participants, creating a vicious cycle.

The key discussion point here is that faculty members who were deemed advocates or fans of athletics were loosely included into the support network of the participants. While they may not have been the primary source of social support, having supportive interactions and relationships with faculty members did help students develop their academic identity, supporting Comeaux and Harrison's (2007) claim that building a relationship with faculty can have a positive impact on Black student-athletes.

Another emerging theme reveals two distinct viewpoints when it comes to the academic support provided to student-athletes. On one hand, one of the most consistent findings from this study affirms the importance of the academic support for student-athletes. In this context, academic support includes academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, and intensive counseling (Gill & Farrington, 2014; Horton, 2015). Most of these academic support services were provided during study table times for the student-athletes. This study found that the most important aspect for these participants in terms of academic support was having study table mandatory for at least the first semester. Upon retrospect, each of the participants not only benefitted but also appreciated having a predetermined location and time where they could focus solely on their academic course load. During the first year, the participants were required to attend study table. If the student-athletes attained a specific GPA, they would no longer be required to attend study table. Therefore, this served as a motivational factor for the participants. Most of the participants did not want to attend study table and thus focused on obtaining the required GPA to avoid its requirement. Study table was a place for the participants to complete their academic assignments and utilize additional academic support services as well. However, the duality of study table was that it served as a motivational factor for the participants because they did not want to attend after their freshman year, which incentivized them to get the necessary GPA to avoid its mandate.

The athletic department has members on staff whose job is to ensure that student-athletes have academic resources readily available to them, which saved the participants a tremendous amount of time from having to search for those kinds of resources alone. Having this kind of academic support, especially for Black football student-athletes, can enhance their GPAs and increase their retention and graduation rates (Gill & Farrington, 2014; Horton, 2015). This

finding remains a critical component in the student-athlete experience, especially during their first two years on campus.

When the participants first arrived on campus, they were totally unprepared for the volume and time they would have to dedicate to both football and their academic course load. This is when study table and other available academic resources were extensively used because it helped the student-athletes prioritize their time and navigate their new surroundings. As the participants developed a better understanding of the time required for their athletic – related responsibilities, they were better able to maneuver their schedules in order to dedicate more time to their academic pursuits, which significantly reduced the amount of academic support they required from the athletic department.

Another emerging theme was the interaction between the participants and their athletic academic counselors. This interaction was either helpful to the participants or deterred them from seeking the assistance of counselors. In some cases, there were specific academic counselors who developed a good rapport with the former student-athletes, which allowed them to receive guidance from the academic support staff. However, in the eyes of the participants, not all of the interactions were perceived as positive. The most common sentiment regarding the academic support staff was that as a collective unit, they did not truly challenge the participants academically and sometimes tried to subtly influence the class or major selection of the participants. Participants felt that certain members of the academic support staff were only concerned about keeping them eligible and ensuring that their class schedules did not interfere with their football – related responsibilities. This created a culture of low expectations for the student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The participants were savvy enough to quickly pick-up on the perceived expectations from the academic support staff and, in many cases,

237

deterred them from seeking additional support or academic guidance.

Institutions like State University, provide student-athletes with a myriad of academic support services to help them graduate (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Hollis, 2001), but quantity does not equal quality of academic support. The participants mentioned that their support staff did not go above and beyond to challenge them academically but were content with simply doing their job of ensuring that the student-athletes were eligible. Therefore, academic support for the participants was invaluable during the early stages in their development in college, but challenging the student-athletes is a component the participants wished they had received more of with less of a focus on eligibility.

The major selection of the former student-athlete participants was another theme worth discussing. The vast majority of all former student-athletes had three specific majors: education, liberal arts, and kinesiology. With regards to the selection of majors, the assistant athletic director stated, "I think the number of majors are limited by ability, not by time." This research found that student-athletes who have limited major options because of their intellectual ability is only part of the story. FSA 5, for example, did not have a competitive GPA or standardized test score coming out of high school and needed some assistance when he arrived at State University. He subsequently pursed a general studies degree. Of the former student-athlete participants, FSA 1 did have a competitive GPA, which could have potentially earned him admission to State University without the assistance of football. Nonetheless, when he arrived on campus, he was still guided into the same academic track as FSA 5. FSA 3 came into college with a high school GPA range between a 2.4 – 2.9 and he was also guided into courses that fulfilled the general studies major when he first arrived on campus. It was only later during his collegiate career that he ended up switching from general studies to a sociology major. Similarly, FSA 4 came into

college with a high school GPA range between 2.4 – 2.9 and was also guided into courses that would fit a physical education degree but subsequently changed his major to communications. FSA 2 had a high school GPA range between 3.0 and 3.4 but did not initially know what he wanted to major in and later developed a passion for sports management because it was something he could relate with.

Even though the five former student-athlete participants had different reasons and experiences for selecting their specific majors, the fact remains that their majors and class selections were highly accommodating for their football requirements, which supports Fountain and Finley's (2010) finding. According to the academic counselor, majors that conflict with practice time are strongly discouraged and the student-athletes are strongly encouraged to find an alternative, which demonstrates that in some cases, the limiting factor for major selection is time rather than ability.

When a student-athlete is faced with a class schedule that conflicts with practice, the practice time typically takes priority in their schedules. The academic counselor stated, "There are a lot of majors that makes it hard for a lot of athletes to do because sometimes that conflicts with their practice." He also established that because a lot of these student-athletes are receiving a football scholarship "they look for other options." Being available for football practice seemed to be the key focus for the student-athletes because football was paying for them to attend the institution and the student-athletes did not want to jeopardize their standing on the team. FSA 1 noted that the reason he selected the general studies major was because it provided him with the flexibility to take certain business classes he had an interest in. However, he also points out that he still could not major in business because of the time conflicts with his football classes.

Therefore, he majored in general studies with a minor in business because that was the best compromise between his academic interest and his athletic responsibilities.

The academic counselor also pointed out that if there is a class a student-athlete has to take that conflicts with football, "that is between you and your coach…and many times the coach will say to look at other alternatives if possible." Whether consciously or not, the student-athletes conformed to their football time requirements and ensured that class did not interfere with football practice.

At last, an additional emerging theme from this study was that upon entering class during their freshman year, this group of former student-athletes shared that their classmates immediately identified them as football players because "[they] would wear some of the clothes given to [them] by the football team to class." Or because as FSA 2 said, they were "big Black guys in class." Once identified as a football player, each of the participants discussed that especially their White non-student-athlete counterparts believed them to be stupid or dumb jocks. FSA 1 mentions that he felt his peers disrespected not only his intellectual ability but also the experiences that football players had to manage. The vast majority of the hostility experienced by these former student-athlete participants originated from their White non-student-athlete peers. This finding supports Melendez's (2008) assertion that Black student-athletes experience a stigma that has "both athletic and racial undertones" (p. 438). Essentially, these participants were being judged the moment they walked into the class or before having any substantial interaction with their White peers.

Athletics

A significant challenge the participants in this study encountered when they first arrived on campus was balancing their academic course work and athletic requirements. The early

college phase is when the participants first encountered and had to manage the magnitude of the academic and athletic expectations placed on them. The typical athletic schedules the participants had to manage illustrated that they were spending over 40 hours per week (in season) on their sport practicing, playing, and training (Wolverton, 2008). In addition, the time that is spent on their sport does not account for "additional hours potentially lost due to mental or physical fatigue or injuries" (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016, p. 490). A study conducted by the PAC-12 conference found that student-athletes in their conference were spending close to 50 hours per week on their sport, 20 hours of required athletic activities, and 29 hours spent on other activities including voluntary athletics, receiving treatment, and traveling (2015).

Not only did the former student-athletes have to manage this new football schedule, which was unlike anything they previously experienced, they also had to manage their academic course requirements as well. FSA 2 discussed being so physically and mentally exhausted that he could not stay awake in one of his early courses. FSA 1 said:

> At [State University] the majority of my classes were fairly difficult…a tough course load and then on top of all that I had to deal with the fact that the time requirement for football was greater than my time requirement in high school…so just being more fatigued...

Again, these findings are not isolated instances but were the norm for these former student-athlete participants. This challenge manifested itself during the early college phase when the student-athletes were first trying to adjust to their new environment. Jayakumar and Comeaux (2016) note that the evolving ethos of college athletics emphasizes athletic performance over academic achievement, which means that the academic roles of the student-athletes can become diminished as the sport commitment takes center stage. The results of this study concur with this

sentiment in that as sport participation takes center stage in the lives of the student-athletes in the early college phase the free time the student-athletes have is designed to be dedicated to their sport. Much of the time the student-athlete spends on their sport does not occur by happenstance but is specifically designed by the coach who arranges several aspects of their life (e.g., meals, housing, team bonding, schedules, and study times; Simiyu, 2012). Therefore, the time demands placed on these former student-athlete participants during the early college phase was the biggest challenge they faced upon arriving on campus at State University.

Another emerging theme from this study is the interactions with members of the coaching staff. For the most part, the participants mentioned that coaches were not significantly involved with monitoring or encouraging academic high achievement. Coaches were primarily involved when their academic performance endangered their eligibility. In such cases, coaches were in charge of punishing the participants, which usually included a variety of grueling early morning or after practice workouts. This was the significant extent of the coaches' involvement in the academic pursuits of the participants.

However, there were a handful of coaches that specifically held the participants accountable for the academic performance while continuing to impress upon them the importance of obtaining a college degree during their tenure at State University. These were the coaches the participants gravitated towards because it demonstrated to the participants that the specific coach cared about them more so than just about their availability to play. Having coaches that cared about the participants more than they cared about their performance was highly influential to the participants. The associate athletic director articulated that when it came to coaches encouraging student-athlete academic pursuits, "some will and some won't." The experiences the participants had with coaches usually fell into these two categories. Even though

some coaches did not take a vested interested in the academic pursuits of the participants, this did not deter the participants from devoting the time on their academic requirements. Nonetheless, those coaches who did take a sincere interest became loose members of the participants' support network. The coaches might not have been full members of the support networks for the participants but they did provide valuable encouragement and direction that the participants needed and gravitated towards.

The recruited athlete is made to feel elite and important by the coach. After the student-athlete arrives on campus, the coaches' focus shifts towards the team, the upcoming season, and the next group of recruits (Hyatt, 2003). Hyatt's (2003) observations provide the backdrop to explain and understand the interactions between the coaches and the Black football student-athletes. Once the former student-athlete participants got to college, they realized that the attention and treatment they received from the coaches during the recruiting process was drastically different. The participants mentioned that once they arrived on campus for football camp, there was a barrier created because the coaches were not able to relate to them. The vast majority of the coaches at SU were White and unable to truly understand the student-athletes they spent a significant amount of time recruiting outside of their football related abilities. The Black student-athlete participants also noticed that the coaches were able to create meaningful relationships with White football student-athletes but unable to truly relate with the Black players. FSA 5 specifically mentioned that it seemed to him that the coaches could better relate to the White players, which created a clear disconnect between the coaches and Black football student-athletes.

Another critical finding is that the relationship between the former student-athlete participants and the coaching staff, especially the majority of White coaches, largely depended

on the athletic performance of the student-athletes. The participants mentioned that they would witness coaches praising teammates for a great performance one week and then speak to them in a disrespectful and derogatory manner the next week, all based on the game or practice performance of the student-athlete. According to the participants, athletic performance was the determining factor in how the coaches interacted with and treated the football student-athletes. FSA 1 mentioned that he observed how coaches would overlook many of the off-field issues that certain teammates were engaged in, as long as they continued to perform at a high level on the field. These experiences made it clear to the participants that on-field performance drastically determined the kind and level of interaction they would have with the coaches, specifically at this early college phase.

Social

With regards to the social aspect of the early college phase, one of the more significant emerging themes was that the environment initially proved to be hostile and unwelcoming for the former student-athlete participants as supported in the literature (Davis, 1994; Simiyu, 2012; Singer, 2005). Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) suggest that student-athletes can have positive benefits from increased engagement with campus and non-student-athlete peers. However, the results from this study illustrate that the majority of interactions with campus peers were plagued by racism, stereotyping, microaggressions, and being alienated as not true members of the campus community (Allen, 1992; Harper, 2006; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Their White campus peers generated most of this hostile behavior. The former student-athlete participants recall experiences of being loved while playing and alienated after the games were over.

