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College Football Players: The New Nontraditional Student

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYERS: THE NEW NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership

by
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ABSTRACT

The focus on the collegiate careers of student athletes continues to grow within the community of higher education. As the focus has been centered on academic performance, a growing concern is evolving for the overall experience student athletes obtain in a higher education setting. As the focus on college experience gains momentum, higher education professionals must investigate why traditional stereotypes maintain their strength and the appropriateness of the expectations placed upon student athletes.

The purpose of the study is to gain understanding and insight into the relationship between athletics and academics for Division I football players in higher education. To examine this purpose, the researcher asks: What is the meaning of the relationship between intercollegiate athletics and academics for football student athletes in higher education? To answer the research questions, the researcher selected a phenomenological qualitative method to gain an essence of the student athlete experience in higher education.

Results indicate that the college experience for student athletes differs from that of the general student population. The thematic development of this study indicates the student athlete reality differs across the normative, regulative and cultural-cognitive aspects of the institution and argues the appropriateness of viewing intercollegiate football athletes as traditional undergraduate students.

Key Words: Student Athlete, Athletics, Non-traditional Student, Phenomenology, Neoinstitutional Theory

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The focus on the collegiate careers of student athletes continues to grow within the community of higher education. As the focus has been centered on academic performance, a growing concern is evolving for the overall experience student athletes obtain in a higher education setting. The student athlete experience in higher education has traditionally been examined through a comparative lens between general student population and the student athlete population. Comparing the general student population to the population of student athletes may be unfair, as the two populations exist in different social and academic cultures within higher education. The comparison between student athletes and non-athletes may be creating an unfair means of comparison in the realms of academics and student affairs. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between athletics and academics to further the understanding of the college experience for student athletes.

The importance of intercollegiate athletics to students, faculty members, and communities is undeniable and the role that student athletes accept can be difficult to maintain. Faculty members across the nation call for a better understanding of athletics while trying to provide an environment that promotes learning and performance and maintaining institutional integrity and academic rigor (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a; Suggs, 2005). Past studies provide a grim aspect of college athletics as results showed that athletes differed from the general student population on dimensions of high school grade point average (GPA), class rank, SAT scores, college GPA, and graduation rates

(Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982). Moreover, male athletes scored lower in all aspects compared to the general student population. Student athletes that participate in revenue producing sports of football and basketball have a relatively low probability of receiving an education compared to non-athletes (Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982). While athletes have traditionally been stereotyped as lesser students, we are seeing an adaptation in the student athlete population similar to the millennial population within the general student population. Recently, studies have shown dramatic improvements in student athlete academic successes as athletes perform similar academically to other students who enter college with similar SAT scores and demographic background (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

As student athlete graduation rates and associated academic success continues to rise, higher education professionals must investigate why traditional stereotypes maintain their strength and the appropriateness of the expectations placed upon student athletes. Student athletes enter an academic system for the production of marginal students through the relationships that were developed between all significant members of the academic setting (Benson, 2000). Traditionally, student athletes enter college with limited expectations, face negative reinforcement from teachers, and experience poor academic advising (Benson, 2000). As recently as 2005, Singer found that student athletes lack the opportunities to make educational decisions and were treated differently in the academic domains of higher education. However, as previous research has brought

these issues to light, the higher education community has shown an interest in enhancing the educational experience for the student athlete population.

The academic performance of student athletes has become a focal point of evaluation and comparison over the past three decades. Steps by individual athletic departments, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and educational researchers have been taken to amend discrepancies between the student athlete population and the general student population. Examination of the lifestyles, expectations and demands placed upon student athletes, especially those in revenue producing sports at the Division I level, have yielded detailed findings on time restrictions, limitations in class choice, limitations in the selection of professional majors, and differences in expectations between the student-athlete population and general student population from the faculty members. While multiple improvements have been made in regulating classes, attendance, graduation rates, and grade point average, the most influential change has been the willingness of the faculty member and student athletes to communicate. The cultural improvement in the faculty member and student athlete relationship was integral for the success of student athletes as students and determined to be an important predictor of academic success and especially grade point average (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006). Therefore, an increased understanding of the student-athlete's world and a more active approach by faculty to encourage both academic and interpersonal interactions has the potential to provide student-athletes with a greater understanding and appreciation for the academic environment and help them develop as true student-athletes (Jolly, 2008).

The cultural influence experienced upon entering college as a student athlete can also be different from the general student population. The general student population is encouraged to socialize throughout the campus and provided with gatherings and events organized by the university and student organizations. Student-athletes are encouraged to prepare for their sports and use their limited free time to balance academic expectations. Student athletes are required to attend and prepare for hours of practice a week that can equate to a full-time work schedule. As the general student population has the option to obtain outside employment, it rarely combines the full time working schedule with the physical demands experienced by student athletes. The time requirements of student athletes does not indicate athletes have appropriate excuses for any academic shortcomings, only the culture in which they exist in higher education is indeed different from that of the general student population. Aggravating the mental and physical toll on the body is the emotional influence of pressure to succeed in both worlds. The pressure to be a successful student and a successful athlete separates the two worlds and creates a double life for the athlete (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a). The athletes exist as two separate individuals living two different lives in the world of higher education.

The deficiencies in educational literature exist in the examination of the influence of cultural relationships between athletics and academics and the methods in which the student athlete population experiences them. Therefore, a phenomenological research method was selected to examine the lived experiences of the student athletes within higher education with the goal of giving readers an accurate understanding of the essence of their common experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This research method seeks to

understand the meaning or construction of human experience as it is lived (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to gain understanding and insight into the relationship between athletics and academics for Division I football players in higher education. This leads to two additional purposes: 1) to examine the overall college experience for Division I football players to better understand the relationship between the athletic and academic development for these individuals, and 2) to provide university faculty and staff an updated vision of the student athlete experience as to further contribute to the academic growth and development of the student athlete population.

The research tradition driving the study is the interpretive approach. Yanow describes the interpretive approach as “methods based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations” (p. 5). To further explore the experience, the researcher uses Organization and Institutional Theory as a theoretical lens. The notion that institutions consist of regulative, normative, and cognitive structures offers meaning to the development of the relationships within organizations and the ways in which student athletes experience these relationships. Organizational and Institutional theory is used only as an orienting lens to shape the methods of data collection and interview questions (Creswell, 2009). The theoretical lens further focuses on neoinstitutional theory. Neoinstitutional theory examines the cultural norms within higher education institutions with regards to the normative, regulative and cultural-cognitive perceptions of the institution. Using Richard Scott’s (2001) analytical

description of the normative, regulative, and cultural-cognitive pillars, this study focuses primarily on the sociological development of relationships and culture formation using the three pillars of institutions to assess the individual experience of Division I football athletes. Culture formation, academic socialization, time constraints and faculty member influence can be investigated through each pillar (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a).

Additionally, experiences are reflections on all aspects of the institution, which include the norms and values of the institution, the established rules of the institution and in the student athlete's case the established rules of the NCAA, and the cultural and social reality of athletics within the institution. Therefore, neoinstitutional can be used to explore multiple facets of college life that create both the social reality for student athletes and the overall experience in which reality exists.

Research Question

Since no evidence exists in the literature that examines the student athlete experience of academic and athletic relationships using the neoinstitutional perspective, it is the intention of the researcher to examine the essence of the experience using neoinstitutional theory as a guide. The researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with current Division I football athletes to examine the behavioral and social relationships that is created between college athletics and academics. By using this model as a guide, the researcher seeks to answer the question of how student athletes experience higher education. Therefore, the phenomenological exploration seeks to answer the following research question:

Central Question

What is the meaning of the relationship between intercollegiate athletics and academics for football student athletes in higher education?

Sub Questions

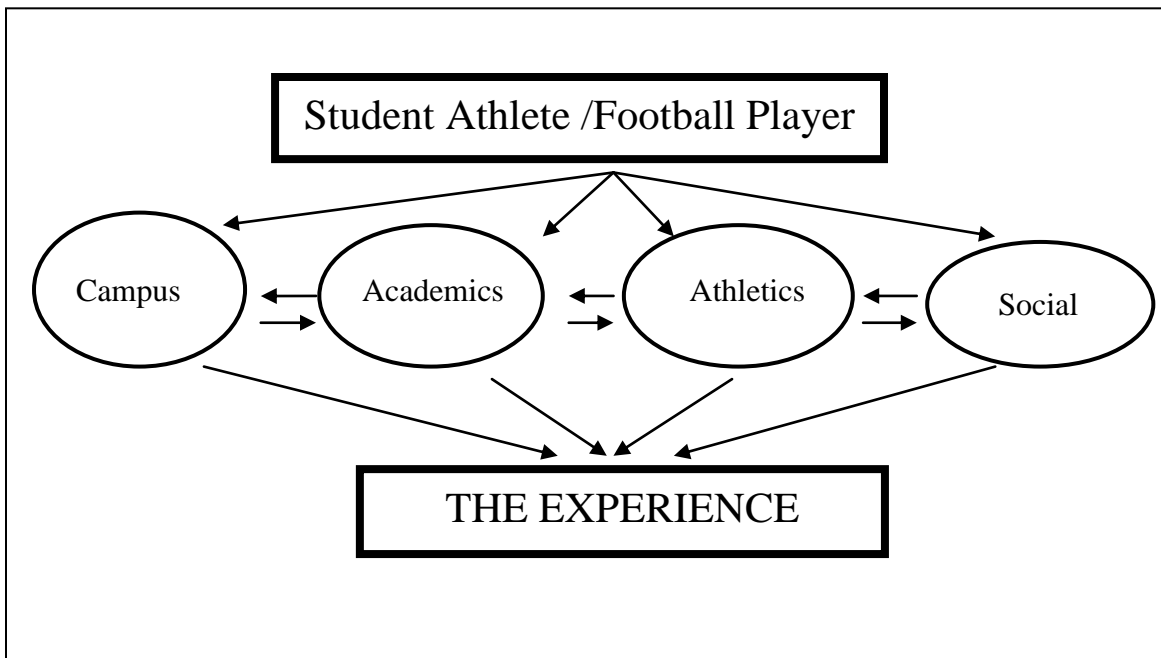
1. How do intercollegiate football players in higher education describe the experience of pressure to succeed academically in higher education?
2. How do intercollegiate football players in higher education describe the experience of pressure to succeed athletically in NCAA athletics?
3. How do intercollegiate football players in higher education describe the experience of maintaining academic responsibilities with athletic requirements?
4. How do intercollegiate athletes in higher education experience social and cultural formation within the institution?
5. What is the essence of the relationship between intercollegiate football players in higher education and the general student population?
6. What is the essence of the relationship between intercollegiate football players in higher education and the academic personnel within the institution?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used throughout the development of the research study was focused on producing accurate and detailed experiences for the participants. To

accomplish a complete descriptive experience, the multiple social and cultural influences of academic life as a student athlete were investigated. These influences include campus interactions and events, academic interactions and events, athletic interactions and events, and social interactions and events. Each individual participant experiences these components differently as they all have the potential to affect one another. Therefore, these influential factors and their relationship to each other were investigated to produce an overall experience of being a student athlete in higher education. Figure 1.1 provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework used throughout the investigation.

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework



Delimitations

While this study will allow for the voices of student athletes to be heard, the phenomenological nature of the study insures that the study size will be small. In

addition, the research is limited by sport and academic class standing of possible participants. The selection of only one sport was due to the number of within group differences between sports. Each institution and each sport is different and thus cannot be treated the same as another. The normative, regulative, and cultural categories of each sport appear to be unique indicating that each sport at each institution is different.

It is also important to note that the term relationship throughout the study does not indicate a correlation. Within all organizations, its members establish cultural relationships. Therefore, it is important to understand how relationships are negotiated between group members. These relationships are not always numerical, nor do they have to be as they can be driven by culture, spiritual, and emotional factors that exist within the organizational culture. Therefore, the research only focuses on football student athletes' who are enrolled in the third, fourth, or fifth academic year. However, it is the very nature of qualitative research to take the experiences of the few in order to extrapolate the experiences of many. As Seidman (1998) stated, "the stories of a limited number of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions can create enormous power" (p. 48). In addition, qualitative studies acknowledge from the outset that reality and truth reside within the individual (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, while the information obtained for the research is not generalized to the population as a whole, it is valuable as it applies to the participants in the study and the university in which they attend.