Even though many of the interactions with White non-student-athlete peers were negative (Melendez, 2008) and only positive following football victories (Bimper, 2015), the participants were able to find communities of people that provided a welcoming environment for them. FSA 3 found that some of his positive interactions originated from his exchanges with students living in the dorms during his freshman year, while FSA 4 stated that his positive interactions began the summer before his freshman year during a summer program at the university. In addition, many of the positive interactions that these participants had with non-student-athlete peers came from the Black students. Melendez (2008) found that Black student-athletes did experience prejudicial behavior from Black non-student-athlete peers however, this study found the complete opposite. The Black non-student-athlete peers on the campus of State University seemed to be much more inviting for these participants in particular. This may be because as FSA 2 observed, "there weren't a lot of Black folks on campus" and many of the Black students and student-athletes alike were simply trying to adjust to campus.

In addition to the on – campus experiences, the participants also mentioned that other student-athletes and teammates provided a welcoming environment for them, especially early on in their collegiate careers. FSA 2 discussed taking classes and working on group projects with some other student-athletes and recalled, "[My teammates and I] were all trying to adjust and manage." Again, this finding reinforces Melendez's (2008) finding that these Black student-athletes do find positive and welcoming environments from other student-athletes in part because of some shared experiences. Therefore, Black non-student-athlete peers and other student-athletes created the welcoming environment because of similar shared experiences.

One aspect of the social component in the student-athlete experience that is worth mentioning is their participation, or lack thereof, in on – campus student groups or organizations.

Each of the participants discussed trying to adapt to campus, football requirements, and their academic course load during the early stages in their collegiate experiences. Therefore, there was no time left for them to engage or participate in student groups, as FSA 1 affirmed. Similarly, FSA 5 commented that early in their collegiate experiences, schedules were "designed so you don't get in trouble…they're trying to occupy all your time so you don't have more than three hours to do anything stupid." Along with their academic course load, the athletic practice schedules ensured that the participants did not have time for much else, especially during the early college phase. While different administrators believe there is value in having the student-athletes interact more with campus, in addition to their new surroundings, their athletic and academic obligations all but ensure that there will be minimum involvement with campus organizations, if at all.

<div align="center">**Transition Phase**</div>

As previously mentioned, data gathered from this study revealed how the former student-athlete participants navigated their environment differently from the time they began their collegiate career at State University to when they became upperclassmen (i.e., early college and late college phase). Between these two phases lies the transition phase, which typically occurs between the end of the sophomore academic year and the beginning of the junior academic year. It is during the transition phase that the former student-athletes interacted and developed a support network. These interactions with the support network ultimately helped to influence and refocus the meaning construction to graduate for the participants. Carter-Francique et al., (2013) assert that the student-athletes' support network is one method that helps the student-athletes manage their transition.

Harrison and Lawrence (2003) assert that as student-athletes become aware and recognize that exiting sport is inevitable, regardless of the level of competition, the student-athletes "are stimulated to start making plans for their lives after sport" (p. 388). The data supports Harrison and Lawrence's (2003) assertion because as the structure provided a variety of support to student-athlete participants, the support network also helped the participants prepare for life after athletics. This transition phase also helps to shift the meaning construction of the student-athletes as they enter the late college phase, which is the last two years of their collegiate eligibility.

Support Network

Referring back to the original research question, how did Black male football student-athletes manage to graduate, while being part of a Division I team at a research-intensive institution? This study reveals that besides the academic support provided to the participants, the most important factor in their experience was the relationship and interactions with people who provided them with a non-academic support network. Carter-Francique et al., (2015) conceptualizes social support in four distinct components from House (1981): (a) appraisal support, (b) emotional support, (c) informational support, and (d) instrumental support.

This concept clearly articulates an understanding of what a support network is and how this kind of support was utilized by each of the participants. Rosenfeld, Richman, and Hardy (1989) suggest that there are different types of social support that can be provided to individuals who care about the wellbeing of the student-athlete or those with expertise in the sport. This kind of social support can include listening, emotional support, emotional challenge, shared social reality, technical appreciation that is "others who acknowledge when a good piece of work or performance is accomplished" (p. 24) and technical challenge that is "others who can challenge,

stretch, and encourage the athlete to achieve more" (p. 24) (Rosenfeld et al., 1989). Results from this study indicate that each of the participants had a support network that served a variety of different functions (Rosenfeld et al., 1989) like managing their environment and preparing the student-athlete for life after college (Bimper et al., 2012).

Participants undeniably needed encouragement throughout their academic careers, especially when dealing with on and off the field challenges. Some participants sought guidance on how to best prepare themselves for life after football and some needed direction about how to navigate the environment at State University. Support networks included both formal and informal members. Formal supporters were athletic academic counselors, on-campus academic advisors, and the associate athletic director. People who contributed informal support were parents, a specific coach, teammates, mentors, or professors, just to name a few. Regardless of who the participants selected to be part of their support network, it is clear that this network itself was paramount for the participants' overall wellbeing. The associate athletic director said it best, that having this support network helped the participants stay "sane in an insane place." The overwhelming sentiment from this study was that the participants selected their social network based on who they believed had their best interest in mind and those who they were able to develop a good relationship with (Bimper et al., 2012).

Rosenfeld et al., (1989) found that teammates did not emotionally support one another because of the competition for positions on the team but did provide some shared reality support. Part of that finding supports the idea that participants did include selected teammates in their social networks. The selected teammates were a critical part of the support network because they shared similar experiences, goals, and continuously motivated the participants on the field and in the classroom. All of the participants mentioned that they thrived on competition and created it

amongst themselves to enhance their overall experience. As Bimper et al., (2012) discuss, "these relationships appeared to foster a more holistic approach in developing their academic adeptness, understanding their identities, and expanding their social skills and perceived capital needed not only as an athlete but also as a Black person in American society" (p. 124). FSA 1 captured this experience by stating, "Having bothers who were in the same fight helped me." It must also be stated that not every teammate was included into the social network of the participants. Those included were only those teammates who the participants connected with and who were as driven and motivated on and off the field as the participants themselves. Regardless of who the participants selected, each had a support network they could rely on to help to navigate the college landscape. Unlike the academic support, this social support continued throughout their collegiate career, especially to help the participants' transition from being a student-athlete to preparing for their career after their college eligibility concluded.

A support system played a vital role in the overall campus experience and graduation for the former student-athlete participants. Results of this study support what Carter-Francique et al., (2013) found: "social support serves as an important factor to aid stress and/or stressful life events" (p. 241). Ultimately, the social support that the participants received were critical to helping them manage the multiplicity of academic, athletic, and social expectations placed on them and provided them guidance to develop as men. This study found that the social support came from academic adviser, peers, teammates, faculty, and mentors, further confirming results from Carter-Francique et al., (2013). The student-athletes were able to vent, find guidance, and adapt to their environment while managing their conflicting pressures between their academic and athletic requirements.

Meaning Construction to Graduate

This higher level of meaning construction occurs after the student-athlete has spent approximately two academic years on campus, interacted with faculty and staff members, been exposed to his football responsibilities, and has established his support network. The manner in which the participants interpreted and made sense of their environment became much more refined compared to the manner in which they interpreted their environment when they first arrived on campus. One of the major findings for this later meaning construction phase is that the participants upon arriving on campus at State University wanted to "get out" of their home environment, but it is at this stage that they realized the need and importance for obtaining a college degree. Their individual support networks emphasized and solidified their desire to earn a college degree. For some participants, being the first in their families to graduate from college was a significant milestone. This meaning construction is important because this is when they realize that graduation is not only a possibility, but a reality. FSA 2 believed himself to have a legitimate opportunity to play in the NFL. When he suffered a significant injury, he adjusted his perspective about not only the importance of the college degree but also planning for life after football. As previously mentioned, FSA 2 stated:

> I always felt like graduating high school and graduating college, it's something that you should do, like it's part of the process. As I got older, as I became more aware, it hit me especially when I got my injury…I definitely think the injury accelerated things for me because I knew I needed a plan B. Once I [got injured] I was like, 'Oh I'd better start doing that now rather than later.' The NFL is not guaranteed. It was definitely a changing point from that aspect.

This moment became the reality check for this particular participant because he began to understand that playing in the NFL was not guaranteed and he desperately did not want to be one of those players that did not end up completing his college degree.

The reality check that FSA 2 encountered was not an isolated case. FSA 5 mentioned that when he realized he had a legitimate opportunity to play professional football, he had to finish his college degree because there was a good chance that if he left college early, he would not complete the necessary requirements. The results from this study suggest that between the early college and late college phase, how the student-athletes construct meaning of their environment that pushes them to graduate comes into contact with a reality check (e.g., injury, lack of playing time, facing the end of the athletic career, or the realization that college will soon be ending), which adjusts and solidifies their resolve to graduate. This elevated sense of meaning construction becomes the ultimate catalyst to ensure these student-athletes end up graduating from the institution.

Meaning construction is an important component for this model because previous concepts, for example Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) framework, only allude to various ideas of meaning construction and only in the pre-college phase. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) only imply the meaning construction but do not explore the interpretations of meaning the student-athletes developed during the late college phase. Melendez (2008) refers to experiences that the student-athletes may have in various settings but meaning construction is not identified in that model. Therefore, the addition of meaning construction in the Porter model is a unique aspect when discussing the student-athlete experience because it explores how the student-athletes interpret their environment.

Late College

Encountering the support network further helps to refine and establish how the student-athletes interpreted the world around them. This refinement is critical for helping the student-athletes manage their social, academic and athletic experiences more effectively compared to when they initially entered the university environment. Because the student-athletes are able to better deal with the three components in their experience (e.g., academics, athletics, and social) and have a refined meaning construction (especially during the late college phase), this puts them in a better position to navigate the different core functions from early college to late college.

The key aspect of this model for student-athlete academic success is the interaction the student-athletes have with their support network, which is not merely a matter of social integration as Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model suggests. Rather, the support network is a vital component in helping student-athletes manage the competing core functions (e.g., academics and athletics) and refine their view of the social, academic, and athletic experiences; all of which have a direct impact on student-athlete graduation. In addition, Comeaux and Harrison's model does not necessarily account for the different stages the student-athletes progress through that showcases the overall development of the student-athletes. Based on this shortcoming, the late college phase was created to fill in the missing gap because there was a clear difference between how the participants dealt with their environment when they were underclassmen and when they became upperclassmen.

Academics

Bimper et al., (2012) found that as Black student-athletes better understand their environment and academic requirements, they begin to take control of their academic responsibilities (e.g., class scheduling and tutoring appointments) without the need of the athletic

academic support staff, which gives the Black student-athletes a sense of liberation through

education. The participants in this study discussed being better equipped to handle their

academic responsibilities because of two distinct reasons: (a) they passed the first two years of

prerequisite courses and were able to choose a path that more closely aligned with their interest

and, (b) knew how to handle their football and academic schedules compared to when they first

arrived on campus. FSA 3, in particular mentioned that after he got through all of his prerequisite

courses, "everything started to click for [him]." The other participants mentioned that once they

were able to select their academic direction based on their interests, they were better able to

manage their academic requirements. FSA 2 mentioned having difficulty with some of the

prerequisite courses that were required for him to apply to his intended major. However, once he

was able to take the courses within that specific degree program, he excelled as a student.

In addition to completing the core course requirements and enrolling in courses they had

an interest in, the participants had a better idea of how to manage their football and academic

responsibilities. FSA 1 mentions that as an upperclassman, he had a complete understanding of

what his football and academic expectations were. Because of this, he was better able to manage

his time, realizing that he could show up right on time for football meetings and class because he

was not getting "any brownie points" for sitting in class or a football meeting15 minutes early.

When the participants began to understand this, they realized that they did in fact have more time

to meet with faculty members and knew how to get their work done on time. Knowing what was

expected of the participants on the field and in the classroom seemed to allow them to adapt and

manage their surroundings, which had a positive impact on their educational pursuits.

Academic support. During the early college phase, the former student-athlete

participants used several different components of the academic support provided to them by the

athletic department. However, during the late college phase, the use of these academic resources was greatly reduced. The results suggest that this may be due to two key factors: (a) in the late college phase, the student-athletes knew what they needed to do and how to seek help if it was needed, and (b) they were in courses that captured their interest and attention, which made it easier for them to engage with the course material.

When it comes to not needing as much academic support, FSA 2 articulated this perspective best when he mentioned that he knew what he needed to do, how to schedule tutors, and did not need someone micromanaging him to make sure he was completing his academic requirements. He also mentioned that if he needed extra assistance with a course, he would schedule time with the faculty members, which is not something he would have felt comfortable doing in the early college phase. This seems to be the common sentiment of the participants because as they entered the late college phase, they understood what they needed academically and how to go about acquiring that extra support if needed.

Second, at the beginning of the late college phase is when the participants had to declare their academic majors. This finding supports the idea that if there is an interest in the topic, students are more motivated to continue with the task, which increases the learning outcomes for the students (Herndon, 1987). Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the more the participants engaged in their course material in which they had an interest, the better they were able to manage their requirements. Once the student-athlete participants were able to take the courses in for their declared majors, the amount of academic support decreased significantly and they began to seek further assistance from their faculty instructors if it was deemed necessary.

We have seen that the faculty interactions during the early college phase fell into three distinct categories: (a) faculty that were advocates/fans of athletics, (b) faculty that essentially

did not care about athletics, or (c) faculty members that despised athletics. However, this research finds that during the late college phase, the participants were able to locate, interact with, and develop relationships with faculty who were supportive of them. Each of the participants discussed having positive interactions with faculty members, specifically during the late college phase. These faculty members ended up being vital to these participants because they provided academic support with course work in addition to encouragement. This supports Comeaux and Harrison's (2007) finding that to some extent, the academic success of the student-athletes is based on the nature of faculty interactions. This study finds that the nature of the faculty interactions became positive over time because the participants determined which faculty members they would be able to establish a supportive relationship with. The experience of FSA 2 further established this point because he suffered an injury during his collegiate career. Not only were his faculty members supportive, they were able to accommodate him during his rehabilitation process so that he was able to complete his academic requirements.

In the late college phase, the former student-athlete participants have already selected their intended majors. As a result, they have a significant amount of flexibility with regards to the courses they can select. In addition, many of the declared majors have a set of courses the student-athletes can choose from. Again, this means that the academic support staff provided by the athletic department becomes significantly less involved in this process compared to when they first arrived on campus. FSA 2 mentioned that during this pivotal moment, he realized that he did not require guidance from the athletic academic support staff and instead increased his interaction with the academic advisor for his intended major. This was due to the fact that the academic advisor had a better understanding of the requirements needed for that particular major in order to graduate.

Athletics

The time demands that the participants were exposed to and had to manage during the early phase did not cease to exist in the late college phase. The difference is seen in how the former student-athlete participants managed those time demands in the late college phase. After the first couple of years, the former student-athlete participants had a better understanding of both their academic requirements and athletic obligations. This deeper understanding led them to recognize the amount of free time available throughout their day. For example, FSA 1 mentioned that it was during the late college phase when he realized that he did not have to be in the football meetings or in class 15 minutes early. This realization is subtle but carries an important impact. The athletic requirements did not change but the student-athletes were better able to navigate their responsibilities

As previously mentioned, the most significant challenge that the former student-athlete participants encountered was managing their academic and athletic load. The results at the late college phase indicate that the former student-athlete participants in this study discovered how to best manage their schedules by (a) experience, (b) by watching teammates, and /or (c) using the lessons learned during the early college phase. In the previous example, FSA 1 realized that he did not have to arrive to class or practice extremely early was the pivotal moment in which he understood how much time he had during the day. In addition, the athletic academic counselors helped the participants create daily schedules to ease their transition process during the early college phase. During the late college phase, the participants enacted some of those same lessons, to varying degrees, which enabled them to better manage the different demands on their time.

In addition to enrolling in courses that captured their attention, the student-athletes had a better understanding of their football expectations and how best to create more time for them to engage in various other academic pursuits (e.g., meeting with professors during office hours or involvement in a student group). Therefore, the time demands of the former student-athlete participants did not significantly differ from the early college to late college phase. What did change, however, was their ability to negotiate their athletic responsibilities to create more flexibility in their schedules for other academic and non-athletic pursuits. This adaptability came during the latter phase of their college career and was not adequately addressed in Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model. Comeaux and Harrison (2011) define sport commitment as "the amount of physical and psychological time and energy that a student-athlete devotes to his or her sport" (p. 238). According to the data presented in this study, sport commitment did not represent the experiences of the former student-athlete participants because it did not account for the time demands, the coaches' perception of academics, nor the interactions with coaches. For these reasons, sport commitment was adapted in the Porter model to athletics, which encompasses more components of the overall experience of the former student-athlete participants.

In the late college phase, if some of the coaches were involved in any manner, it was to ensure that the former student-athlete participants graduated. The coaches, as a collective unit, seemed to be less involved in the academic success of their student-athletes. However, the former student-athlete participants did have some interactions with members of the coaching staff who wanted to ensure that their athletes were focused on graduation.

Unfortunately, coaches that continued to encourage graduation at this stage seemed to be the exception to the rule. As Hyatt (2003) suggests, the coaches are concerned about the next group of incoming recruits, which leaves less time to be concerned about the academic welfare

of their older student-athletes. The experiences of the former student-athlete participants demonstrate that after the early college phase, coaches by and large were not involved with the academics of the participants.

Results from this study indicate that at this level, the former student-athlete participants have become fully aware of how to best deal with their coaches. This means the participants knew what the expectations of their coaches were and how to best meet those expectations. Unlike during the early college phase, in which the participants were trying to figure out the expectations of their coach, at this stage they already know what to expect because the participants have already experienced at least two seasons and academic years on campus.

Again, it must be reiterated that the interactions that did not change were the ones between the coaches and participants that largely depended on the athletic performance of the participant. FSA 1 clearly mentioned that "If you played well…you were the coach's best friend...if you don't…you were the worst person." This finding remains unchanged from the early to late college phase and illustrates that the level of performance of the student-athlete dictates their treatment from the coaches.

Social

After having experienced both the hostile and welcoming environments at SU, the participants were able to adjust to these distinct types of environments in the late college phase. The participants began to venture away from their teammates and discovered peers that shared similar beliefs or interests. FSA 5 mentioned that it was his religious beliefs that he used to establish deeper connections with peers on campus outside of his team. The common understanding for the participants was that they had a good sense of how the environment on

campus viewed them but took active measures to interact with other students that had shares viewpoints.

According to Simiyu (2012), the athletic schedules that the student-athletes manage typically prevent them from engaging with student groups. However, during the late college phase, participants realize how to restructure their schedules to give them more time, which allowed them to be active on campus. They also found student groups to become involved in or events to attend. FSA 1 and FSA 5 both were able to find such campus groups that they became involved in.

The remaining participants engaged with events on campus and were exposed to larger parts of the campus in that manner. However, the fact is that in the late college phase, the participants felt more confident to venture out of the athletic campus and engage with the larger campus. This confidence came from being able to better manage their academic and athletic responsibilities and once that happened, it freed up some time for the participants to engage in other activities. Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009) stated that "one of the most important factors in student learning and personal development is student engagement" (p. 316). The results of the current study support this assertion from Gaston-Gayles (2009) because they indicate that participating in student groups or attending campus events was meaningful for the participants to engage with and learn from campus peers with whom they might not have otherwise interacted.

Post College

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of former Black football student-athletes during their time on campus at State University. In particular, findings suggested that graduation and career selection were especially important components in the overall experiences and warranted a further discussion. These findings also illuminated additional

shortcomings of the Comeaux and Harrison (2011) student-athlete academic success model. For example, the former student-athlete participants discussed early struggles trying to manage both their academic and athletic responsibilities (Harrison, 2003; Haslerig & Navarro, 2016). According to the findings of this research, the intercollegiate athletic system is a force that influences both matriculation and academic schedules. Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model does not address the influence of intercollegiate athletics throughout the model, which represents a significant shortcoming that can be expanded upon through the current study.

While Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model concludes with the academic success component, it does not clearly define what academic success is in this context. Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model falls short of examining the experiences of the student-athletes beyond the college environment, which could also be a component for assessing academic success as Beamon (2008) suggests. This research found that the career choices of these former student-athlete participants were directly and indirectly influenced by football because most of the participants recognized that they enjoyed football enough to integrate it into their career path. The two main components of the post college phase are discussed in the following section.

Graduation (Bounded by Forces)

During the early college phase, the former student-athletes recall that their academic decisions (e.g., selecting classes and majors) were dictated by their football scheduled. This is conceptualized as academic clustering, in which student-athletes pursue undergraduate majors for the purposes of maintaining their eligibility and to avoid conflict with their football requirements, regardless of career interest (Beamon, 2008; Fountain & Finley, 2011; Navarro, 2015). The influence of football begins with initial major selection and continues until graduation. Research has also established that football influences the priorities of the student-athletes, which inhibits their ability to reap the full benefits (e.g. ability to engage in more

campus events, internships, and travel abroad programs) associated with being a member of the college student population (Beamon, 2008; Harrison, 2003; Singer, 2008). According to the experiences of the participants, the influence of football continues to and through graduation. Even though the participants stated that they navigated the college environment during the late college phase better than their early college phase, according to FSA 2, "football was the dark cloud over [my] head controlling everything."

Beamon (2008) establishes that the reason football exerts a significant level of control over the lives of their student-athletes two-fold. First, participating in football helped the participants gain acceptance into the institution and second, football provided the financial assistance necessary for them to pay for school. The level of influence football exercises and the unique pressure on coaches to produce winning teams (Navarro & Malvaso, 2016) creates an environment where football dictates the majors and how most of their time in spent during college, regardless of the adaptability of the student-athletes. Even when student-athletes attempt to pursue an academic route that doesn't align with football, as was the case with FSA 1, football inevitably governs their campus life experiences.

Although football had a significant impact on the lives of the former football student-athletes, the participants had a clear understanding of their give – and – take relationship with the athletic department. If the former student-athletes were going to earn the athletic department millions of dollars each Saturday, it was also up to the student-athletes to use the university for the opportunity to earn a degree. FSA 4 articulated this point:

> I figure…it was a system in my eyes. As far as, junior year I felt like, 'Man, we do all this stuff and don't see much.' It's a blessing like I said, you get a free education, so you can't complain or anything like that. But you are getting used but they don't tell you that

you're getting used…you got walk – ons and they will try so hard to make the team. These guys [the walk-on student-athletes] are huge on academic scholarships and…they have to come out of pocket, and it just struck me. I'm talking to my roommates, junior year in the apartment like, 'Man, we've got to use them like they using us. We got to get it all out because if they paying for your education, we might as well do the best that we can do.'

As previously stated, FSA 1 recalled a position coach telling him, "If you don't leave here with a degree, you got taken advantage of." That revelation solidified the importance of using their university to earn a college degree. In another instance, an on-campus academic advisor made the point to the student-athletes to use this system to their benefit. She shares with student-athletes, "say…the university uses them because they don't get paid. My response to them is always, 'Then use the university right back.' They're using you; you use them to get a free education." She urged the student-athletes to recognize how to use this system to benefit them while they could.

Along the same lines, the football coach was much more direct in his analysis. He equated the system of college athletics to that of a "booty call." Essentially, a "booty call" is a summons based on the needs of an individual that is to be satisfied by another on an ad hoc basis. Simply stated, the athletic departments need a continuous supply of talented student-athletes, especially in their revenue – producing sports to continue generating funds for the university. However, as more talented student-athletes emerge, they become the targets of recruitment compared to the current student-athletes who are essentially old news. The football coach explains it like this "If there's someone else out there better than you, [those] calls stop coming. They'll call that person." He further suggests that because this system is like a booty call, the

onus is on the student-athletes to use that system to its full advantage as long as they are in college. Using the system to its full advantage means ensuring that the student-athletes leave college with a degree, relationships that can propel them into their career, and experiences that will prepare them for life after college athletics. The feelings of being exploited by the systems (Beamon, 2008) will fade as the student-athletes graduate from their institution, prepared for the next steps in their journey.