Subjectivity Statement

The researcher is an experienced athletic trainer with seven years of experience within intercollegiate athletics. While the researcher maintains an athletic training certification, the researcher no longer works as a practicing athletic trainer in the field and has transitioned into the classroom teaching in the Athletic Leadership minor degree program at State University. The researcher's academic and professional experience has been extremely influential towards research interest with college athletes, especially the ways in which they experience college life.

Throughout the entire research process, the researcher set aside all preconceived notions that he had about football players at the Division I level, athlete and faculty member stereotypes, and relationships between the two, and listen in order to understand the phenomenon as experienced by the participants (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher released all judgments about the nature and essences of people and events in the realm of NCAA college football as to focus on the descriptions and experiences of the research participants, how they viewed themselves, and how information was communicated.

As a professional educator, the researcher is committed to creating a quality research design and asking relevant and professionally applicable questions in an attempt to produce knowledge that furthers any existing literature on the subject of athletics and academics. The research design is flexible to allow for changes that may emerge during the research process. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection that will include research design, conducting interviews, transcribing voice recordings, organizing

and interpreting the data, and thematic analysis of all collected information. As the researcher and ultimate author of the research, everything possible is done to protect the research participants from any inconvenience or discomfort and maintain their anonymity. The goal of the study is to clearly communicate the voices of the research participants so that this study transmits trustworthiness and authenticity. Thus, the position as the researcher is an active learner, who is open to the process of phenomenological research.

Chapter Summary

With the continued focus on student athletes in higher education, this study attempts to gain understanding and insight into the relationship between athletics and academics for Division I football players in higher education. As the student athlete population is consistently compared to the general student population, the study seeks to understand the realities of being a student athlete in higher education from a regulative, normative, and cultural framework to examine differences in the social and academic cultures of student athletes and the general student population. As previous research has painted negative pictures of student athletes as academics, there has been little research that examines the means by which student athletes experience the culture of academia and athletics in higher education. Therefore, a phenomenological method is implemented to examine the experience of higher education using Richard Scott's (2001) analytical description of the three pillars of organizations to assess the individual experience of Division I football athletes.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The student athlete experience in a higher education setting is shaped through multiple aspects of college life. For the purpose of this study, the terms student athlete and intercollegiate athletics focuses on athletes that participate in the revenue-producing sport of football in higher education at the Division I level. The setting for the research is a large sized university located in the Southeastern portion of the United States. To protect the anonymity of the research participants and participating university, the university is referred to throughout the study as State University.

The Setting

State university was founded in the late 1800s and currently functions as a land-grant institution. The city surrounding State University is considered a small college town that is home to over 12,000 residents. State University is located on the border of the city and is classified as a Doctoral/Research Extensive University with a total enrollment over 17,000. In 2008, the U.S. News and World Report ranked State University among the top 30 public schools in the United States. The athletic program of State University competes within a twelve-team conference recognized as a Bowl Championship Series (BCS) Conference in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). State University maintains two revenue-producing sports of football and men's basketball, and from a sports perspective, State University is thought of as a traditional football school that includes one consensus NCAA national championship and more than ten conference

championships.

Environmental Culture

Upon acceptance to play football at State University, the football tradition sets the cultural tone student athletes enter. The athletic culture is further shaped by the academic culture of the institution, but the athlete's connection to the school begins when he first joins the squad in practice (Cross, 1973). Institutional culture and athletic culture can be symbiotic and therefore symbolically related to one another (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009b; McCormick & Tinsley, 1987). These cultural relationships exist as a constant tension between control and resistance (Creswell, 2009; Thomas, 1993), as the worlds of academics and athletics experience this circumstance.

As these two worlds exist as separate, it is important to specify a meaning for culture to create a lens for it to be examined. Culture is a reflexive concept and is always contingent upon its historical location, contemporary understanding of relationships, politics of the moment, and social position (Clammer, 2005). Given that culture is itself a cultural concept, to define culture is in itself selective, individual and experienced through the development of the topic to which it is being applied (Clammer, 2005). Culture can begin to be defined as "the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior" (Spradley, 1972, p. 6). For Hall (1959), culture was a set of patterns experienced by individuals as normal ways of acting, feeling, and being (Smith-Maddox, 1998). Erickson (1997) begins to examine both the external and internal constructs of the importance of culture in academia with the following description of culture:

Culture, as it is more or less visible and invisible to its users, is profoundly involved in the processes and contents of education. Culture shapes and is shaped by the learning and teaching that happen during the practical conduct of daily life within all the educational settings we encounter as learning environments throughout the human life span, in families, in school classrooms, in community setting, and in the workplace (p.33).

Incoming student athletes experience an academic socialization process as incoming freshman, yet the culture they enter may be dramatically different from other students (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a). For student athletes, the athletic culture has a tremendous influence on academic culture. If the student athlete enters an athletic culture that emphasizes and values academics, then the probability the student athlete will adapt to that ideology is greater. On the other hand, if that athletic culture deemphasizes academic roles of the student athlete then the probability of adapting to that ideology decreases. The later circumstance is of greatest concern. Incoming student athletes may be influenced early in their collegiate experience that they are not expected to do well academically or that academics are not important. The development of negative academic expectations for student athletes is reinforced in Benson's (2000) study in an interview with a senior student athlete stating he believed he would have done better in school if the initial expectations would have been set higher:

I would have done a whole lot better if it weren't for coming in and having a group of people say, "This is the minimum you need to do," and holding your

hand... They were already expecting me not to do well, so why would I want to do more (p. 229).

Therefore, the cultural development influenced by athletic participation must be examined individually through specific university characteristics of culture that include values, systems of belief, material artifacts, practices, and symbolic relationships (Clammer, 2005; Satterfield & Godfrey, 2009). Clammer (2005) furthered the understanding of modern culture in the following description:

Without an accurate and critical understanding of culture itself as something much more than simply the residue of other (primarily economic) explanations, no great advance towards a deepening understanding of development problems along cultural/sociological lines is going to be made. However, as economic anthropologists have long been aware, not only is the economy embedded in culture, but it is itself culture. A system of values, evaluations, processes of production, consumption, and exchange, and of social arrangements predicated upon particular patterns of organizing these processes (p.102).

Additionally, culture becomes a widely shared knowledge and practice for a relatively homogeneous local community. Culture becomes similar to a policy, tacitly and gradually concocted by groups of people for the furtherance of their interests, and consists of unwritten contracts, established by practice between and among individuals (Weisner, 2009). Ultimately, culture is not sedentary; it is constantly and actively acquired and transformed to meet the needs of its community with a diverse constellation

of variables influencing the many different aspects of culture (DeWitte & Muijen, 1999; Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009b). Culture is the important relationship that exists between places and those who share meanings. Individuals negotiate, construct, and reconstruct meanings of culture based upon daily occurrences within the world around them (Borer, 2006). Culture was thus transferred from the culturally constituted world-that of every day experience, and then through various instruments and rituals until the meaning was transferred to the individual (Hogg & Banister, 2000; McCracken, 1986).

The influence of athletics on institutional culture is not limited to student athletes. The symbolic connections and personal relationships created between the athletic programs and the student body is dramatic. Athletics begin to affect all aspects of college life. It can affect classroom culture through attitudes, attendance and participation. The emotional connection and expenditure is not exclusive to the student athletes. These emotions become embedded in the student body and affect the lives and culture of the institution. Team success and failures are experienced throughout the college community. A win is perceived as a personal success and a loss resonates throughout the institution as a failure. When the team wins, the mood surrounding the university is uplifting and a loss dampens the spirits and seems to slow the student body down. Therefore, athletics played a role in the development of culture by influencing group dynamics through athletic affiliation (Satterfield & Godfrey, 2009a). The affiliation of the student body and college athletics, and the pressure to succeed associated with the affiliation, influences the culture that emphasizes athletics for student athletes. While the culture is not an optimal

situation, it brings to light a concept that the student athletes are being influenced to prioritize athletics over academics from areas other than the athletic department.

The relationships between athletics and academics have been extensively researched throughout the years. Historically, most studies on student athletes in higher education display negative relationships between athletic participation and academic performance (Adler & Adler, 1985). The majority of the research conducted in the seventies and eighties set the tone for perceiving student athletes to be lesser students. The general conclusion that researchers reported was that athletes are underprepared or are uninterested in academics and come to college to advance their athletic careers rather than their academic career (Adler & Adler, 1985; Benson, 2000; Cross, 1973; Edwards, 1984; Nyquist, 1979; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982; Sack & Thiel, 1979; Spivy & Jones, 1975). Athletes generally have lower grade point averages (GPA), higher attrition rates, and lower chances of graduating compared to traditional students who do not participate in collegiate athletics (Adler & Adler, 1985; Benson, 2000; Cross, 1973; Edwards, 1984; Nyquist, 1979; Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982; Sack & Thiel, 1979; Spivy & Jones, 1975).

Using previous research as a foundation, Adler and Adler (1985) concluded that the major areas of focus concerning athletic culture formation were (a) athletes beginning their college careers idealistically caring about academics and intending to graduate and (b) the processes in which the academic goals of student-athletes become increasingly influenced by athletic involvement. Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) agreed with the notion that the majority of student athletes entering college have a desire to graduate. Their

study examined over 2400 student athlete's perceptions of being a college student at 18 Division IA NCAA universities. Through an administered survey, 93% responded that graduating was very important (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Concurrent with this thought, 90% of the responding student athletes believed that graduating was very important to their families, thus suggesting significant social support (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). These perceptions created an academic concern that incoming student athletes are exposed to negative culture formations upon enrolling in college, in which they are presented with limited expectations of being a student athlete. These limited expectations did not exist purely in the form of team culture but also classroom culture. The question now becomes how culture is created in higher education and how the student athletes experience the culture.

While historical research has focused on cognitive measures of academic success such as GPA and SAT scores, numerous studies regarding student athletes and academic performance have demonstrated a relationship between non-cognitive measures and academic success. Self-concept measures such as social support, positive self-concept, and trait anxiety were related to the adjustment and academic success of student athletes (Killeya, 2001; Petrie & Stover, 1997; Sedlacek, 1987; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Tracy & Sedlacek, 1984; Tracy & Sedlacek, 1987; Young & Sowa, 1992). Killeya (2001) described the effects of non-cognitive factors by stating that student athletes are individuals who "describe and evaluate their roles in diverse ways and this diversity has implications for domain-related outcomes such as academic performance and adjustment" (p. 2). Intercollegiate athletes often enter college with a constellation of

secondary school experiences, aptitudes, and socioeconomic perspectives that were significantly different from those of non-athletes (Hood, Craig, & Fergueson, 1992; Pascarella & Bohr, 1995; Pascarella & Smart, 1991). Therefore, it was important to consider the non-cognitive factors in culture creation and acceptance. If student athletes are finding positive support and community within one culture, they are more likely to emphasize that role. On the other hand, if that culture is found to be negative, then the role will be de-emphasized. The deemphasized academic roles for student athletes has been found within previous research studies in that athletes were perceiving discrimination and negative stereotyping in the academic realms thus creating a negative culture (Killeya, 2001). This negativity often stemmed from the general student body and faculty members. Engstrom and colleagues (1995) reported that faculty members and students harbored prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes towards student athletes, especially in terms of academic performance. Additionally, faculty members regarded student athletes' academic abilities as inadequate compared to the general student population and expressed anger in situations where additional services or privileges were granted to student athletes. The condescension of the student athlete has thus created a stereotype of student athletes being dumb jocks, especially for those involved in revenue producing sports (Kirk & Kirk, 1993; Salies; 1993).

Time

Identity with the athletic culture combined with the extreme time demands placed on student athletes and the uneasy marriage between athletics and academics in the university setting contributed to the difficulties that many student athletes face in

succeeding academically (Jolly, 2008). As student athletes face these unique challenges to academic success, many campus support personnel and faculty members have limited knowledge of these challenges (Jolly, 2008; Satterfield & Godfrey, 2009a). The demand on student athletes that seem to hurt them the most academically was the time demands created through athletics (Emma, 2008; Meyer, 1990; Parham, 1993), making it difficult for them to devote time to study or earn good grades (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004; Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a). The negative effect of time demands on academics was reinforced through a study conducted by Godfrey and Satterfield (2009a) in which research participants made the following significant statements:

1. I think about it like I am running a race and I don't get to practice. I just get to show up on race day. And everybody else in the field gets to train everyday, for however long they need to.
2. And it is draining, physically and emotionally, and after practice you are just so tired that it is not like you can be ready to focus on 3 hours of school work or whatever, you are just tired and want to take a nap, just kind of drained from it all.
3. When do I have time to study? After practice, 8 o'clock at night, if I put in 4 hours it is already midnight for one class. And I have 4 other classes. So, I spend 2 hrs a class so I'm not looking at 8 o'clock in the morning by the time I am done. I have to cut down time on everything.
4. Teachers will say its not their fault that you do not have enough time, maybe you need to burn the midnight oil, talking about pulling all

nighters, talking about when I was in college I would pull all nighters so there is no excuse.