Career

Previous research has established that student-athletes do not typically have well – defined career plans when they enter college (Lally & Kerr, 2005) and many want to establish a career playing in professional sports leagues, especially football players (Harrison, 2003; Haslerig & Navarro, 2016), despite the remote chances (Tyrance, Harris & Post, 2013). The findings from the current research support such research since most of the participants did not have well – defined career goals. One participant played in the NFL for more than 10 years and the others considered trying out. Even as they approached their junior and senior years, the former student-athlete participants did not have mature career plans. This experience contradicts some literature which suggests that student-athletes allow their student role to become more prominent during the latter college years, with more defined career plans (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

It has been documented that football student-athletes aspire to play professional football, but scant research exists that examines football student-athletes who want to establish a career in sports, not limited to only being an athlete. Previous research has consistently established that athletes with a strong athletic identity are more unprepared to manage their career transition out of their sport (Lally & Kerr, 2005; Tyrance et al., 2013). However, the experiences of the former student-athlete participants indicate that as they were working through their career transition when their playing careers ended, most still enjoyed football and found ways to be involved with

it in their career. Navarro (2014) establishes that career construction is a dynamic process, which is not neatly defined, but is an evolutionary process that considers the life experiences of students. It is not unreasonable to consider that because student-athletes spend 20 hours per week or more on football – related activities over the course of their college careers (Tyrance et al., 2013) that they might enjoy being involved with football after their playing days are over. Realizing that participating in a football – related career did not come immediately; rather, it was a process of exploration of a variety of other careers until they settled into their current careers.

The experiences that these former student-athletes encountered on campus shaped the careers they ultimately pursued. Whether it is working as a real estate developer or playing in the NFL, these former student-athletes described that their experience playing football prepared them for their career. In some respects, the challenges they faced while adjusting to college provided them with opportunities to build transferable skills for their respective careers, especially those careers that were associated with athletics. FSA 2 shared, "Having played football at the Division I level, I now have a better understanding of how to be a better coach for my players." Even FSA 5, who played over 10 years in the NFL believed, "Without the experience at [State University], I would not have been in the position to have a successful career in the NFL."

As presented in Chapter 4, FSA 1 benefited from networking and meeting a donor from State University with a particular affinity towards the football team. This connection opened the door to his current position. As such, this brings up one important consideration. Football provided these students with the opportunity to build social capital. They built relationships with people who they may not have come into contact with outside of football. In many cases, these external supporters had a keen interest in the football team and were not shy about interacting

264

with members of the current team or former student-athletes. As FSA 1 stated, "If it wasn't for playing football at [State University], I would not have the opportunity to build relationships with as many people because we were in two completely different worlds. But football brought us together." FSA 4 shared a similar revelation "If it wasn't for football, there is no way that I would have met the people I did, that eventually led me to get the job I have now." Despite the challenges of trying to navigate not only the academic and athletic responsibilities but also manage the social environment, playing football at Division I institution provided a great opportunity for these former student-athletes. The opportunities included the ability to earn a degree and network with individuals who were typically outside their social and professional circles.

Organizational Perspective

As previously described in Chapter 2, the framework for understanding the organizational environment was introduced in by Muwonge (2012), which built upon Scott (2003), Thompson (1967), and Parson (1960). This framework (Figure 2) establishes a central function of the organizational system (i.e., to produce games) to obtain the necessary resources to operate (e.g., financial and personnel resources), a cultural environment to construct meaning in, an institutional environment to legitimize the system, and managerial activities (e.g., people who manages the system). This framework provided the context to examine these former student-athletes beyond their individual experiences and to situate them within the boundaries of a larger organization and system.
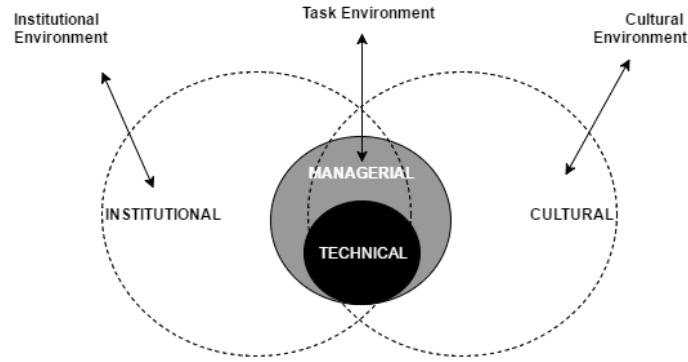
Figure 2. Levels of organizational activities.

Since the student-athletes must compete with two opposing core functions (i.e., athletics and academics), this model was adapted to depict those two competing interests. Figure 3 represents this interaction and indicates that intercollegiate athletics does not exist on its own. Rather, it resides within the primary functions of higher education: researching, teaching, and providing academic service (Buer, 2009).
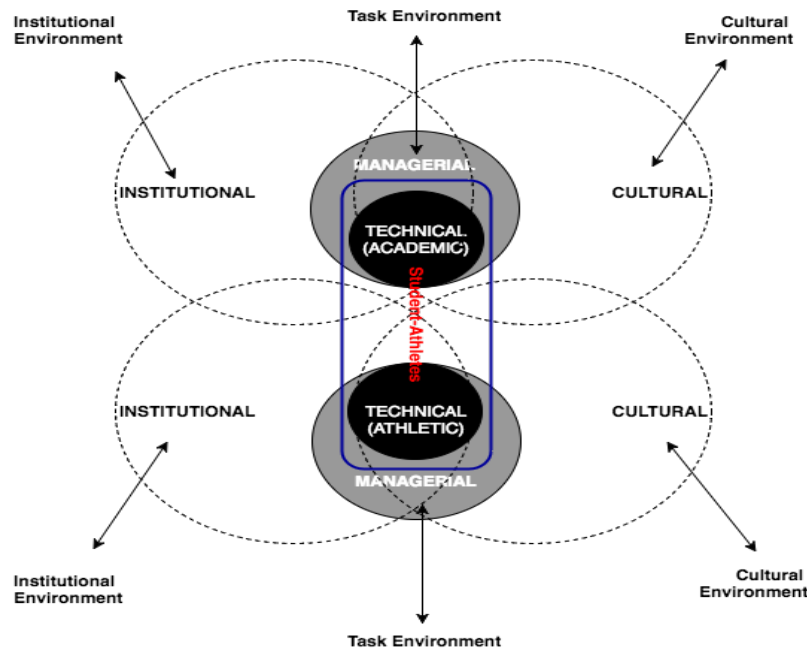
Figure 3. Levels of organizational activities (combined with conflicting technical cores)

This means that in addition to contending with football as situated in the system of intercollegiate athletics, the student-athletes also have to manage two core functions that conflict with one another (i.e., athletics and academics). As previously mentioned, the core function of the academic entity at State University is to produce graduate students while the athletic core function of football is to produce games. The foundation of the athletic department is built on revenue generated from football. This, combined with commercialism and the increased pressure to win (Duderstadt, 2000), has created a situation in which the Black male football student-athletes must successfully compete within the environment at the university and manage two conflicting core functions.

The athletic component within the university context creates a dual identity for the university because the athletic enterprise and academic instruction of the university operate simultaneously (Buer, 2009). However, the academic and athletic components are in conflict with one another because each competes to situate itself as the first priority of the university. Buer (2009) writes that each entity "stresses elements of its own, with values paramount in academe and commercialist more prominent in spectator sports" (p. 112). When each side stresses its own elements, the conflict is hardened and a civil war ensues (Buer, 2009).

Examining the experiences of former Black male student-athletes from this organizational perspective clarifies why conflict exists and the extent of its effects. In essence, the conflict between the competing core functions of the academic and athletic entities of the university is exacerbated because football financially sanctions them attend the university. Buer (2009) further establishes that "both sides…make decisions that seem appropriate to them but that the other sees as inappropriate and even unacceptable" (p. 113). Such decisions can include the scheduling of classes or practice times, academic and athletic requirements, major

requirements, football film study, travel schedule, and group projects. Each one of these decisions has an intended and unintended consequence for the student-athletes.

In many ways, football is a gateway attraction of the university. Football is considered a spectator sport and acts as the "front porch" to the university, "making it accessible to the alumni and community, and engender 'campus spirit,' making a university more attractive to students" (Buer, 2009, p. 109). In addition, university presidents have capitalized on the popularity of spectator sports to increase public interest in their university. This widely accepted idea from both the academic and athletic entities of the university ensure that spectator sports, specifically football, are indispensable elements of the university and help distinguish it in the professional ranks. Even though athletics can draw on the prestige of its institution, it is primarily concerned with wins and losses. Similarly, the academic enterprise capitalizes on the success of the spectator sports since it is concerned with producing graduate students.

Therefore, it is important to understand that student-athlete academic success extends beyond establishing a path of progress towards graduation (Figure 4: Porter model). Rather, it must take into account two conflicting core functions (i.e., academics and athletics) that impact the experiences of student-athletes. Figure 9 captures this conflict as two key forces that shape how student-athletes navigate the collegiate environment. These forces are football and the intercollegiate athletics system itself.
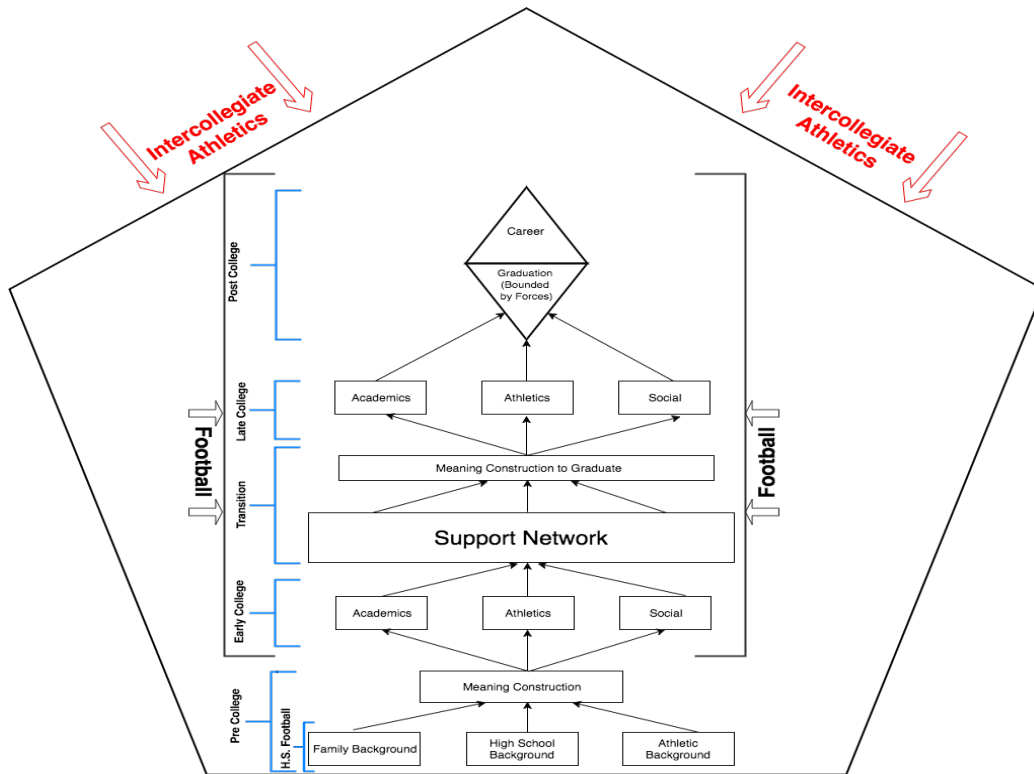
Figure 9. Porter model (displaying forces)

Forces of the Intercollegiate Athletics System & Football

As discussed in Chapter 2, the intercollegiate athletics system operates under the scope of the higher educational system and controls the commercial enterprises associated with college athletics. These are not inherently designed for the success of student-athletes, and more specifically, they are not designed to push Black student-athletes to graduation. Although the participants in this study did not have the same academic credentials as their White non-student-athlete counterparts, they were not necessarily underprepared for college. Their most severe challenge upon arriving on campus was managing the conflicting athletic and academic responsibilities.

Adjusting to this new athletic commitment seemed to be the single hardest aspect that these participants had to successfully manage. The influence of student-athletes' schedules and the institutional focus on the athletic performance of these student-athletes is well documented

269

(Donnor, 2005; Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003; McCormick & McCormick, 2012; Penn Schoen Berland, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2012). However, the majority of the previous research (Beamon, 2008; Simiyu, 2012; Singer 2008; Woodruff & Schallert, 2008) only discusses athletic schedules with regards to the amount of time the student-athlete must devote to their sport. The findings of this study revealed that the athletic time commitment and the volume of academic course created the most significant challenge for the participants. In reality, the intercollegiate athletic system ensured that the vast majority of their time was dedicated to their football – related activities. But even after fulfilling these commitments, it was expected that any remaining time for academic – related activities was not to conflict with any football – related priorities.

As such, a key finding from this study is that football is a constant external force, one that the student-athletes must contend with during their entire time at the institution. For the former student-athlete participants, this force affected and influenced all aspects of their experiences at State University to ensure their compliance with the system as soon as they arrived on campus. But football does not exist in a vacuum; it is small part of a larger intercollegiate athletic system that influences student-athletes prior to their arrival to college.

This system is designed to reduce Black student-athletes to the labor source that drives the entire athletic department, especially for institutions in the Power 5 conferences. Black students as a whole make-up less than 10% of the entire student population at all of the Power 5 institutions but comprise the majority of players on the football team (Harper, 2006; Harper et al., 2013; Sellers, 2000). The participants recall being too exhausted to stay awake in class, interactions with academic support who only wanted them to maintain their eligibility, being stereotyped by members of the predominantly White campus, and being encouraged to pursue certain courses or majors that would not interfere with football. As the participants progressed

through their academic and athletic careers, they became more fully aware of their treatment and how the system was designed to continue recruiting talented student-athletes. The participants also recognized that during the recruitment process, staff members involved consistently touted the academic credentials of the institution. However, the participants soon realized that some majors/courses would be almost impossible to take if they wanted to continue playing football.

The intercollegiate athletics system is also designed to utilize the talents of these student-athletes, Black football players especially, in order to advance its commercial enterprise. Because of how this system is structured, the university can claim to fuse together the importance of the academic pursuits of their student-athletes while stressing the importance of devoting the majority of the student-athletes' time to their sport. Figure 9 attempts to capture this dynamic and illustrates both the forces of the intercollegiate athletic system and football. The following section discusses three areas where these forces significantly impact the experiences of former student-athletes: (a) time commitment, (b) emphasis on maintaining eligibility, and (c) career preparation.

Time Commitment

Balancing athletic and academic requirements proved to be more challenging than the academic rigor for some participants. These experiences underscore the prevalence of how these conflicting academic and athletic core functions create an imbalance that only the student-athlete is expected to manage. These conflicts are most intense in football. When discussing the time commitment of being a student-athlete at State University, FSA 1 articulated that "being an athlete…you're getting up early in the morning for early morning workouts. [Then after the workouts], you're in class. Then you have to go back to [practice]. Then after…practice, you're then required to go back and study." FSA 2 articulated similar sentiments regarding the time

271

commitment they had to manage. He also stated, "I just remember it being dark all the time...we would practice on Sundays…and it felt like we were there all day. We would leave and it'd be dark." This experience suggests that this former student-athlete spent so much time performing football related activities that during the off-season (in the Winter), he felt that he was basically in the football building all the time.

All participants affirmed that their football – related responsibilities (e.g., athletic trainer appointments, training tables, weight room sessions, film study, and game travel) easily required more than the allotted 20 hours a week (in season) to their sport. This was also true during the off-season. FSA 2 in particular noted, "The 'volunteer' practices or weight room sessions weren't exactly 'volunteer.'" The complicating factor was also trying to manage class, which is why study table was a crucial academic support program for the former student-athletes. As previously mentioned, FSA 2 discussed that because of everything he had to do on the football field, he physically had a difficult time staying awake in some of his classes. Because FSA 4 was diagnosed with a learning disability, he required more time than average to get assignments done.

Similarly, FSA 1 realized that because he was not adequately prepared for college, he understood that he could not miss a class because he could fall further behind. However, like the other former student-athlete participants, FSA 1 also had to manage the expectations the coaches had of him to maintain his starting position on the football team. He mentioned, "The first year…I was so overwhelmed with all the school work and it was a million things going on in my mind the first year." Not only did these former student-athletes spend more than the allotted 20 hours a week (in season) on official and unofficial football – related activities, they also had to manage the academic credit hours they were required to take. In the early college phase, each of

the former student-athlete participants admitted that they easily spent more time with football than they did on academic pursuits. FSA 2 in particular said, "It was not even close. I spent significantly more time with football than I did doing anything else."

The time commitment required of these former student-athletes demonstrates that even though they attended a predominantly White research-intensive institution, the intercollegiate athletics system was designed to ensure they devoted an enormous amount of time to their sport. Spending a significant amount of time on their sport left them with barely enough time to attend class and take care of their academic responsibilities. As stated by Singer's (2008), this forced Black male student-athletes' academic interests and campus pursuits to take a backseat.

The physical price required to endure over the course of an academic year can be detrimental to Black student-athlete's ability to concentrate on their academic work. During the regular season, football student-athletes average over 50 hours per week on sport – related activities and over 250 days during an average year (McCormick & McCormick, 2012). A study conducted by the Pac-12 conference found that student-athletes are spending approximately 50 hours per week on athletic related activities during the season in both official and unofficial team functions (Penn Schoen Berland, 2015).

Unfortunately, the stringent time commitment prohibited participants from considering all possible majors that might have been available to them. These restrictions also limited their ability to be active members in the university community. When discussing meeting professors at their office hours, FSA 4 articulated the common theme, "I always asked if they got extra office hours that I could attend because probably you leaving to go play an away game." And when it came to meeting with group members to work on projects, he said, "it was hard for me to meet with [my] group members because [I] had practice and they had to work later that night, so [I

would] have to re-schedule." These time constraints inhibited their ability to meet with professors and group members and active participation in the campus community beyond athletic. When asked about the organizations these student-athletes were involved with, many articulated that were not involved at all until they became upperclassmen. The reason for this is because as these student-athletes got older and became upperclassmen, they were better able to manage their time expectations and maneuver through the system much more effectively than when they were underclassmen. FSA 1 said it best:

> It was just…feeling accomplished that I know what my responsibilities or requirements are. I don't have to be sitting here in the classroom…early. I can come in right when class start. I'm not getting any brownie points for sitting in the room for 15 minutes. Same thing with football, I don't have to be sitting in the meeting room fifteen minutes early. I can come in right when the meeting is about to start. I know what's going on and [the] coaches respect you…with my comfort, with understanding, I could steal a few minutes here, and few minutes there…you feel you knew what you were doing. You know you're not lost.

Utilizing these skills helped the former student-athletes manage their time more effectively. Knowing what the coaches expected from them, learning the university environment, having a better sense of their academic requirements and how to get help if needed, and understanding the business aspect of intercollegiate athletics contributed to their successful adaptation to this system.

Emphasis on Maintaining Eligibility

The former student-athlete participants also alluded to the fact that some of the academic support they received, was simply a focus not on academic achievement but on maintaining

274

eligibility. As previously stated, some participants mentioned that the academic support staff did not push the student-athletes to take challenging courses that could possibly conflict with football. In addition, maintaining eligibility influenced the majors the student-athletes selected. It is worth mentioning that former student-athletes were never told what majors or courses to take; however, those decisions were indeed affected by their football responsibilities. It is important to distinguish the explicit statements and the implicit messages when participants received academic counseling. The fact remains that the athletic system greatly influenced course selection and major pursuit.

During the recruitment process, participants were convinced of the value of the degree they would receive along with the variety of options of possible majors. However, upon arriving on campus, the participants realized that either (a) some majors were not going to be possible to get into with their football schedule because of time conflicts or (b) their football schedule and obligations did not permit them ample time to dedicate towards their academic pursuits. Unfortunately, this is how the system is designed.

These former student-athletes confronted the reality of a demanding football – related schedule, which left them with little time to spend on campus to meet faculty and group partners, participate in social clubs, or pursue other academic interests. The intercollegiate athletics system is designed to ensure that any time remaining after football – related obligations is spent on non-conflicting academic pursuits. Essentially, athletic commitments take priority over any other endeavor because the institution provides student-athletes with scholarships. This suggests that athletic prowess is a priority over any academic pursuits.

According to State University records, the average GPA for graduating undergraduate students between 2006 and 2012 (the range of graduating years for the former student-athlete

participants) is 3.26 and for undergraduate men specifically, the average graduating GPA is 3.21. After examining Table 6, it becomes clear that only FSA 5 graduated with a GPA in the range of the average student at State University. FSA 5, who stated that he was unprepared for college level academia, achieved a higher college GPA than high school GPA. Regarding this scholarly transition, he stated, "I was a better college student than high school student." When probed deeper, FSA 5 commented:

> Once I realized that even though it's going to take me longer hours to accomplish things, once I realized I could do [the work]…around my sophomore year…it gave me courage. [I began] to realize that I was just as smart as anybody else…and once I realized that life wasn't about being cool…I began to really well in school.

The other former student-athlete participants all had graduating college GPAs that ranged between 2.4 – 2.9. Based on the information presented earlier, the former student-athlete participants graduated with lower GPAs compared to their non-student-athlete peers. However, while they achieved lower GPAs, it must also be noted that the majority of non-student-athlete peers entered State University with GPAs that eclipsed the former student-athlete participants. Essentially, the GPA gap between the former student-athlete participants and the non-student-athlete peers closed dramatically at State University. Nonetheless, the overwhelming issue that explains the lower graduating GPAs of the former student-athlete participants reflects their initial struggles managing both their football and academic responsibilities.

Each participant shared common struggles with football time commitment and managing their academic courses. Because they were putting so much time into their football responsibilities early on in their athletic career, their grades suffered. These experiences demonstrate that the system of intercollegiate athletics has a tangible effect on the overall

experiences and GPAs of the student-athletes. Early on in their collegiate careers, participants believed they needed to spend a tremendous amount of time performing football – related activities because that is why and how they gained access to State University.

Benefits of Participation in the Intercollegiate Athletics System

Despite the negative attributes of the intercollegiate athletics system, the results from this study illustrate that there are some benefits that cannot be ignored or understated. One of the primary benefits of playing football at a Division I level is the opportunity to earn a college degree from a research-intensive institution. This finding reinforces similar findings from previous research (Beamon, 2008; Benson, 2000; Sellers, 2000; Singer, 2005). The opportunity to attend a prestigious institution without paying the cost of tuition, room and board, or meals alleviates the financial burden associated with college attendance. Even though the participants did have weaker academic profiles compared to the average student at State University, it is feasible that their academic credentials would not have yielded acceptance into the institution without their participation in football. Regardless of how the participants gained admission to the university, the fact remains that they were accepted and provided with an opportunity that is only available to approximately 2.6% of all high school students that play football at the Division I level (NCAA, 2016).

Second, the findings also suggest that the participants were better prepared for their current careers as a result of their participation in football at State University. For some, their football – related experiences, in addition to what the participants learned while taking their required courses, prepared them for their current careers. For example, both FSA 2 and FSA 4 are currently college football coaches. Each stated that their experiences playing college football aided their understanding of how a Division I college football program operates (e.g., meeting

structure, practice structure, practice schedules, weight room schedules, game preparation, and

recruiting). This understanding provided the foundational knowledge they needed to progress

through their careers. Because FSA 2 and FSA 4 had the opportunity to play Division I college

football, they had deep insight about how to effectively structure and operate an elite football

program. FSA 3 is currently a high school football coach and athletic director and echoed much

of the same sentiments about how to organize and manage a football program. FSA 5 is currently

a player for the NFL and attributes his ability to make a living playing football from the

experiences he had playing football at State University. He mentioned that playing football at

State University was the best preparation for his current profession because he played against the

best players in college and understood how meetings, practices, and off-season workouts were

structured. Therefore, when he arrived at his new team's practice facility, he already had an idea

of what was expected and how to be successful. Last, even though FSA 1 was a general studies

major, he took enough business courses to earn a minor degree. This is significant for him

because he is now an affordable housing real estate developer and says that those business

courses provided the foundational knowledge that he needed to survive in his current career.