5. When you have to get up at 5:45 in the morning, an all-nighter is not in your vocabulary. (p. 13).

The majority of student athletes are required to carry a full academic load during the season and practice at least two to four hours a day. In a typical week during their athletic season, greater than 80% of student athletes reported spending over 10 hours a week playing their sport (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2006). When combining the student athlete requirements for revenue producing athletics, the amount of time spent participating in practice and other sport related activities easily surpasses the 20 hour limit. Football athletes have been shown to devote more than twice as much time to athletic responsibilities than to academic requirements (Brownlee & Linnon, 1990). These highly structured time demands produced considerable stress, especially on incoming freshman student athletes (Jolly, 2008).

Adding to the academic burden produced through the time constraints are the absences created by travel requirements. Student athletes, especially those that participate in revenue producing sports, often miss multiple classes during their competitive season. The extensive travel schedule added to the academic burden through missed classroom time and difficulties rescheduling exams and assignments into an already packed schedule (Jolly, 2008). These time and scheduling demands were contributing factors to both the culture creation for student athletes and the difficulties integrating into campus academic life and fully forming their identities as students and athletes (Jolly, 2008).

These time constraints also placed heavy demands on the physical and emotional aspects of the student athlete. With little down time for psychological and physical recovery, the sport wreaked havoc on the athlete's ability to concentrate on his studies (Emma, 2008). While the physical strain of a college athlete's season may be easy to conceptualize, the emotional strain was harder to quantify but as prevalent. The pressure on athletes that participate in revenue-producing sports is tremendous as multiple aspects of the athlete's life and performance were scrutinized by coaches, athletic directors, the general student body, the alumni, the general fan population and the local, regional, and national media (Emma, 2008). The pressure adds to the physical fatigue and further inhibits concentration, awareness, and attention span. Therefore, as seasons progress, the student athletes may be perceived as being disinterested in academics, which reinforces the stereotype that athletes are indifferent to academics.

Pressure

A separate but equally influential aspect of culture creation is the immeasurable levels of pressure placed on student athletes. The athletes perceived pressures individually, but the perception of pressure was influenced by the institutional community of faculty members, students, media outlets, and family. The pressure to succeed increases yearly as the outside community places more emphasis on the importance of winning. Communities and fan bases in the southeastern area of the United States often identify with college athletics and their home institutions. The self-identity with local universities and athletics, especially college football, is pronounced as intercollegiate athletics is often the highest level of athletics in the area. States,

communities, alumni, and fans identify with local university athletics with passion and vigor. The following and support of a particular school created a sense of belonging and served as an individual piece of self-identity. Steele (1997) described the influence of identity on individual behavior. He suggested that “to sustain school success one must be identified with school achievement in the sense of its being a part of one’s self-definition, a personal identity to which one is accountable” (Steele, 1997, p.613). This represents one of the difficult concepts of culture creation in that not all individuals identify with the same thing.

Cultural identifiers can include the town, the university, the athletic program, buildings, stadiums, symbolic meanings or actions or any combination of the above. Buildings often act as public symbols; or people often act as if they do. Architectural structures make up a community’s geographical environment and become public symbols when people endowed them with meaning and value (Borer, 2006). Borer described the inability to price cultural value. Economic models cannot access the cultural value, as it is near impossible to put a price on nostalgia. Though economics play an important role from an organizational standpoint, in regard to the local university communities and administration, and local businesses in the area, athletics was only economically valuable because it is culturally valuable (Borer, 2006).

A cultural analysis of intercollegiate athletics must address the importance of social belonging (Frug, 1999; Wolfe, 2000). Community building sets the cycle of tradition in motion in which whole families and communities begin to identify with one culture, one university, or one athletic program. Places endowed with meaning by one

generation, whether implicitly or explicitly, provide meaning for the next, thereby constructing a bridge between the past and future that binds people together. Such bindings fostered living connections between people and places and these places become the stage where people defined themselves through experiences with others (Borher, 2006). The culture then transforms over time as the generations create new meanings that increasingly grow in their importance. As the communities that surround higher education institutions reinforce the importance of winning, and the perception exponentially grows annually, the pressure exerted on college athletes continues to rise. The cultural pressure undoubtedly begins to affect perceived importance of academic culture and ultimately the processes by which the student athletes experience life while enrolled in college.

Organizational Culture

The individual experience gained through college can be influenced by such diverse factors as the multiplicity and complexity of sub-cultures, conflicting interests, bad timing and communication failures (Burack, 1991; De Witte & Van Muijen, 1999; Martin, 2002; Nord, 1985; Schein, 2004; Trice & Beyer, 1990). The experience was created within an organizational culture that was a socially constructed system of shared beliefs and values (De Witte & Van Muijen, 1999; Schein, 2004). Culture can only be influenced indirectly and creates individual experiences based on how each person interacts within the organization. One example reflects the growing concern of the negative relationship between faculty members and student athletes. Only those athletes that perceive themselves to have a negative relationship with a faculty member, justified

or unjustified, experience this as an interaction with an organizational process. On the other hand, those student athletes that do not perceive any negativity from faculty members do not experience this influence thus creating an individually unique experience. Organizational culture existed as a complex phenomenon that is individually experienced through behavioral norms, hidden assumptions and human nature (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Kilmann, 1985; Schroeder, 2010; Schein, 2004). Therefore, creating a cultural change within an institution or organization was difficult, costly and time consuming, and involves changing personal assumptions, ideologies, values, and artifact meaning (Kilman, 1985; Schein, 1985; Schein, 2004; Schroeder, 2010). Another issue concerning the culture surrounding intercollegiate athletics was the growing division between academic faculty and athletic administrators. Athletes were marginalized from the faculty of higher education institutions with the purported educative value of athletics only serving to create a winning image for the university (Flowers, 2007). As faculty members dwelled on the negative perceptions and issues, the common ideologies for this camp involve (Putler & Wolfe, 1999, p.302):

1. Student athletes not being well prepared for college, having low graduation rates, being involved in violence off the playing field, and accepting money from coaches or alumni
2. Lack of gender and racial equity in athletics
3. Coaches receiving salaries substantially higher than faculty
4. Athletic programs being a financial drain on the university

The disparity in the literature, especially recent literature, has provided the athletic camp with powerful rebuttals that creates a much more positive perception of athletic. These include:

1. Student athletes who achieve high graduation rates are well-rounded individuals and excellent university ambassadors
2. Athletics helps increase contributions from alumni and makes the college more attractive to potential students
3. Athletic departments being committed to gender equity and racial integration
4. Lucrative athletic programs

The information, compiled by Putler and Wolfe (1999), displayed the conflicting perceptions that affect organizational culture within higher education. For the student athlete, only the individual interaction, positive or negative, truly dictated how the relationship between athletics and academics at the intercollegiate level is experienced.

The cultural influence of the institution is not contained within the boundaries of the institution. As the media has continued its focus on college athletics, the reports of misconduct have also increased. The accessibility of athletic programs has resulted in a public perception that athletic programs tend to be deviant and out of control (Putler & Wolfe, 1999; Sander, 2009). The negative cultural perception was reinforced when Frey (1994) reported survey results that found that 81% of faculty members, 75% of the public, 72% of alumni, and 48% of college presidents believed that intercollegiate athletics was out of control. Recent and past incidences of low graduation rates, gross

misconduct, academic scandals, and student athlete's poor academic standings have eroded the public's confidence concerning the relationship between athletics and academics (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The public perception was assumed to be poorly informed as it relied on the most recent media coverage, internet outlets, and interpersonal conversations revolving university programs (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006). Public concern for higher education, and the fuel behind the faculty member disdain for athletics, results from believing that athletic success and academic quality were connected (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006). Although athletic success does not directly affect academic quality, the public believing a link exists creates a quagmire of interests between athletics and academics. On one hand, faculty members want to protect the reputation and integrity of the institution and would like to have greater control over athletics (Wolverton, 2007). On the other hand, athletic administrators now have empirical research that shows athletic success affects public perceptions of higher education institutions and can thus justify hefty spending. As these perceptions create administrative and political deadlocks, the organizational culture that is created within the boardrooms of the institution is filtered down into the student athletes from either the locker room or classroom. Either way, the organizational culture that is perceived and experienced by the student athlete is a reflection of the circumstances and perceptions of those around him.

Athletic Culture

The final dominant area that affects culture development for student athletes in higher education is the athletic team culture that the student athlete enters. Team culture

was created by peers and teammates and was an excellent source of support or detrimental source of discouragement (Casleman & Self, 2007). Within team culture, an athlete's self-concept is built from daily life experiences and then shared amongst the group. In this way, self-concept was both empowering and restrictive in that it sorts information by accentuating some types of inputs and diminishing others (Casleman & Self, 2007; Jopling, 1997). Self-concept and teammate influence then became filters through which social behavior was understood and enacted (Aikins, Bierman, & Parker, 2005). The aspect of peer influence directly affected culture formation presenting an incestual process of organizational culture creation that becomes difficult to breach and more difficult to change. Student athletes spend a great deal of time, both athletically and socially, with teammates. Therefore, the experiences of those within the group can have a ripple effect throughout a team and athletic department. The influence of culture then branches out away from the individual in which groups of individuals are now influenced by the multiple experiences and perceptions.

Other developmental concerns regarding academic culture in athletics fall within the areas of family support, recruiting processes, coaches, and academic advisors. As previously noted, Benson (2000) reported that the majority of athletes entering college fully expect to earn a degree. This statement does not take into account any dominant emphasis of athletics over academics, simply that incoming athletes expect that they will be required to participate in scholarly activities of attending class and completing required coursework. Coaching staffs consistently worked on building team unity and creating a culture of success and development (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009). What

occurrences during the first academic year change the thoughts and actions of student athletes?

Where there is a gap in the literature concerning student athletes and academics is within the modern day experiences as students. As the millennial students are entering higher education institutions, so are the millennial athletes.

Millennial refers to students who have grown up since the emergence of the World Wide Web (Considine, Hoerton, & Moorman, 2009), creating access to more information than any generation in history (Foehr, 2006). The use of available information produces the perception of advanced learners with an increased possibility to excel academically. As individuals are acculturated at early ages to be good students, so are student athletes. This generational transformation combined with the NCAA's focus on promoting academics is creating a scenario in which athletes are succeeding academically. The NCAA began calculating graduation rates using their own formula in 2005. The NCAA's formula, known as the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), differs from the U.S. Department of Education by accounting for transfer students, which increased the graduation numbers for historically underachieving sports, although not by much (Wolverton, 2006). The GSR provides the foundation that present day student athletes are indeed becoming more proficient students.

The transformation of the student athlete is beginning within the secondary school level as Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, and Visscher (2009) reported an increase in student athletes in high school taking and excelling in pre-university programs, whereas the national average remains stable. This situation is represented at State University. In 2009,

State's 15 sport programs had an overall grade point average of 2.97 for the spring semester, the highest on record, according to the school's Department of Institutional Research. The previous mark was 2.93 set in the spring of 2007. The football team had a record 44 of its 96 student-athletes earn a 3.0 or better. The previous record was 41 during the fall of 2000. The team GPA was 2.61, the second highest team GPA on record. Therefore, as student athletes are entering college as better students, the culture may be shifting thus creating a different experience from those in the past.

Student Athlete and Faculty Member Relationships

The cultural role established by faculty members has also seen extensive attention over the past few decades with conflicting conclusions. One facet of the college experience involves student athletes' interaction with faculty members. While evidence concerning the positive impact of male student athlete-faculty interaction was virtually unequivocal (Comeaux, 2005), the majority of research implicated apprehension and disdain by the faculty to interact with student athletes (Killeya, 2001). Of greatest concern from these reports were the negative comments by faculty members within higher education reported by student athletes. Simons et al. (2007) reported various negative responses and perceptions of faculty members towards student athletes in which 62% reported a faculty member making negative remarks about athletes in class. Simons referred to this as the "dumb jock stereotype" by which athletes created a devalued social identity in the world of academia. Benson (2000) explained the cause of limited expectations as an accumulation of actions and treatment by peers, advisors, faculty and coaches. To illustrate the relationship between student athletes and faculty members, the

following significant statements were taken from Benson (2000) and Simons et al.