Without that foundational knowledge, he mentioned that it would have been harder to adapt to

and manage his job responsibilities.

Learning to better exercise time management skills was a key tool that these former

student-athletes acquired during their time at State University. In addition to the foundational

knowledge that each participant acquired, each participant dealt with demands on their time and

they reference their ability to handle class, football, and their social lives as a key factor in

preparing them for life after football. Therefore, the ability to manage conflicting stressors, the

information from the courses, and experiences playing football and on campus, helped to prepare these participants for their current professional roles.

The last benefit of this system stemmed from the relationships that participants formed with people outside their existing social and professional networks. There are external supporters of the university that have an interest in the success of the football program. Due to their interest, these supporters spend a tremendous amount of time informally interacting with the student-athletes. The participants all discussed the benefits of being able to network with many of these individuals who they may not have met in the course of their daily routines. Many of these relationships actually led to job opportunities for the participants, which demonstrates the power of networking in athletics. Considering there are several major concerns with the system of intercollegiate athletics, it does provide some beneficial aspects to those student-athletes that are worth considering. The student-athletes who take full advantage of the positive features of the system can reap benefits and future career options.

Implications of Practice

Based on the data revealed in this study, there are several key implications of practice that must be addressed. Athletics academic support professionals, student affairs professionals, faculty members, coaches and associate/assistant athletic directors must recognize the importance of (a) having student-athletes develop their own support network, (b) that Black football student-athletes are not a homogenous population and each has a different set of circumstance and experiences they bring with them to college, (c) challenging student-athletes beyond a focus of maintaining eligibility, (d) understanding and helping to refine how student-athletes construct meaning of their environment, (e) encouraging the student-athletes to become active participants on campus and (f) preparing interested student-athletes for careers in athletic

279

related fields. Understanding and implementing these aspects can ensure that Black male football student-athletes are in a better position to graduate from their institution.

Findings from this study support Rosenfeld et al., (1989) and Albrecht and Adelman (1984) that the development of a support network is critical to the overall wellbeing of student-athletes. Similar to the findings of Rosenfeld et al. (1989), social support can come from a variety of different groups of people (e.g., coaches, teammates, parents, friends, and significant others) and each contributes in a different manner. It is important to note that people in the student-athletes' support network do not need to be specially certified to possess any kind of unique qualities; they only need to care about the wellbeing of the student-athlete. This study also found that the participants looked to their support networks for venting frustration, academic guidance, reassurance, career guidance, and counseling. Therefore, helping student-athletes develop their own support network provides them with a built-in structure for mental and physical recovery from managing the pressures that come along with being a student-athlete (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984).

Second, Black football student-athletes are a subgroup of the Black male population on predominantly White college campuses. However, classifying all Black males that play Division I football in a similar manner diminishes the differences within this subgroup and clearly showcases the stereotypes they must contend with (Harper & Nichols, 2008). The results of this study support the previous findings that Black male students come from a range of home environments, had different affiliations, communicated in culturally different ways, and had varying interactions with same race peers on campus (Harper & Nichols, 2008; Sellers, 2000). If Black male students are not a monolithic group, Black male student-athletes are certainly not an exception. The common narrative is that Black male football student-athletes come to college

largely from inner cities and from schools with inferior academic resources (Sellers, 2000), which explains why this population is largely underprepared for college academia. This study reveals that within the Black male football student-athlete population, there exists a significant amount of diversity that cannot be overlooked within the different levels of academic preparation. Not all Black male football student-athletes are academically underprepared for college. In many cases, as this study found, they are trying to manage the conflicting athletic and academic responsibilities. Athletic department staff members charged with working with these Black male football student-athletes must look for opportunities to learn about the different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences that the student-athletes bring with them to college and not the typical stereotypes that accompany them (Harper & Nichols, 2008). Only when those working with the student-athletes understand their background and experiences can they foster conditions to address the individual needs of the student-athletes.

Third, results from this study indicate that in many instances, the participants felt like the academic support they received was designed to simply keep them football eligible rather than to challenge and intellectually stimulate them. This finding supports the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2001), which suggests that athletic academic support centers are focused on maintaining eligibility (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Athletic departments boast about the amount of academic resources that they provide to their student-athletes. However, as Hollis (2001) notes, "extra resources alone do not have a positive impact on student-athlete graduation" (p. 280). The participants in this study experienced no shortage of academic resources but still perceived the role of the academic support staff to ensure eligibility first and foremost. Nonetheless, providing intensive academic support for the student-athletes beyond a focus of maintaining eligibility can enhance their GPAs (Gill & Farrington, 2014) and

graduation rates. Monda, Etzel, Shannon, and Wooding (2015) suggest that student-athletes who understood their expectations and had clear academic goals and strong support were "more likely to stay motivated in engage in academic activity" (p. 123). This means that setting higher academic expectations for student-athletes, compared to solely concentrating on the minimum standards, sets them up to perform better academically and increase the number of graduating Black student-athletes each year.

Four, understanding and developing the motivational forces that drive student-athletes to graduate can be a key goal of the entire athletic department. Harrison, Martin and Fuller (2015) find that although self-determined behaviors are "essential to the success of African American male student-athletes, athletic departments and the campus community are capable of facilitating or debilitating self-determination" (p. 88). Furthermore, teammates, coaches, and university members either promoted or hindered the student-athletes' self-determined behaviors. Likewise, this research found that there were individuals who the participants interacted with that either promoted or hindered their self-determined behaviors. University officials that interact with student-athletes have the ability to impact the motivation of the student-athletes and therefore should understand and nurture it. Promoting these behaviors and motivation for the student-athletes can be another critical component to ensure that they graduate from the institution. Simons, Van Rheenen, and Covington (1999) explain that "educators need to play a more prominent role in the lives of student athletes to help them see that they can succeed academically as well as athletically" (p. 161). In this context, the university staff members that interact with the student-athletes can be considered educators and, as such, are paramount to promoting the intrinsic motivation of the student-athletes to graduate. Harrison et al., (2015) also suggest that intrinsic motivation relies on feedback that one receives and can be perceived as

informational, controlling, or lack of motivation. Therefore, university officials, including athletic department staff members, must understand and promote the motivation of their student-athletes and ensure their feedback is designed to do the same thing. This is an important factor to consider because understanding and promoting motivation can have an impact on the student-athletes' drive to graduate.

Fifth, structural constraints limited and inhibited the ability of the student-athletes to be active members of the campus community, which confirm similar findings from Singer (2008). This was true for the participants, especially during their first two years on campus. Even though student-athletes are only allowed to participate in 20 hours a week on official athletic – related activities during the season, in reality they will often spend upwards of 40 hours a week on their sport in addition to their academic course requirements. However, encouraging student-athletes to participate in campus activities or groups that are meaningful to them can, as Gayles and Hu (2009) suggest, "have a greater impact on personal self-concept and learning and communication skills regardless of background characteristics" (p. 328). Some of the participants in this study began participating in campus groups that piqued their interest once they adjusted to their academic and athletic requirements. In addition, Gayles and Hu (2009) find that "exposing student-athletes in meaningful ways to their non-athlete peers makes a difference in terms of how they view themselves, their cultural attitudes, and reported gains in learning and communication skills" (p. 329). The faculty and staff members interviewed for this study also agree with this premise. They believe that exposing the student-athletes in meaningful ways to campus groups and programs can enhance their campus educational experiences and better prepare them for life after football. However, it is important to note that not every peer non-athlete interaction is positive. Bimper et al. (2012) state that some faculty and non-athlete peers do have lower

expectations and hold negative stereotypes of Black student-athletes. Therefore, the athletic department staff members should encourage meaningful campus experiences so that student-athletes can reap the benefits of being active campus participants.

In January 2017, the Power 5 conferences and their member institutions "unanimously voted to adopt new rules that would give student-athletes one day off per week during the season, 14 days off at the end of the season, and two days off per week during the off-season" (New, 2017). This showcases that some institutions are beginning to recognize the importance of allowing student-athletes opportunities to engage with the campus community, seek study abroad programs, and pursue internships. While the structural constraints imposed on the student-athletes are undeniable, some administrators and officials are attempting to ensure that student-athletes can become more authentic and active members of the campus community.

Last, the idea of preparing student-athletes for athletic careers should be reexamined. When student-athletes discuss athletically – related careers, traditional research refers to the chances for student-athletes to play professional sports (Tyrance et al., 2013). Because career construction is a dynamic process that takes into account life experiences (Navarro, 2014), it may be reasonable to consider that student-athletes may want to pursue a career in sports that does not involve direct participation. Therefore, establishing a program in which student-athletes can explore a variety of careers related to athletics could galvanize their passion for their sport beyond college instead of forcing them to earn a degree in a major which they have no interest in pursuing (Beamon, 2008).

Recommendations for Practice

A goal of this study was to enhance the understanding of the experiences of Black male football student-athletes that graduated from a predominantly White research-intensive

institution. Black male football student-athletes comprise the majority of Division I football teams in the Power 5 conferences and they experience a tremendous amount of contradictory pressures to perform academically and athletically. Unfortunately, it is not only the student-athletes that feel this pressure and many times, this pressure trickles down to the staff members who are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the student-athletes uphold their athletic and academic responsibilities. As a result of this trickledown effect, staff members sometimes treat this group of student-athletes like they are all the same when they focus on maintaining eligibility, promote certain majors over others, and direct their extra time to football – related activities. The system of intercollegiate athletics does not appear to be changing anytime soon. However, the researcher presents a set of practical recommendations that describe how institutions and their athletic departments can ensure that a higher number of Black male football student-athletes graduate from their institution.

Determine Background.

Uncovering the real academic and socioeconomic backgrounds of the student-athletes rather than believing preconceived misconceptions can create a better understanding of the student-athletes. Once the staff members know who the student-athletes are and find out their socioeconomic environments along with their academic backgrounds, the athletic department staff members can create more robust individual academic support plans for the student-athletes to help them adjust and manage their conflicting expectations. Instead of making general assumptions, utilizing this authentic information about this subgroup of student-athletes can help the staff members understand the needs and what areas the student-athletes need to develop.

Understand Their Motivation

After determining the background of the student-athletes, determining what motivates them could help athletic department staff members figure out how to promote, enhance, and foster that motivation. For some student-athletes, having the opportunity to play Division I football as a way to earn a college degree and get out of their home environments is their motivation to graduate. Only by learning what drives each student-athlete can athletic support staff members create individual plans and procedures for promoting intrinsic motivation.

Foster Relationships With Faculty

Faculty members who are advocates for student-athletes could be important partners for the athletic department. Beyond course material instruction, faculty members can provide student-athletes with valuable insight about how to navigate the academic world, especially with those faculty members who are either indifferent or those who detest athletics. Developing relationships with faculty members is not only vital for the success of the athletic department but also for the student-athletes. Whenever possible, the student-athletes should be encouraged to seek out faculty guidance and assistance. It may not always be possible to develop a relationship with faculty members, but those who are advocates can be great assets to the student-athletes and may end up being part of the student-athletes' support network. This way, the importance of academics and graduation is reinforced from university officials that are not athletic department staff members.

Teach Student-Athletes How To Navigate the System

Besides engaging in activities aimed at understanding the background and meaning construction of the student-athletes, the most important recommendation for practitioners is to teach the student-athletes how to navigate the system of intercollegiate athletics. The results of

this study demonstrated that one of the key ways in which the student-athletes learned how to navigate the system was by watching and emulating their older teammates. With this finding in mind, creating an opportunity in which the younger student-athletes are paired with older teammates to show them the ropes can provide invaluable learning experiences for the younger student-athletes. Instead of hoping the younger student-athletes watch their teammates and learn things sporadically, creating a big brother program for the younger student-athletes would be especially invaluable in their early college phase.