(2007):

Benson (2000):

1. Teachers demonstrated little concern about how he conducted his academic life.
2. It did not seem truly important to his teacher that he attend class.
3. Many of their teachers did not care about what they learned or how well they performed in class.
4. Teachers generally allowed them to remain passive in class.
5. They never received any message that their actions were unacceptable.
6. There was an overall failure at providing any positive feedback concerning academics. (p.230).

Simons et al. (2007):

1. If a professor knows you are an athlete, you are assumed to be stupid until you can prove otherwise.
2. Before a test, a professor stated, "It's an easy test. Even athletes can pass."
3. One professor asked the student athletes to stand on the first day of class and stated, "These are the people who will probably drop this class." (p.253).

The continued negativity surrounding faculty comments on student athletes is a major cause for concern and an influential factor in culture creation. While the relationship between student athletes and faculty does not fall solely on the shoulders of the faculty, the student athlete perception implied those faculties are contributing to the

negative performance of student athletes by dismissing their roles as students and aiding in the creation of a negative classroom culture. Benson (2000) concluded that “poor academic achievement was not caused simply by a lack of ability—rather, it was produced by a series of actions by the students themselves and by significant others in the academic environment” (p.238). The concern that arises from previous research and in personal conversations with student athletes in the researcher’s classes is that faculty hold an overall negative idea or stereotype towards student athletes. Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991 & 1995) and Killeya (2001) reinforced the negative perception held by faculty members by reporting that faculty tended to possess both prejudicial and stereotypical attitudes towards student athletes concerning academics.

The negative perception has increased as faculty demand greater control of intercollegiate athletics. Recent research reported that approximately one-half of student athletes surveyed nationally felt their professors discriminated against them because they were athletes (Jolly, 2008; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2006). Professors continually made it difficult or refused to provide opportunities for student athletes to reschedule exams and assignments despite academic senate requirements to do so (Jolly, 2008). According to Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, and Jensen (2007), who completed a study of 538 collegiate athletes, 33% reported being perceived negatively by professors. Only 15% reported positive perceptions and 61.5% reported being given a hard time when requesting accommodations for athletic competitions. Three hundred and seventy athletes reported specific negative comments made about athletes from faculty and students and 62.1% of participants reported a faculty member making a negative comment. The comments from

Jensen's (2007) study reinforced the pervasiveness of the dumb jock stereotype and the spillover from the faculty into the student body.

The dumb jock stereotype holds that athletes lacked the motivation and intelligence to succeed academically at the intercollegiate level (Leach & Connors, 1984; Simons et al., 2007; Zingg, 1982). The perception is that in order to remain eligible and participate in sports they exerted the minimum effort, did little academic work, took easy classes, received academic handouts, and had others do the work for them (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a; Simons et al., 2007). The pervasiveness of the dumb jock stereotype reinforces the concept expressed by Simons et al. (2007) that athletes were stigmatized in higher education. To be stigmatized is to be one who possessed an attribute that is discrediting and was seen by others as tainted (Goffman, 1963).

The stigma is a context that is socially constructed and shaped by cultural and historical events. The social construction of social reality creates a dynamic organization within higher education. The stigma itself becomes a socially created and embellished perception within higher education that influences the thoughts, actions and values of the faculty and students. This reality is often created out of hearsay and folklore. The social reality thus creates the perception that to be an athlete automatically makes you academically unsuccessful. As the social reality for student athletes grows and expands, the negative effects on the student athlete academic experience will also grow. As one research participant stated:

With stereotypes in general, once they are established people tend to fall into them, because it is the easier thing to do. You feel like, oh well, I am

already perceived that way so I might as well act that way especially if you do not have a solid foundation on who you are as a person or exactly what your plans are (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a, p.16).

While the negative aspect between the faculty and student athlete has been reported, the potential for faculty to have positive effects on student athletes is tremendous. Although many faculties believed that student athletes prefer the athlete role over the student role, research showed that many students idolize faculty members and desire to cultivate meaningful relationships (Adler & Adler, 1991; Eitzen, 1999; Harrison, Comeaux & Plecha, 2006). The willingness of faculty to relate to students has been extensively researched and reported that faculty member interaction influence student outcomes both positively and negatively (Chickering, 1969; Harrison, Comeaux & Plecha, 2006; Terenzini, Theophilidies, & Lorang, 1984), but few empirical studies research this influence on student athletes. Harrison, Comeaux, and Plecha (2006) were successful in reporting that the interaction between faculty and student athletes has positive academic outcomes. Faculty that provided intellectual and stimulating conversations strongly contributed to student success.

A final point that should be assumed here reflects back to the developmental changes in the millennial student athlete. As new generations of student athletes are entering college, so are new generations of faculty entering legitimate leadership positions within higher education. As new generations of faculty grows accustomed to the efforts and achievements of the student athlete population, the perception of student

athletes as lesser students may begin to subside and the gap between athletics and academics merged.

General Student Population Relationship

In other studies, the general student population was also found to have similar negative attitudes toward student athletes. These negative perceptions were consistent with the dumb jock stereotype (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1989; Engstrom and Sedlacek, 1991; Harrison & Lawrence, 2004; Hoberman, 1997; Hughes, Satterfield, & Giles, 2007; Knapp, Rasmussen, and Barnhart, 2001). This is interesting as Braddock, Sokol-Katz and Dawkins (2006) concluded that 50% of males and 30% of females consider the reputation of a school's athletic program when making their college choice. This contradiction was commonly found in the literature on the relationship between student athletes and the general student body (Braddock, Sokol-Katz and Dawkins, 2006; Knapp, Rasmussen, & Barnhart, 2001). The general student body was generally supportive of intercollegiate athletic programs but doubted the academic seriousness of student athletes and was suspicious of student athletes receiving favorable academic treatment by faculty (Knapp et al., 2001). Sailes (1996) found that students believe that college athletes were not as intelligent as the typical college student and they take easy courses to remain eligible. Traditional students also perceived student athletes to be more likely to cheat on exams and to receive leniency in grading due to their athlete status (Eitzen, 1999; Harrison et al., 2009; Lapchick, 2001). To emphasize the general student body's perception of student athletes, Hughes, Satterfield, and Giles (2007) reported the following significant statements:

1. They are only here to play ball.
2. They are not here to get an education.
3. They are not the brightest bulbs on the block.
4. They have lower scores than the campus as a whole. (p.119).

The general student population perception of student athletes does not go unnoticed by the student athlete population. In a separate study conducted by Godfrey and Satterfield (2009a), student athletes reported feeling suspicion from the student body that they were provided with inappropriate grades, class aides, and free handouts due to being a student athlete. Thus, the perceptions displayed by the student body adds to the complexity of the institutional and organizational culture that contributes to the negative academic atmosphere for student athletes.

Student Athlete Experiences

The intercollegiate experience of a student athlete was unique compared to non-athlete students and represents a nontraditional group on a college campus (Harrison, Stone, Shapiro, Yee, Boyd, & Rutland, 2009). It might be beneficial to view the student athlete as nontraditional students or as a graduate student population to understand the processes in which they experience college. In much of the literature, the term non-traditional is a reference to age in which the student is twenty-five years or older, but recently the term non-traditional has also been defined using background characteristics and risk factors of students (Kim, 2002). These characteristics can include balancing school with employment, family, financial responsibilities, and the successful completion

of academic responsibilities (Kim, 2002) and maintaining multiple commitments external to academics (Eifler & Potthoff, 1998).

Athletes seem to have a unique culture and set of experiences in college that differentiated from others (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Athletes were subjected to prejudice and discrimination much like groups thought of as minority cultures (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Singer (2005) reported similar findings while adding that negative perceptions includes all athletes but grows with minority athletes. Singer's qualitative case study of four African American intercollegiate football players reported minority athletes lack opportunities in the decision-making roles within their sport and was treated differently in the academic setting, especially as it relates to being scheduled for classes that were needed towards graduation. Athletes were largely uninvolved in the academic decision making process and did not interact directly with professors, academic administrators or academic counselors (Adler & Adler, 1985; Jolly, 2008). Athletics, and the responsibilities associated with playing a sport, dominate all facets of the athlete's existence, especially academic performance (Adler & Adler, 1985; Jolly, 2008). The time demand required to be successful in athletics conflicts with the time demands required to be successful academically. These conflicts included practice time, occurrence throughout the day, travel time, booster functions, team meetings, non-mandatory responsibilities, and weight training (Adler & Adler, 1985; Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a). The strain on availability for student athletes produced tremendous mental, physical and emotional fatigue demonstrated by the following statements from various studies:

1. In college the coaches be a lot more concerned on winning and the money comin' in. If they don't win, they may get the boot, ans so they pass that pressure onto us athletes. I go to bed every night and I be thinkin' 'bout basketball. That's what college athletics do to you. It takes over you mind (Adler & Adler, 1985, p.244).
2. We got two-a-days, get up as early as the average student, go to school, then go to practice for three hours like nothing you have ever strained... It's brutal 'cause you be so tired. You don't feel like sittin' there an' readin' a book, an' you not goin' comprehend that much anyway 'cause you so tired (Adler & Adler, 1985, p.244).
3. Spend a week, a month, a day in our shoes and I don't think, I'm not ignorant enough to think they have not experienced anything difficult, they have, everyone has. But the level to which we are pushed physically, mentally, emotionally... I'm not sure they fully grasp what we go through in the entire process. They would be physically exhausted. Take them through a workout. Let them sleep 5 hours and tell them they have to read 100 pages for this class and have them do the same thing tomorrow (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a).
4. Its exhausting to even describe how draining and the amount of hours you spend actually in your sport and the limited amount of free time you actually have in the day. Thinking about waking up, getting early to treatment, going to practice, changing, getting in the cold tub, and then going to class all day and then having maybe a few hours at the end of the day and then eating and going to sleep. Then

waking up and doing the whole thing again tomorrow (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009a).

With the continued growth in popularity of intercollegiate athletics, the psychological and social problems of student athletes have also increased (American Institute for Research, 1988). Football and basketball players in competitive college athletic programs more frequently reported physical and mental abuse than athletes in less successful and less competitive programs (Dudley, Johnson, & Johnson, 1997). Dudley et al. (1997) also reported student athletes having greater difficulties than the general student population in taking leadership roles, learning from their mistakes, discussing personal problems and articulating their thoughts. As these are common results throughout the literature, there seems to be a shift in the athlete mannerisms concerning their college experience. While it might be argued that student athletes should not be satisfied with the college experience (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007), this does not seem to be the case for all experiences. While many athletes wish they had the opportunity to participate in more campus activities, they also believe they have had valuable experience which non-athletes have not (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007).

While leaders in higher education have questioned the college experience of athletes beyond athletics (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007), there have been few studies aimed at the personal experiences of athletes in college. We do not know how they experience school, and each school is specific (Benson, 2000). Benson (2000), Daniels (1987), Ender (1983) and Ruffer (1971) believed that to address the perceived problems with student athletes, the athlete experience was a vital component. Qualitative researchers such as

Adler and Adler (1991), Benson (2000), and Singer (2005) have broken ground in researching athlete experiences but as Benson expresses, “Their voices have barely been heard at all. As it stands now, more is known about deficient test scores and program interventions for this group of students than about their experiences of schooling that these programs are supposed to help with” (p.225).

Methodological Justification

When faced with the commitment of participating in college athletics and the responsibility of academic coursework, athletes can experience a multitude of psychological and social changes. The student athletes’ subjective well-being, a construct in the field of psychology, was an experiential evaluation of their lives (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). The subjective well-being has been used to ascertain feelings of life satisfaction as well as affective self-evaluation. In phenomenological research, lived experiences are explored with the goal of giving the reader an accurate understanding of the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). The research method seeks to understand the human experience as it is lived (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Thus, the phenomenology method, as outlined by Moustakas, was chosen as the appropriate methodology for the study as the researcher is searching for an understanding of the meaning of these participants’ experiences.

Theoretical Lens

As the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between athletics and academics, the theoretical lens includes institutional and organizational theory with a

specific focus on neoinstitutional theory. Neoinstitutional theory examines the cultural norms within higher education institutions concerning the normative, regulative and cultural-cognitive perceptions of the institution (Satterfield & Godfrey, 2009b). Neoinstitutional theory has roots in economics, political science and sociology (Scott, 2001). The study focuses primarily on the sociological factors that affect culture formation within institutions using Richard Scott's (2001) three pillars of institutions. Culture formation, academic socialization, time constraints and faculty member influence can be investigated through each pillar (Satterfield & Godfrey, 2009b; Scott, 2001). Using analytical descriptions of the three pillars, the student athlete's college experience is examined.

The Normative Pillar

The normative pillar of institutions placed emphasis on the normative rules that introduce a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life (Scott, 2001). More specifically, the normative pillar focused on the values and norms of the institution in designating a means to set and pursue goals and objectives (Scott, 2001). For the population of student athletes in higher education, the normative pillar examines the cultural appropriateness with regards to the treatment of athletes by faculty members and the expected perception of all student athletes of the institution. Faculty member norms and values concerning student athletes can create a variety of cultures, both positive and negative, thus inhibiting the social acceptance of a student athlete as a student. These exercised norms and values by the faculty members, again positive or

negative, may lead to an overall sense of unknown or misunderstood classroom expectations in regards to performance, attendance, and acceptance.

The Regulative Pillar

The regulative pillar of institutions examined the set rules of the institution in the attempt to regularize and constrain behavior (Scott, 2001). Rules created for the student athlete population exist from the institution itself and from within the athletic sport and more specifically the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The rules, often described as policies, at the institutional level vary between institutions concerning acceptance criteria, class attendance, and scheduling. The NCAA oversees each institution and creates an eligibility scale to ensure the student athletes are committed to their academic responsibilities. These rules exist in both a formal and informal manner and coercive measures are taken to ensure those rules are followed. The regulative pillar also includes the academic rules and policies created by the institution, which create a cultural behavior within the team. Academic policy did influence student athlete behavior and experiences, because even though policies do not change and are set, each athlete knew and understood what is expected of them to participate in their respective sport (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009). While the coercive means of force, fear, and expedience were central ingredients to the regulative pillar (Scott, 2001), the methods for which these rules were enforced differ by institution in both their timing and severity. Therefore, these rules become normative creating a unique relationship of the regulative and normative pillars of institutions concerning the student-athlete population.

The Cultural-Cognitive Pillar

The cultural-cognitive pillar examined the shared understandings, beliefs, and stereotypes held by faculty members of the institution that create the social reality of the institution (Scott, 2001). Within the cultural-cognitive pillar, the individual experiences of the student athlete population can be investigated. The creation of stereotypes and the culture formation of beliefs and subsequent sharing of both the beliefs and stereotypes becomes an institutionalized social reality that affects a student athlete's ability to succeed in the classroom. These beliefs and stereotypes become a part of the culture of the university and thus becomes a part of the expected social reality concerning student athlete's academic abilities and expectations by the faculty members and student body. These stereotypes and beliefs then encompass the student athlete to create a separate culture or social reality that the student athletes are inadequate academics, which then diminishes personal expectations the individual athlete possesses of themselves as students. The seriousness for which tasks are approached and influencing psychological energy expenditures, such as friends, teammates, families, and schooling (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007), played vital roles in the formation of academic perceptions. If these perceptions are enhanced by a cultural system that athletes are inadequate or "lesser" students then this group of students exist at a great disadvantage in the classroom.

The continued use and creation of the dumb jock stereotype in higher education creates a great deal of animosity between athletics and academics. As student athletes bridge the gap between past inadequacies and present day achievements, how they experience the academic-athletic relationship will dictate the future perception for student

athletes. Therefore, the influence of Scott's (2001) three pillars is used as a theoretical lens through the developmental stages of the phenomenological investigation to research student athletes as themselves (Singer, 2005). This lens is used for the process of methodology development, interview question guidelines, and, if appropriate, thematic coding and analysis.

Interpretive Approach

The research tradition driving the study is the interpretive approach. Yanow describes interpretive methods as “methods based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations” (p. 5). Using the idea that institutions consist of regulative, normative, and cognitive structures will offer meaning to the social construction of culture and the realistic experiences created.

The regulative pillar emphasizes rules, laws, and sanctions. North (1990) said that institutions have formal rules, written and unwritten, which, if broken, are followed up by sanctions and punishments. The normative pillar is the perception of institutional values and norms. Scott's (1998) description of normative pillar indicated norms “specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends” (Scott, 1998, p. 37; from Satterfield & Godfrey, 2009b). Scott also described norms as limitations to social and creators of social action. March and Olsen (1989) describe the effects of the normative pillar as the creation of behaviors from observation that demonstrate the way in which people determine what they are supposed to do.

The cognitive element of institutions constitutes the nature of reality and how meaning is created (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009b). “Mediating between the external

world of stimuli and the response of the individual . . . is a collection of internalized symbolic representation of the world” (Scott, 1998, p. 40). D’Andrade (1984) also supported Scott by indicating that what a person does is mostly a representation of his environment.

Through the three pillars outlined by Scott (1998), the affects of culture on student athlete experiences can be examined. Although each pillar represents a specific area of organizational knowledge, it is the relationship between the pillars that creates unique cultural experiences. The relationship between pillars also describes the need for research on individual settings as the institution, institutional status, and historical relevance pertaining to athletics uniquely define each pillar. For athletic programs, the relationship is individualized to the type of institution, program history and tradition, location, and athletic affiliation.

Chapter Summary

The student athlete experience in higher education is shaped through multiple aspects of college life. For the purpose of this study, the terms student athlete and intercollegiate athletics focuses on athletes that participate in the revenue-producing sport of football in higher education at the Division I level. The setting for the research is a large sized university located in the Southeastern portion of the United States.

To establish an understanding of existing literature on student athletes in higher education, this chapter examines the regulative, normative and cultural influences that affect the experience of being a student in higher education. These factors include environmental, organizational, and athletic culture development along with the influences

of time restrictions, pressure, and relationship development between student athletes, faculty members, and the general student population.

To provide the reader with an understanding of how student experience the relationship between academics and athletics in higher education, the phenomenological method within qualitative research was selected. The goal of phenomenology is to provide the reader with an accurate understanding of the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994), and understand the human experience as it is lived (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Thus, the phenomenology method, as outlined by Moustakas, was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this research as I am searching for an understanding of the meaning of these participants' experiences.

The theoretical lens for the research includes institutional and organizational theory with a specific focus on neoinstitutional theory. Neoinstitutional theory examines the cultural norms within higher education institutions with regards to Scott's (2001) three pillars of organizations.

The normative pillar of institutions placed emphasis values and norms of the institution in designating a means to set and pursue goals and objectives (Scott, 2001). The regulative pillar of institutions examined the rules of the institution and athletic program, written and spoken, in the attempt to regularize and constrain behavior (Scott, 2001). The rules created for the student athlete population are established by the institution itself, the athletic department of the university and from the regulating body of intercollegiate athletics known as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The cultural-cognitive pillar examined the shared understandings, beliefs, and stereotypes

of the institution that create the social reality of the institution (Scott, 2001). Within this pillar, the individual experiences of the student athlete population can be investigated.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding and insight into the relationship between athletics and academics for Division I football players at State University to develop a deeper understanding of the overall experience of student athletes' in higher education. Using Moustakas (1994) as a guide, the goal of this inquiry is to determine what the higher education experience means for student athletes that participate in football. Using semi-structured interviews, athletes participating in the sport of football while in their fourth or fifth academic year of school will be asked to provide detailed descriptions of their perceptions of the college experience.

Using a phenomenological method, the study seeks to describe the relationship between athletics and academics through the experiences of intercollegiate student athletes. In contrast to the more traditional quantitative approaches to research, phenomenology falls under the qualitative research tradition. Creswell (2009, p.4) defined qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. Qualitative research involves questions and procedures that emerge throughout the study as data is collected in the participant's setting. The collected data is then analyzed for thematic analysis to make an interpretation of the meaning or essence of the data (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the researcher acts as an unbiased and independent observer that seeks to objectively measure a phenomenon in its external world and the ways in which the phenomenon is lived and experienced.

The qualitative research approach seeks to explore social or human problems to provide outsiders with an experiential understanding of a phenomenon. Qualitative methods are ideal when attempting to answer experiential questions that were participant-centered (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (1985) described qualitative methods as a discovery rather than a verification that explains with understanding and provides insight to individuals and their behavior. By selecting a qualitative method of phenomenology, one of several different qualitative methods of research, the researcher sought to gather rich, situational and contextual knowledge and meaning (Creswell, 2009). The goal of phenomenology was to produce detailed descriptions of the participants lived experiences, rather than hypothesis, opinion, or generalization (Wertz, 2005). The research focuses on the lived experiences of student athletes and the ways in which they understand and experience the relationship between athletics and academics at the intercollegiate level.

In phenomenological research, lived experiences were explored with the goal of giving the reader an accurate understanding of the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher transcended past knowledge and experiences to understand a phenomenon at a deeper level (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). The phenomenological method sought to understand the human experience as it is lived (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Thus, the phenomenology method, as outlined by Moustakas, was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this research because the researcher seeks an understanding of the meaning of these participants' experiences.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Transcendental Phenomenology was “intimately bound up in the concept of intentionality” (Moustakas, 1994, p.28). Intentionality referred to consciousness and internal experience while recognizing that self and world are inseparable components of meaning. Transcendental phenomenology contained four basic assumptions (Creswell, 1998). The first is that the beginning of knowledge exists with a description of the experience. Second, phenomenology attempts to dissolve all judgments about reality until they are based in certainty, a process described as *epoche*. Third, the intentionality of consciousness posits that the reality of an object is intimately linked to one’s consciousness of it and the meaning found within (Brown, Sorrell, McClaren, & Creswell, 2006; Creswell, 1998). Fourth, qualitative research in phenomenological methods calls for the refusal of subject-object dichotomy. Reality is only in the meaning of the experience of the individual.

Beginning of Knowledge

Knowledge rests on inner evidence, and as we grow to learn and expand our base of evidence, so to does our knowledge expand (Husserl, 1970). In phenomenology, knowledge is defined as “to bring to light, to place in brightness, to show itself in itself, the totality of what lies before us in the light of day” (Heidegger, 1977, pp.74-75). Thus, in a broader sense, the phenomena that appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating new knowledge. It is the phenomena that become the building blocks of human science and the basis of all knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). The beginning of knowledge exists as the desire to know or deeply understand any subject within its

objective reality. The phenomenon is said to possess an objective reality as it exists by representation in thought, although in truth, objective reality is a subjective reality (Husserl, 1977). In other words, the perception of reality of an object is dependant on a subject and different subjects can create different meanings and essences in knowledge.

Epoche

The second assumption of transcendental phenomenology is that the researcher attempts to dissolve all judgments about reality until they are based in certainty, a process described as epoche. Epoche required the elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is a process of returning to the self to discover the true meaning and essence of things as they appeared. Husserl (1970) described the epoche as a freedom from suppositions in an attempt to look with care to see what is really there, and to stay away from everyday habits of knowing things.

In the epoche, researchers “set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (Moustakas, 1994, p.85). Schmitt (1968) described the epoche process as a way to “invalidate,” “inhibit,” and “disqualify” all commitments with reference to previous knowledge (p.59). Thus, epoche is an attempt to dissolve all personal biases and look upon a subject as new with a naively fresh conscious. Moustakas (1994) reflected on the nature and meaning of Epoche in the following statement:

I see it (Epoche) as a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices,

predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again as for the first time (p.85). As the Epoche is concluded, the researcher begins assessing a phenomenon or experience as it is and come to know it only as it presents itself. In the Epoche, the researcher refrains from taking positions or sides and views the data as equal values. Nothing is determined in advanced. Although the Epoche is rarely perfectly achieved, the focus on self-reflection, intention, and attitude significantly reduced the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases (Moustakas, 1994).

Intentionality

The third assumption of transcendental phenomenology examines the intentionality and intuition of consciousness and the methods in which the reality of an object is intimately linked to one's consciousness. In Aristotelian philosophy, the term intention indicated the orientation of the mind to its object; the object exists in the mind in an intentional way (Kockelmans, 1967, Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality is further comprised of a noema and a noesis. The noema is the perception or phenomenon of a subject rather than the subject itself. As Gurwitsch (1967) explained while describing a landscape, the noema is the perception of a tree, not the tree itself. The object can be perceived differently depending on when it is perceived, from what angle, with what background of experience, and with what orientation and judgment of the perceiving individual. The tree itself is a real object that exists in time and space, but the perception of the tree can change depending on the person making the observation. Therefore, the

noema of any phenomenon existed differently from person to person based on the individual differences making the perception (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality also creates a noetic experience in which meaning or multiple meanings are created. The noesis was the personal meaning that is created and developed by perceptions and answers the question of how are we experiencing what we are experiencing (Miller, 1984).