Encourage the Support Network

Encouraging the student-athletes to surround themselves with peers, teammates, family members, select coaches, and staff members who they can trust and are dedicated to their overall wellbeing, is a key recommendation. It will be imperative for the student-athletes to have people with whom they can vent and receive guidance from during their tenure at the university. Support networks do not need to look the same for every student-athlete; the critical factor is that each student-athlete builds a network. Athletic department staff members that consistently interact with student-athlete should check – in with them to ensure that they have people they can depend on, especially when faced with difficult situations. Pairing student-athletes with mentors, faculty, staff or former student-athletes when they first arrive on campus can be a way to further expand the student-athletes' understanding of the system. With this recommendation, staff members internal to the athletic department need not be worried about restructuring the entire system because they can introduce stakeholders into the existing network who can help the student-athletes manage the unknown.

Encourage On-Campus Experiences

Encouraging the student-athletes to become an active part of campus by engaging in meaningful programs and events can help enhance the student-athletes' experience. This will help the student-athletes become well – rounded people. Determining the interest of the student-athletes beyond the athletic and academic responsibilities will help the athletic department staff members point them in the right direction of groups and events they might find interesting. Student-athletes spend a significant amount of time involved with their sport and class. Encouraging them to take advantage of all the university has to offer will help the student-athletes reap the benefits of being active members on campus and exposing them to things they might have never found if they never left the confines of the athletic campus.

Coaches Take An Active Role in Academic Pursuits

The coaches play a critical role in the lives of the student-athletes because they recruit the student-athletes and spend a significant amount of time with them. It goes without saying that the first job of the coach is to win games; otherwise their employment is jeopardized. However, the coaches have another obligation to the student-athletes. If coaches are going to use the academic prestige of the university to recruit student-athletes, then the coaches have an obligation to be more actively involved with the academic pursuits of their student-athletes beyond enforcing punishment. Active involvement includes but is not limited to simply asking the student-athletes how they are managing their classes, what they are interested in doing after their athletic career is finished, and how the coach could better support the student-athletes. These simple conversation prompts can help demonstrate to the student-athletes that the coaches care about them and not solely about their ability to contribute on the field of play. Although some may consider this recommendation idealistic, the results from this study indicate that the

288

coaches who encouraged the student-athletes' academic pursuits were the same people who the participants learned from and developed lasting relationships with. The influence of coaches is undeniable and if they are members of the of higher education institution, then they should at least exhibit genuine interest in the academic pursuits of the student-athletes.

Develop Time Management Plan

Managing the academic and athletic responsibilities can be challenging for student-athletes. Helping the student-athletes create a plan to manage their time is paramount to their ability to adapt to their increased levels of responsibility. Division I football coupled with college level academia creates a significant amount of stress for student-athletes. Only by effectively managing their time, especially early on their college career, will they be able to perform in the class and on the field.

Prepare Student-Athletes for Life After Sports

Results from this study indicate that many student-athletes will gravitate towards sport – related careers after the conclusion of their college playing days. Many student-athletes have been involved in or around sports for numerous years. In many instances, sports have also provided an avenue for student-athletes to attend college. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that student-athletes may want to pursue careers in an athletically – related field. Further developing an opportunity for student-athletes can gain experience in the sport – related career of choice could be extremely advantageous for the student-athletes. This would provide the opportunity for student-athletes to learn about a variety of careers within the athletic realm and gain practical skills to help them prepare for life after playing.

Since the NCAA and members of the Power 5 conferences have passed new legislation further limiting the amount of time student-athletes can dedicate to their sport, athletic

departments have a unique opportunity to prepare student-athletes for careers in athletically –

related fields. Increasing accessibility for student-athletes to participate in internships, perhaps

with local companies or organizations, can be a great step in preparing student-athletes for life

after sports. State University has already taken incredible steps to ensure that student-athletes

have an opportunity to do internships and gain practical skills as a means for preparing them for

life after playing sports. However, more institutions need to follow and develop their own

method of preparing student-athletes.

Understand the Role That Race Plays In Intercollegiate Athletics

As previously mentioned, Black males are particularly overrepresented in football

relative to their representation on college campuses and in society as a whole. This over

representation is not accidental. Exploring and understanding critical race theory (CRT) can lead

to deeper understanding of the racial dynamic inherent in the intercollegiate athletics system. The

benefit of CRT is that it "not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets

out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to

transform it for the better" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). The experiences of the participants

in this study further illustrate that race does indeed play a role in the lives of these student-

athletes. Black men are the majority of football student-athletes and must deal with racism

present within the system, which is why CRT can play a vital role for the student affairs

professionals and staff members charged with working with this group of student-athletes.

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Implications for Research

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The results of this research create a framework that fills in gaps in understanding the

experiences of Black student-athletes who play football. The framework that has been

established first takes into account the experiences of the former football student-athletes that

have graduated. Former student-athletes have already experienced and managed to navigate their way through college in order to graduate, which distinguishes their perspective from current student-athletes. Like Comeaux and Harrison's framework (2011), this model moves beyond the deficit perspective that Ogbu (1999) used and situates itself as an anti-deficit perspective to view the experiences of theses student-athletes. However, this is only one aspect of this framework.

Another aspect of this model that differentiates it from previous frameworks is that it also considers the influence of the forces of football and the overall system of intercollegiate athletics. Previous research alludes to the impact that sport schedules have on the success of the student-athletes, but few discuss intercollegiate as an entire system (e.g., Buer, 2009). This is worth considering because understanding student-athlete academic achievement and graduation is more than simply trying to predict what variables (e.g., standardized test score and GPA) will play a role in their experience. In addition, it is not enough to simply state that (a) student-athletes are spending upwards of 40 hours a week on sport related activities, (b) faculty members tend to hold negative stereotypes about Black student-athletes, or (c) Black student-athletes come to college less prepared than their White counterparts. Each of those components only represents one part of the entire system in which the student-athletes must grapple with in order to graduate from the institution.

Beyond the student-athlete experience on campus, the underlying issue that is rarely discussed at length is the conflict between the academic and athletic enterprises of the university. As previously mentioned, each of these enterprises will continue to make decisions that are in their own best interest, even though the other entity may not agree with them. The challenge is that only the student-athletes, especially those that participate in football, are asked to manage that conflict at the highest and most public level.

The frameworks presented critically advances the understanding of the Black football student-athlete experience. First, it considers the experience of the student-athletes within the context of larger systemic forces at work. Second, it considers the impact that the two competitive conflicting core functions have on the student-athletes who must navigate them. Therefore, the frameworks take what has been discussed in previous literature and combine it into an organizational and student-athlete success framework that demonstrates how the entire system operates. This matters because the student-athletes do not have the luxury of only managing one aspect of the system at a time. They must deal with multiple aspects of the system simultaneously and must do so effectively since there are serious ramifications if the student-athletes cannot manage (e.g., loss of academic eligibility or loss of athletic scholarship). Therefore, it is important to understand the entire student-athlete experience and the forces that impact them in order to push them through to graduation. Regardless of their selected major, as Sellers (2000) notes, a college degree increases the standard of living and is the first step in creating upward social and financial mobility.

Several logical implications can be drawn from this study. One next step is an exploration of Black football student-athlete experiences that did not graduate from the research-intensive PWI. Understanding those experiences, in addition to the findings presented in this study, could provide more updated and much needed insight for athletic academic support staff and student affairs practitioners whose job is to help these young men graduate from college. Once a better understanding of the experiences and factors that create barriers to graduating has been established, developing and implementing effective measures to ensure that a larger number of these Black men graduate holds much potential.

Second, research should examine the experiences of other Black football student-athletes who graduated from other Division I institutions and other institutions in the Power 5 conferences. A comparative analysis of these data across institutions and conferences could be useful in elevating the current graduating statistics for this student-athlete subpopulation.

Third, Black men who play Division I basketball are also among the lowest graduating subpopulations on the college campus. Performing a similar qualitative study on those that did and did not graduate may be extremely useful in capturing a wide range of experiences that both positively and negatively impact their graduation.

Fourth, while discussing student-athlete persistence and graduation, future research should seek to determine if injuries, lack of playing time, or an abundance of playing time effects their matriculation and persistence to degree completion.

Fifth, examining the experiences of Black men who participate in non-revenue-generating sports could be valuable for capturing the wide variety of experiences of Black male student-athletes. This research has demonstrated that all Black males are not the same and enter the college environment from diverse backgrounds and experience college uniquely. The same could be true for Black male student-athletes that participate in non-revenue sports. Therefore, capturing these experiences and examining the backgrounds of these student-athletes could showcase a different perspective than what has been commonly discussed by research.

Lastly, Black female student-athletes are often excluded when discussing the experiences of Black student-athletes. This particular group of student-athletes has their own series of challenges that are vastly different than their male counterparts. Researchers should not neglect this group of student-athletes. It would be a disservice if researchers continued to discuss the experiences of Black student-athletes while leaving out those of the Black women.

Conclusion

Today, many Black football student-athletes are considered underprepared for college level academia. Previous research indicates that this population hails from high schools that underprepare them for college and have poor socioeconomic backgrounds. The traditional school of thought is that this lack of preparation is the reason behind their substantially lower graduation rates than their White and non-male counterparts. However, findings from this study suggest that it is possible for these young men to play football and graduate from college. Findings from this study also revealed that there is currently a shift in interscholastic athletics and new national and state policies that impact the common notion of Black student-athlete graduation. This means that all student-athletes have more opportunities to attend better – resourced high schools compared to findings from previous research.

The homogenous and inaccurate perceptions of Black student-athletes must be disrupted in order for true change to take place. All Black student-athletes who play football are not poor and from the ghetto. There is a wide spectrum of circumstances that these student-athletes present and lumping them into one category does them a disservice and inaccurately captures their experience. Likewise, it was not the level of academic rigor that provided the most significant challenge for these student-athletes; it was the amount of volume from both the football and academic requirements they had to manage. This is the first time the requirements on their time have been strained this much and adapting to them was an often overlooked challenge. In many cases, it is assumed that football takes away from academic pursuits but rarely is it considered that the combination of football and academic requirements creates the most strenuous obstacle for the student-athletes.

Upon entering the collegiate environment, the former student-athlete participants found themselves trying to navigate and manage two conflicting competitive core functions (i.e., academic and athletic). Traditional students arrive at the institution ready to compete in the ambitious and cutthroat academic environment. Athletes arrive at the institution ready to compete on the field, a different ferocious environment. The elite navigators of both arenas have the highest potential for success after college. Every student who applies is not accepted into the institution because of the incredible standards the institutions impose for admission. The same can said for athletes. Every athlete will not be afforded the opportunity to play at the Division I level. This example reinforces the extreme competitive nature inherent in these two systems.

It must be noted that only student-athletes arrive at the university with the dual responsibilities of navigating academic and athletic environments and the competitive core functions present in each setting. Currently, there is no clear boundary spanning to bring these conflicting competitive systems together, which adds a tremendous amount of pressure on the football student-athletes because their performance is directly associated with the funding of the department. Therefore, navigating the system of intercollegiate athletics, which is a subset of the system of higher education, becomes a major issue unto itself.

The finding from this study demonstrate that having a support network and constructing a meaning/reason to graduate were some of the pivotal experiences for these participants who graduated from a Power 5 institution while playing football. There are many environmental, academic, social, and athletic challenges that student-athletes face when they arrive at the university. Once they arrive, developing a support network of people who student-athletes can confide in, vent to, or receive guidance from is critical to their degree completion. Each student-athlete will have different people that constitute their support network. What is paramount is the

network itself. In addition, many student-athletes arrive on campus already motivated to graduate. This motivation stems from a variety of circumstances (i.e., being the first in the family to graduate college, wanting to inspire future generations from their hometown, realizing that football is not guaranteed.) The motivation that develops throughout college and a support network might be critical components that help a larger number of Black football student-athletes graduate from their predominantly White research-intensive institutions.