Reality and Reflexivity

The assumptions of the beginning of knowledge, epoche, and intentionality all build the foundation for the final assumption that reality is only in the meaning of the experience of an individual. Therefore, each experience must be regarded as a personal reality for each participant and be held equally to all other experiences. A natural concept of phenomenology embedded in this fourth assumption is the concept of reflexivity. Reflexivity was the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, the participants as individuals, a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, and coming to know the self through engaging in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to be reflexive throughout the investigation creating a heightened sense of self-awareness regarding any biases, judgments, or preconceptions. Perceptions, feelings, opinions, and sensitivity to student athletes should continuously be evaluated while emerged in the research process.

Participant/Subject Selection

For this research study, individual interviews were conducted with student athletes that participate in football at one Division I-A university located in the southeast region of the United States. The participant requirements included current enrollment and participation within a varsity level sport of football at the university and a class classification of junior or senior. The participants were not selected by means of scholarship designation, playing status, academic standing, or proposed major at the university.

Protection of Participants

Before the interviews began, the participants were provided a letter of informed consent. The letter assured the participants that their privacy would be protected in all documents and publications that result from the study. Participants were consulted about their choice of pseudonym to be used in all documents written as a result of their participation within the study. While the study posed no physical danger to the participants, the researcher did not wish for the study to be the cause of any embarrassment for the participants as they exist in a high profile sport. The use of pseudonyms does not guarantee complete anonymity for the participants because as Seidman (1998) explained, in-depth interviewing leads to the sharing of sometimes sensitive and individual specific information that might identify the individual to anyone reading the document who knows that individual. The “potential vulnerability” (p. 50) cannot be assessed before the study takes place, but everything within my capability was done to insure that the participants privacy remains protected.

In addition, audiotapes of the interviews were kept in locked file cabinets at my home office and work office. Transcriptions were kept in electronic format on the researcher's home computer and two separate flash drives to be kept at my residence. Paper copies were kept in the researcher's home office, and the computers were password protected. Only one set of paper transcriptions was kept on record and all other copies have been shredded.

Finally, upon completion of data collection and thematic development of the research, each participant was debriefed on the individual sections of text to which the participant contributed. Participants were provided an opportunity to share any concerns that they have concerning my interpretation of their experiences.

Data Collection

Data collection was accomplished through two separate face-to-face interviews along with multiple telecommunications throughout the coding process. The questions used to guide the interview process can be found in appendices A. These telecommunications included phone conversations, text messaging and emails. The purpose of continued communication was to produce data saturation in order to produce the most realistic experience related to the intercollegiate culture of student athletes and the academic and athletic influences that affect culture. The setting for data collection occurred in a private office assigned to the researcher. The initial interviews ranged in time from seventy minutes to ninety minutes, with the second interviews and telecommunication between the researcher and participants ranging from two minutes to forty minutes.

Pilot Interviews

The researcher conducted two pilot interviews with former student athletes, both of which had graduated after the previous playing season. These interviews were performed to determine question clarity and interview appropriateness. These interviews also allowed the researcher to clarify question wording and question order to gain the most information from the interview period. From the pilot interviews, the researcher came to the conclusion that beginning with a non-sport topic of conversation relaxed the participants and created additional rapport with the participants. Additionally, the pilot interviews provided useful experience in providing a relaxed interview atmosphere.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used throughout the methodology development and data analysis was focused on neoinstitutional theory to examine the culture within higher education institutions concerning the normative, regulative and cultural-cognitive perceptions of the institution as outlined by Richard Scott (2001). This study focused primarily on the sociological factors that affect culture formation within institutions using Scott's (2001) three pillars of institutions.

Culture formation, academic socialization, time constraints and faculty member influence were investigated through each pillar (Satterfield & Godfrey, 2009b; Scott, 2001). The theoretical framework provided an opportunity to examine multiple aspects of the experience of being a student athlete in higher education and established the individual experience as a created social reality based upon the normative, regulative and cultural influences experienced as a student athlete in higher education.

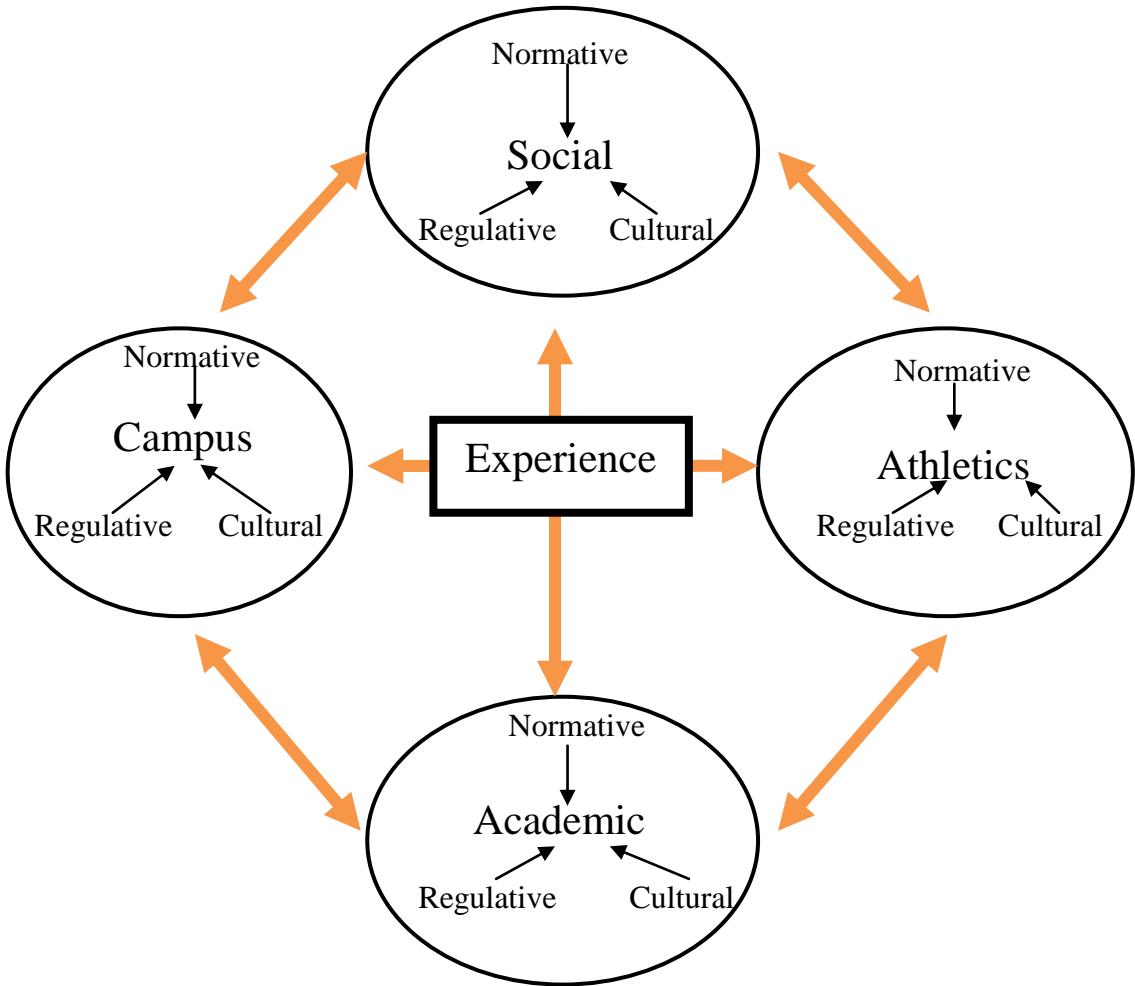
The regulative, normative and cultural influences within the campus environment, academic environment, athletic environment, and social environment all affect each other and play a role in the development of experience. As each component possesses specific normative and regulative expectations, they also produce separate cultural realities that must be navigated separately as a student in higher education. The rules and expectations exerted by each are influential factors on how a person chooses to experience college as a student athlete, thus creating a separate socially constructed social reality for each individual. The addition of the athletic rules, norms and culture for student athletes is a separate and unique addition compared to the general student population, which potentially affects the campus, academic and social components of college life. Therefore, the study is theoretically framed to investigate the influences of the athletic component on the experiences of the student athlete. Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of the theoretical framework used throughout the investigation.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological Reduction and Analysis

Analyzing phenomenological data follows a systematic procedure that was rigorous yet accessible to qualitative researchers (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Data analysis, according to Moustakas (1994), required a description of the researchers own experience with the phenomenon (epoche), followed by identifying significant statements, meaning units and themes. Next, the researcher synthesized the themes into a

Figure 3.1. Theoretical Framework



description of the experience that can textually represent the actual lived experience of the research participants (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). In phenomenological reduction, the task of the researcher was to produce a textural description of what one sees, not only in the terms of external objects but also in the internal act of consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). The focus of reduction is in the qualities of the experience while

generating meaning of the experience is the challenge. The process involved a pre-reflective description of an experience just as it appears to be and a reduction of the data for thematic development. Such an approach to elucidating one's knowledge was known as "Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction" (Moustakas, 1994, p.91). This method is "Transcendental" because it uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning; "Phenomenological" because the world is transformed into mere phenomena; and "Reduction" in that it leads us back to our own experience of the way things are (Schmitt, 1968, p.30).

The method of Phenomenological Reduction involves tasks of pre-reflection, reflection, and reduction, with concentrated work aimed at explaining the nature of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1931). The reduction process began with the dimension of bracketing in which the focus of the research was placed into brackets so the entire research process could be rooted in the topic at question. The next step of horizontalization in phenomenological research began with returning to the self and examining personal experiences from the point of self-awareness and self-reflection. Every statement was treated as having an equal value and each horizon that develops in consciousness was the grounding of the phenomenon that gives it a distinctive character (Moustakas, 1994). These horizons became the textural meanings and invariant components of the phenomenon. Horizontalization was achieved by reading over the data to gain a general sense or what was there and reflecting on its overall meaning. The researcher considered each of the horizons as equals and with equal value as he attempted to disclose the nature and essence of the phenomenon.

The next step was a detailed analysis with a coding process. Coding was the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to the information (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p.171; from Creswell, 2009). Organizing the material was an analytic process through which concepts were identified and their properties were discovered within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by selecting the significant statements within the data. Upon first reviewing the data, every statement was viewed as a significant statement. The transcribed interviews were printed and separated into individual thoughts and sentences. Upon sorting through the individual sentences, 1,390 statements were kept to be coded as significant statements.

The relationship between significant statements were then grouped into categories or meaning units. As the researcher gains a greater awareness of the data, the researcher will notice how concepts related to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The creation of meaning units was the act of relating significant statements along the lines of their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher grouped the significant statements into thirty-one meaning units which were then grouped into ten meaning clusters that developed a coherent textural description of the phenomenon. Meaning cluster development was a process of integrating the categories and subcategories of the meaning units for thematic analysis to produce a detailed description of the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The coding process was completed as the researcher determined sufficient saturation was achieved and the ten meaning clusters were gathered into six experiential themes. Throughout the coding process, there was an interweaving of person, conscious experience and phenomenon. The qualities of

the experience were recognized and described, linked thematically, and a full description was derived. The pre-reflective and reflective components of phenomenological reduction enabled an uncovering of the nature and meaning of experience, “bringing the experiencing person to a self-knowledge and a knowledge of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96).

Trustworthiness of Findings

In accordance with phenomenological principles, scientific research is valid when the knowledge sought was arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994, p.84). In place of validity, particularly for an interpretive research study, the researcher substituted the concept of trustworthiness as the evaluative standard for field research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Trustworthiness required conducting and presenting research in a way that readers trust the results in order to be convinced the research is worthy of their attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness does not require the reader to agree with the researcher, only that readers can see how the researcher arrived at the conclusion that they made (Bailey, 2007).

Two strategies for enhancing trustworthiness of this phenomenological study include member checking and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2009). Although researcher used these techniques throughout the research process, member checking and peer debriefing became more important as the phenomenology research project reached thematic analysis (Bailey, 2007). In member checking, the researcher asked the participants and or other members of the setting to review the final manuscript and

respond to its correctness or accurate description of the experience. Peer debriefing, sometimes referred to as expert reviews, involved seeking help from others, particularly a trusted peer or an expert in the topic to check the consistency between the study's methodology and its conclusions (Bailey, 2007).