The results from this study also highlight some of the limitations that are placed on the student-athletes from the time they enter college to the time they leave. In particular, football student-athletes that receive athletic scholarships are bounded by a system that explicitly directs their path. For example, these student-athletes have a choice of majors and social activities as long as they do not interfere with the football – related requirements. The early college phase is when the student-athletes are exposed to the variety of forces imposed upon them and must learn how to manage them. It is also at this stage that the path of the student-athletes begins to solidify. All of this occurs within the context of football because football is funding their education and without it, many student-athletes would not be able to attend college. Because of this, the support network is critical in helping the student-athletes balance, adapt, manage, and maneuver through the system without redefining or challenging it. As the former student-athlete participants began to understand what was expected of them on the field and in the classroom (usually around their sophomore year), they excelled in their classes. This is also due in part to the fact that per NCAA rules, they needed to declare a major by the end of their sophomore year and complete their prerequisite courses. The completion of the prerequisite courses meant that they could select their majors and enroll in courses that held their interest. Therefore, once these former student-athletes figured out how to navigate the system and were able to select relevant courses, their

grades and experiences improved. Therefore, even though graduation is an important aspect in the lives of student-athletes, it happens within the context of football.

Despite the variety of barriers imposed by the system of intercollegiate athletics and its true systemic goals, this same system provides many Black student-athletes with an opportunity to attend and graduate from a Division I research-intensive institution. This opportunity may not have been afforded to these individuals without their participation in athletics. Beyond the opportunities offered, this system can help prepare these young men for careers beyond athletics and help them connect with people who may be outside of their usual social network and can lead to job opportunities in the future. The key factor in this opportunity is to ensure that these student-athletes have a legitimate opportunity to reap the benefits of the education they were sold while being recruited by the coaches. Without providing a legitimate opportunity to reap the benefits of a world – class education, as Sellers (2000) says, the university would essentially be giving these student-athletes a check that they cannot cash.

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APPENDIX A

Table 12: Football Student-Athlete Population (2014-2015)

2014-2015 ACC	#	2014-2015 Big 12	#	2014-2015 Big Ten	#
White	640	White	516	White	817
Black	848	Black	628	Black	698
American Indian/Alaskan Native	4	American Indian/Alaskan Native	8	American Indian/Alaskan Native	0
Asian	6	Asian	3	Asian	7
Hispanic/Latino	35	Hispanic/Latino	29	Hispanic/Latino	34
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	14	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3
Two or More Races	49	Two or More Races	35	Two or More Races	76
Nonresident Alien	8	Nonresident Alien	5	Nonresident Alien	16
Other	59	Other	19	Other	31
Total	1653	Total	1257	Total	1682

2014-2015 PAC-12	#	2014-2015 SEC	#	2014-2015 Total	#	Percentages
White	506	White	622	White	3101	40%
Black	533	Black	968	Black	3675	48%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	10	American Indian/Alaskan Native	3	American Indian/Alaskan Native	25	0%
Asian	13	Asian	2	Asian	31	0%
Hispanic/Latino	57	Hispanic/Latino	27	Hispanic/Latino	182	2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	125	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	148	2%
Two or More Races	80	Two or More Races	41	Two or More Races	281	4%
Nonresident Alien	4	Nonresident Alien	6	Nonresident Alien	39	1%
Other	95	Other	9	Other	213	3%
Total	1423	Total	1680	Total	7695	100%

Table 13: Football Student-Athlete Population (2013-2014)

2013-2014 ACC	#	2013-2014 Big 12	#	2013-2014 Big Ten	#
White	626	White	509	White	727
Black	834	Black	613	Black	579
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3	American Indian/Alaskan Native	14	American Indian/Alaskan Native	6
Asian	6	Asian	3	Asian	3
Hispanic/Latino	32	Hispanic/Latino	26	Hispanic/Latino	25
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	7	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6
Two or More Races	45	Two or More Races	55	Two or More Races	44
Nonresident Alien	5	Nonresident Alien	4	Nonresident Alien	13
Other	77	Other	19	Other	92
Total	1632	Total	1250	Total	1495

2013-2014 PAC-12	#	2013-2014 SEC	#	2013-2014 Total	#	Percentages
White	530	White	653	White	3045	40%
Black	596	Black	982	Black	3604	48%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	10	American Indian/Alaskan Native	3	American Indian/Alaskan Native	36	0%
Asian	26	Asian	4	Asian	42	1%
Hispanic/Latino	63	Hispanic/Latino	27	Hispanic/Latino	173	2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	125	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	144	2%
Two or More Races	61	Two or More Races	42	Two or More Races	247	3%
Nonresident Alien	8	Nonresident Alien	6	Nonresident Alien	36	0%
Other	43	Other	23	Other	254	3%
Total	1462	Total	1742	Total	7581	100%

Table 14: Football Student-Athlete Population (2012-2013)

2012-2013 ACC	#	2012-2013 Big 12	#	2012-2013 Big Ten	#
White	530	White	537	White	730
Black	705	Black	596	Black	588
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	American Indian/Alaskan Native	11	American Indian/Alaskan Native	5
Asian	4	Asian	5	Asian	4
Hispanic/Latino	16	Hispanic/Latino	31	Hispanic/Latino	23
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2
Two or More Races	32	Two or More Races	33	Two or More Races	29
Nonresident Alien	8	Nonresident Alien	5	Nonresident Alien	10
Other	96	Other	42	Other	53
Total	1394	Total	1266	Total	1444

2012-2013 PAC-12	#	2013-2013 SEC	#	2012-2013 Total	#	Percentages
White	529	White	601	White	2927	39%
Black	579	Black	988	Black	3456	46%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	13	American Indian/Alaskan Native	3	American Indian/Alaskan Native	33	0%
Asian	66	Asian	4	Asian	83	1%
Hispanic/Latino	49	Hispanic/Latino	22	Hispanic/Latino	141	2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	75	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	88	1%
Two or More Races	51	Two or More Races	29	Two or More Races	174	2%
Nonresident Alien	9	Nonresident Alien	9	Nonresident Alien	41	1%
Other	64	Other	38	Other	293	4%
Total	1435	Total	1697	Total	7236	100%

RESEARCH @ EMU

UHSRC Determination: **EXEMPT**

DATE: **March 30, 2016**

TO: **Jeffrey Porter**
Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University

Re: **UHSRC: # 883629-1**
Category: Exempt category 2
Approval Date: March 30, 2016

Title: **Between the Classroom and the Field: An Examination of the Experiences of Black Male Football Student-Athletes**

Your research project, entitled **Between the Classroom and the Field: An Examination of the Experiences of Black Male Football Student-Athletes,** has been determined **Exempt** in accordance with federal regulation 45 CFR 46.102. UHSRC policy states that you, as the Principal Investigator, are responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of your research subjects and conducting your research as described in your protocol.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please submit the **Human Subjects Study Completion Form** (access through IRBNet on the UHSRC website).

Modifications: You may make minor changes (e.g., study staff changes, sample size changes, contact information changes, etc.) without submitting for review. However, if you plan to make changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a **Human Subjects Approval Request Form** and obtain approval prior to implementation. The form is available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects **or** change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an **Event Report** form, available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website

Follow-up: If your Exempt project is not completed and closed after **three years**, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Beth Kubitskey
Chair
College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee

Generated on IRBNet

Table 15. Big Ten Conference Graduation Rates

Institution	Black Males Student-Athletes %	All Black Men %	All Student-Athletes %	% of Undergraduates
University of Illinois	60	64	74	83
Indiana University	36	49	63	72
University of Iowa	50	44	68	67
University of Michigan	54	67	76	89
Michigan State University	45	55	68	76
University of Minnesota	37	43	66	67
University of Nebraska	45	40	54	64
Northwestern University	83	85	88	94
The Ohio State University	38	51	71	74
Pennsylvania State University	78	65	79	85
Purdue University	45	52	68	69
University of Wisconsin	40	51	68	81

Table 16. Atlantic Coast Conference Graduation Rates

Institution	Black Males Student-Athletes %	All Black Men %	All Student-Athletes %	% of Undergraduates
Boston College	68	78	85	91
Clemson University	39	55	61	78
Duke University	73	86	85	94
Florida State University	34	63	57	71
Georgia Institute of Technology	45	65	62	79
University of Maryland*	58	63	72	81
University of Miami	66	69	67	78
University of North Carolina	51	67	74	85
North Carolina State University	43	53	56	71
University of Virginia	56	77	76	93
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University	53	60	72	79
Wake Forest University	70	77	79	89

Table 17. Big 12 Conference Graduation Rates

Institution	Black Males Student-Athletes %	All Black Men %	All Student-Athletes %	% of Undergraduates
Baylor University	44	57	58	72
Iowa State University	30	47	65	68
University of Kansas	38	41	64	60
Kansas State University	48	27	64	60
University of Oklahoma	38	47	54	63
Oklahoma State University	46	45	57	59
Texas Christian University	65	57	65	72
University of Texas	43	60	62	79
Texas Tech University	57	46	58	59
West Virginia University	50	37	60	57

Table 18. PAC 12 Conference Graduation Rates

Institution	Black Males Student-Athletes %	All Black Men %	All Student-Athletes %	% of Undergraduates
University of Arizona	31	43	52	58
Arizona State University	36	35	61	57
University of California, Berkeley	40	63	72	90
University of California, Los Angeles	46	66	71	90
University of Colorado	44	49	54	67
University of Oregon	58	55	67	67
Oregon State University	43	32	61	61
Stanford University	68	88	90	95
University of Southern California	43	72	67	87
University of Utah	#	32	55	55
University of Washington	59	62	73	78
Washington State University	55	53	66	67

Table 19. Southeastern Conference Graduation Rates

Institution	Black Males Student-Athletes %	All Black Men %	All Student-Athletes %	% of Undergraduates
University of Alabama	56	46	66	66
University of Arkansas	31	40	52	58
Auburn University	38	38	60	65
University of Florida	34	64	61	82
University of Georgia	53	66	62	79
University of Kentucky	52	38	58	59
Louisiana State University	41	44	54	59
University of Mississippi	47	40	57	57
Mississippi State University	36	39	57	59
University of Missouri	48	49	64	68
University of South Carolina	40	55	61	67
University of Tennessee	48	45	62	60
Texas A&M University	38	55	64	79
Vanderbilt University	74	80	74	90

All data is adapted from: Harper, S., Williams, C., & Blackman, H. (2013). *Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA Division I college sports.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

APPENDIX D

Documents Reviewed

Document (#)	Name of Document	Summary of Document
Document 1	Former Student-Athlete Questionnaire	Family income, background, composition, education level of family, H.S. GPA, college GPA, current career
Document 2	Admission Material	Showcases average GPA/ACT & SAT Score for incoming freshmen
Document 3	Player Profiles	Details hometowns, high school attended, player statistics, letterwinner status, position
Document 4	Media Guides	Provided detailed stats, majors, high schools & random facts about the players
Document 5	Alumni Profiles	Provided detailed information about activities on campus, current employment, contact information, some hometown information, graduation year, extra curricular activities
Document 6	State University" Student Demographics	Details previous and current student enrollment demographics

APPENDIX E

Observations

Observation (#)	Summary of Observation
Observation 1	Black football student-athletes currently enrolled have many differences among them (e.g. States, hometowns, family backgrounds)
Observation 2	Some Black football student-athletes are not as academically prepared for college and need more direct supervision and counseling
Observation 3	Some Black football student-athletes are much more academically prepared than their teammates and only require basic assistance with class scheduling
Observation 4	A large number wanted to play in the NFL because they believed it was a way for them to support their families
Observation 5	Student-athletes spent most of the year in class to: (1) practice year round, (2) ensure that the required number of credits per year were achieved, and (3) ensure that they had the grades to remain eligible
Observation 6	During many of the academic appointments, the student-athletes would have to decompress and vent before the academic counselor could talk or help in anyway
Observation 7	Academic support staff often discussed a variety of topics and concerns the student-athletes were dealing with, effectively becoming part of their support networks
Observation 8	Sometimes as a group, the student-athletes would go into the office of their academic counselor and vent before anyone left the office to complete their work