Member checking occurred throughout the research process. The researcher possessed good rapport with the participants prior to the research study. The level of rapport was important in researcher-participant communication through the entirety of the research process. The initial rapport between the researcher and the student athletes allowed the researcher to be specific with questioning and the athletes an opportunity to participate openly and honestly. Additionally, the participants were unaware of one another's participation and agreed not to discuss the research outside of the participant-researcher conversations.

As each interview was transcribed for data analysis, the transcriptions were provided to the research participants for accuracy, additions, and clarity. The data was then analyzed and reduced into descriptive themes that were then introduced to the participants. Once again, the participants had an opportunity to read the analysis for accuracy, additions, and clarity with the understanding that the themes would be a true description of the phenomena. The process continued until saturation of the data was achieved in which the participants agreed that the descriptive analysis was reflective of their experience and nothing new could be added to the experience.

Interpretive validity of the research analysis was achieved through participant feedback and the use of low-inference descriptors. Interpretive validity refers to

“accurately portraying the meaning attached by participants to what is being studied by the researcher” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.277). The researcher utilized member checking or participant feedback to clear up any miscommunication between the researcher and participants and to achieve agreement and accuracy in the thematic analysis. Additionally, the researcher used low-inference descriptors to allow the reader to “experience the participants actual language” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.277). The low-inference descriptors were included as direct quotes, reflections, and short stories provided by the participants.

Peer debriefing was conducted throughout the analysis process to promote theoretical validity. By discussing relationship between my methodology, analysis and conclusions of the student athlete experience, the researcher was able to ensure the theoretical explanation fit the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The individuals utilized in the peer-debriefing process maintained access to subject artifacts and interview transcripts to improve trustworthiness of the research and produce a thematic analysis that is accurate, descriptive, and informative of the essence of being a student athlete that participates in Division I football.

At the conclusion of the traditional method of individually selecting significant statements for coding purposes, the researcher also completed a separate analysis through a computer generated program using QSR Nvivo 8. Utilizing Nvivo 8 reinforced the initial findings of the researcher by justifying meaning unit and meaning cluster analysis. The use of the qualitative software analysis program additionally demonstrated the relationship and overlap of the significant statements concluded in the initial analysis.

The similarities between the traditional analysis method and the QSR Nvivo 8 computer generated analysis reinforced the research findings as it was important to the researcher that the thematic analysis was a correct description of the student athlete participants.

Saturation

Saturation in qualitative research is often referred to as the point in which no new data or concepts emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, Corbin and Strauss (2008) added, “saturation is more than a matter of no new data” (p.143). Saturation was a process of continued data collection until the point in which the research participants no longer can add anything to the experience. Saturation began to occur when statements, meaning units, and meaning clusters begins to take on meaning and can be concluded when the major themes of the research show depth and variation in terms of their development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Achieving data saturation can be difficult to conclude, however, Corbin and Strauss (2008) offered the following advice:

Though total saturation is probably never achieved, if a researcher determines that a category offers considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon, and relationships to other categories have been made clear, then he or she can say sufficient sampling has occurred, at least for the purposes of this study (p. 149).

Biases

Researcher biases for this study include a deep connection and appreciation for athletics and student athletes. It is not the thought of the researcher that student athletes

are underachieving as individuals or in personal growth while enrolled in a higher education setting. However, the researcher does believe that the methods in which we evaluate the success of the student athlete population may be unfair when comparing them to the general student population. The preconceived stereotypes, time restrictions, and physical exhaustion may be distorting the experience that universities are providing student athletes. Therefore, the researcher does not assume student athletes to be lesser students, only a different type of student that more closely resembles the graduate student population than the undergraduate student population. Unfairly labeling student athletes as lesser students by classmates, faculty members, and administrators provides a culture that feeds into the negative stereotypes of student athletes and ultimately continues to look down on the population of student athletes.

The epoche process was important to ensure that researcher biases leading in to the study did not influence the data collection or data analysis. Bracketing was a learning process, especially through the initial interviews, which made the two pilot interviews vital to producing an educationally sound study. Bracketing researcher bias is the attempt to “suspend any preconceptions or learned feelings about a phenomenon” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.396). This was important as the researcher wanted to experience the phenomenon “as it is” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.396).

To control for researcher bias, the researcher used the techniques of reflexivity and negative case sampling. Reflexivity is the act of reflecting on personal biases and how they might impact the interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2009). Negative case sampling occurs when the researcher “attempts to select cases that disconfirm the

researcher's expectations" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.276). One example of negative case sampling by the researcher, was the finding of the impact of academics on athletics. The researcher bias was that the relationship was one-sided in that only athletics affected academics. To the researcher's surprise, as the data presented itself, the conclusion is academics can have an equal impact on athletics.

Significance of the Study

The results of the study add to the literature on student athletes and provide further insights into how new generations of student athletes are experiencing the time spent in higher education settings. As more information becomes available, similar research studies will be able to assist higher education administrators in providing the student athlete population with a valuable experience that reinforces the importance of both academics and athletics in the higher education setting. In addition, the study provides information that allows higher education administrators to become more aware of the process and actions of the academic faculty members and administration and their importance in providing a positive experience for the student athlete population.

The greatest significance of this study is that it allows for the voice of the student athletes to be heard. With continual quantitative information being published noting the academic shortcomings of student athletes, the research provides a voice that is rarely listened for or paid attention to. The study allows students athletes to provide insights into what is, for them, a very personal experience that has tremendous impact on their lives in terms of time, effort, and individual growth.

Chapter Summary

Using a phenomenological method, the study seeks to describe the relationship between athletics and academics through the experiences of intercollegiate student athletes. The qualitative research approach sought to explore social or human problems to provide outsiders with an experiential understanding of a phenomenon and is ideal when attempting to answer experiential questions that are participant-centered (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenology contained four basic assumptions (Creswell, 1998). The first is that the beginning of knowledge exists with a description of the experience. Second, is the self-removal of all judgments about reality until they are based in certainty, a process known as epoche. Third, the intentionality of consciousness posits that the reality of an object is intimately linked to one's consciousness and the meaning found within (Brown et. al., 2006; Creswell, 1998). Fourth, qualitative research in phenomenological methods calls for the refusal of subject-object dichotomy. Reality is only in the meaning of the experience of the individual.

The participants for the study included ten Division I football players from State University who are participating within their final few semesters of college. The participants completed individual interviews followed up by multiple communications until the participants and researcher was satisfied that saturation of data had been completed. The data was then analyzed through the qualitative reduction process outlined by Moustakas (1994). The selection of significant statements was individually completed by the researcher to develop meaning units, meaning clusters, and themes.

Trustworthiness of the analysis was completed by implementing methods of member checking and peer debriefing until total participant agreement was obtained towards thematic and experience descriptions. The study allowed for the voice of the student athlete to be heard and provided insights into the way student athletes experience the relationship between academics and athletics at State University.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

This chapter describes the steps taken throughout the analysis process that led the researcher to develop the thematic conclusions that best described the “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p.52) of student athlete football players in higher education. Beginning with participant profiles, the chapter begins with the similarities and differences between participants and then presents the major thematic findings in separate analysis sections. This method allows the reader to follow the analysis process of the researcher and better understand the methods in which the data came together from transcriptions to thematic analysis.

Participant Profiles

Participant #1

Chris is a 22 year-old African American male. He is a graduating senior who played his four-year career as an offensive player. He will graduate with a major in sociology accompanied by four-varsity letters in the sport of football. He is an extrovert with a noticeable politeness. Chris has National Football League aspirations and describes college as “one of the best times of your life.”

Participant #2

Bryan is a 22 year-old Caucasian male. He is a graduating senior who played his four-year career as an offensive player. He will graduate with a major in marketing accompanied by four varsity letters in the sport of football. He is a mild-mannered and forthcoming young man who seems to find the optimistic humor in life. He is open to

both the possibilities of a National Football League career or a business career. He describes his time in college as enjoyable with “no regrets about any of it.”

Participant #3

Jamal is a 23 year-old African American male. He is a graduating senior who played his four-year career on offense. He will graduate with a major in sociology accompanied by four varsity letters in the sport of football. He is quiet and reserved but passionate about the sport of football and the relationships between himself and his teammates. He describes his experience of being in college as “a wonderful experience” and “enlightening.”

Participant #4

Kevin is a 21 year-old African American male. He is entering his senior year of college and currently is majoring in sociology. To date, he has obtained three varsity letters in the sport of football on offense and has been nationally recognized for his active community service. He is a quiet and genuine individual who describes college as “an accomplishment” at both the academic and athletic level.

Participant #5

James is a 22 year-old Caucasian male. He is entering his fifth year of college as a senior and is currently majoring in economics. To date, he has obtained three varsity letters in the sport of football as an offensive player. He is an honest and open individual who describes college as “fun, but kind of like having 2 different lives.”

Participant #6

Will is a 21 year-old African American male. He is completing his junior academic year and is currently majoring in community recreation, sport & camp management. To date, he has obtained three-varsity letters in the sport of football as a defensive player. He is an open and charismatic young man who seems to be goal oriented in both academics and athletics. He describes being in college as “fun” and a time in which you are faced with choices that affect the outcome of your life.

Participant #7

Anthony is 21year-old African American male. He is completing his junior academic year and is currently majoring in sociology. To date, he has obtained three-varsity letters in the sport of football as a defensive player. He is quiet and yet has a confident aura about him that portrays him as a mature young-man with an experienced awareness of the world. He describes college as “fun” and “better than what I thought it was going to be.”

Participant #8

Parker is a 22-year-old Caucasian male. He is completing his senior academic year and sits just shy of graduation while majoring in sociology. To date, he has obtained four varsity letters in the sport of football at the position as a defensive player. He is an extrovert with a charismatic but direct attitude. He describes college as “a great experience, with a bunch of stories and a lot of good times.”

Participant #9

Brett is a 21 year-old African American male. He is completing his junior academic year and is currently majoring in sociology. To date, he has obtained two varsity letters in the sport of football as an offensive player. He is a quiet but honest young man who possesses a direct focus on succeeding in both athletics and academics. He describes college as “fun, but more so as a job. It is not bad, it is just something that you have to do at this stage of life.”

Participant #10

Davis is a 23 year-old African American male. He has graduated with a major in sociology accompanied with four varsity letters in the sport of football as a defensive player. Davis is a conservative and quiet young man, but also honest, direct and blunt. He describes being in college as “a lot of work, but fun.”

The participants for the study were male athletes and Table 4.1 summarizes the participant profiles by age, race, academic major, football class designation, and years of collegiate football. Seven of the participants were African American, and three of the participants were Caucasian. Each participant has completed at least five full time semesters at State University. Six participants were participating in their final year of eligibility for intercollegiate football. Of the six participants competing in the last athletic season of football, two were participating as red-shirt seniors, one as a graduate student, and three as true seniors. Participating with a red-shirt indicates the athlete competed in all team related activities except for competitive games for one academic year. The red-shirt season provides the athlete the opportunity to mature mentally and physically into

the sport without using a year of athletic eligibility. Three participants were competing in their third athletic year after red-shirting as an incoming freshman student athlete classifying them as red-shirt juniors and a single participant was a true junior in his third year at the university.

The population of student athletes is further depicted in Figures 4.1 – 4.11. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the total athletic population at State University compared to the overall non-athlete population. State University, for the 2009-2010 athletic year, had 495 student athletes out of a total undergraduate population of 14,639 students. The student athlete population represents 3% of the total undergraduate student population and 2.5% of the entire student population. Demographically, the population is further investigated by gender, race, and class status. State University is 54% male with 52% of the male population representing non-athletes and 2% of the male population representing student athletes. State University is 46% female with 44% of the female population representing non-athletes and 2% of the female population representing student athletes. The male and female student athlete population makes up 2% of each genders total undergraduate student population, which is presented in Figure 4.2. Furthermore, male student athletes make up 54% of the total athlete population and female student athletes make up 46% of the total athlete population. Figure 4.3 presents the gender distribution of student athletes by sport and demonstrates the number of male and female participants by sport. State University students predominantly consist of two racial demographics of Caucasian and African-American. The Caucasian Student population makes up 88.7% of the student population and the African-American student population makes up 10.3% of the student

Table 4.1
Research Participant Demographics

Name*	Age	Race	Major	Football Class Designation	Years of football**
Chris	22	African-American	Sociology	Senior	4
Bryan	22	Caucasian	Marketing	Senior	4
Jamal	23	African-American	Sociology	Senior	5
Kevin	21	African-American	Sociology	Junior	3
James	22	Caucasian	Economics	Senior	4
Will	21	African-American	Community Recreation	Junior	3
Anthony	21	African-American	Sociology	Junior	3
Parker	22	Caucasian	Sociology	Senior	4
Brett	21	African-American	Sociology	Junior	3
Davis	23	African-American	Sociology	Graduate	5

Note. *The participant names do not include actual names. The participants selected alternative names to be referred to within the study. **Years of Football refer to the number of eligible years that have been completed in intercollegiate football.

population. The total racial demographic for State University is presented in Figure 4.4. For the student athlete population, Caucasians make up 70% of the total student athlete population, African-Americans make up 27% of the total student athlete population, and 3% are classified as other. The racial demographic distribution of student athletes at State University are presented in Figure 4.5 and Figure 4.6 further presents racial demographics by gender. As the study limited the participants to the sport of football, Figure 4.7 presents the racial demographics for the football program of State University and Figure 4.8 presents the racial demographic of the research participants. The class classification of the student athlete population is depicted in Figure 4.9 and then further explained as Figure 4.10 presents the State University football team class classifications and Figure 4.11 presents the class classification for the research participants.

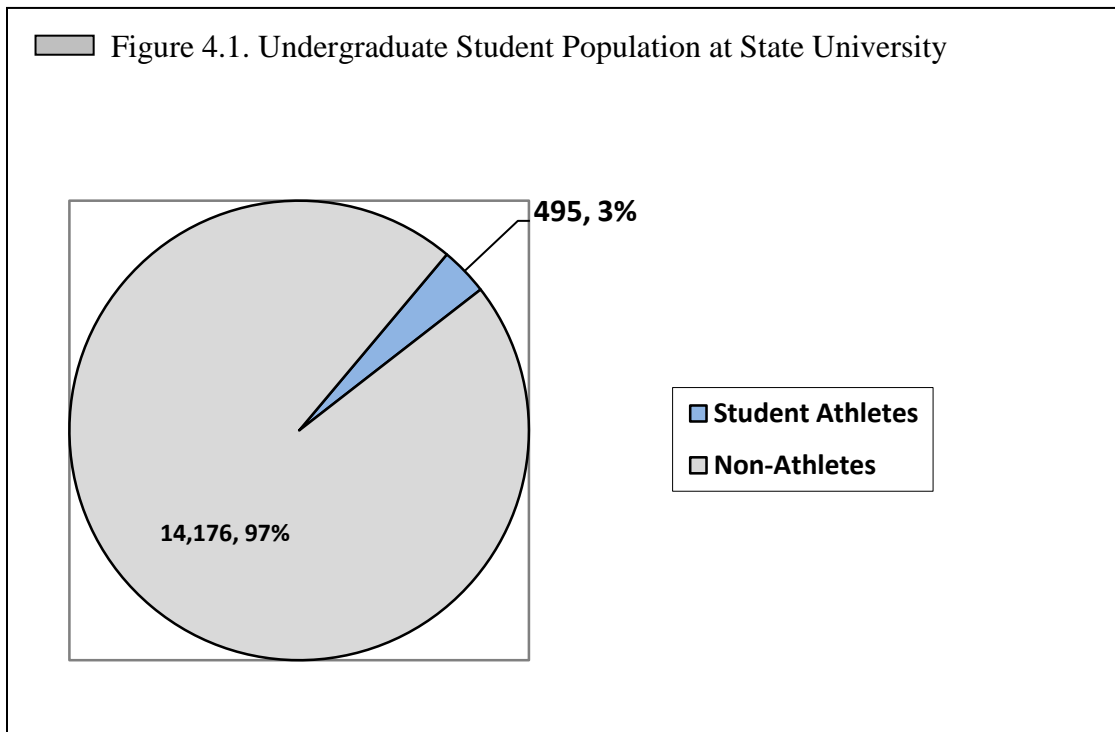


Figure 4.2. Gender Distribution among Students at State University

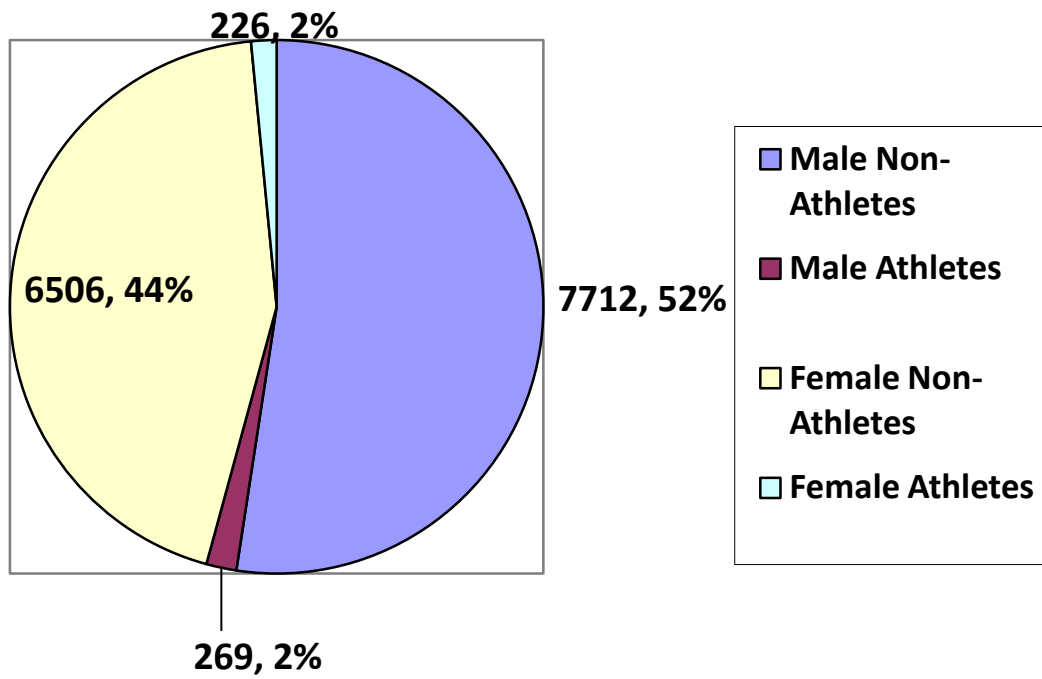


Figure 4.3. Gender Distribution of Student Athletes by Sport at State University

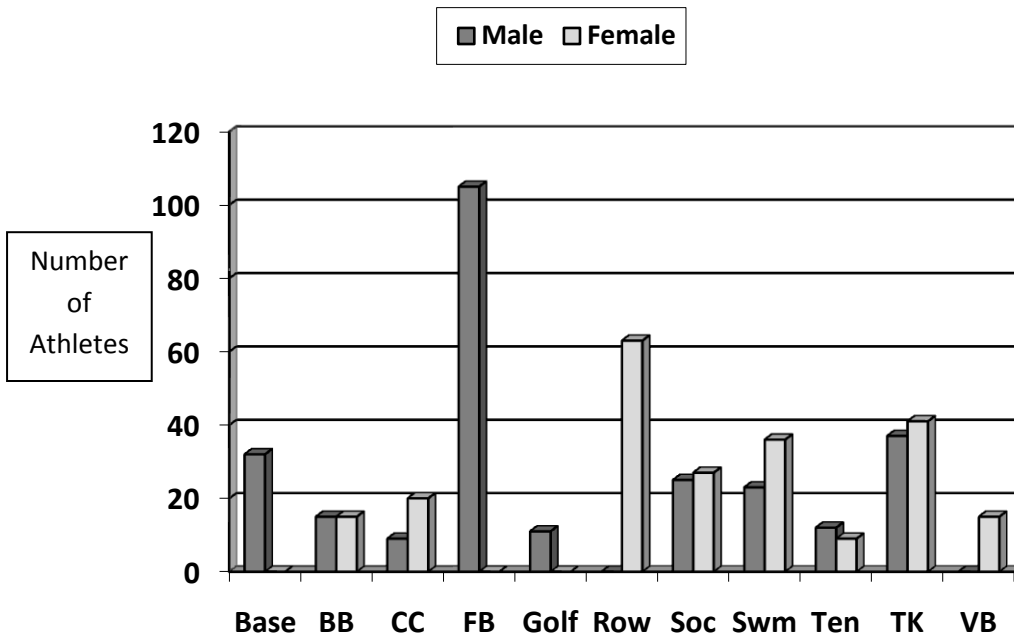


Figure 4.4. Total Racial Demographic of State University

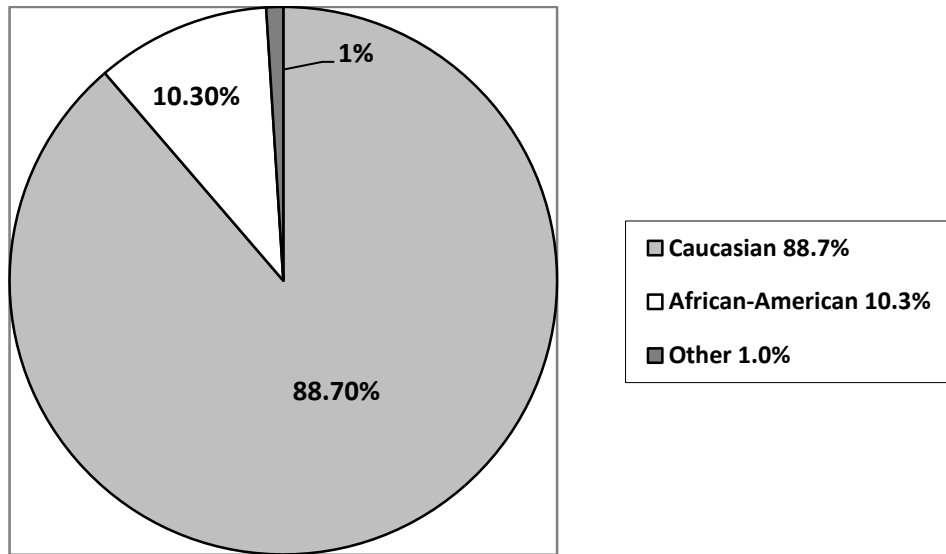
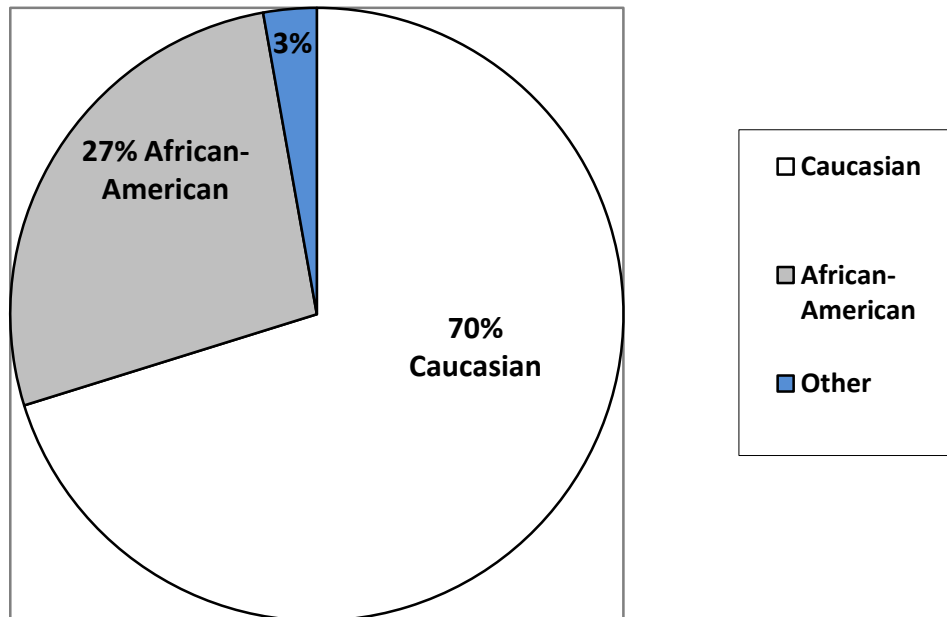


Figure 4.5. Racial Demographic of State University Athletic Programs



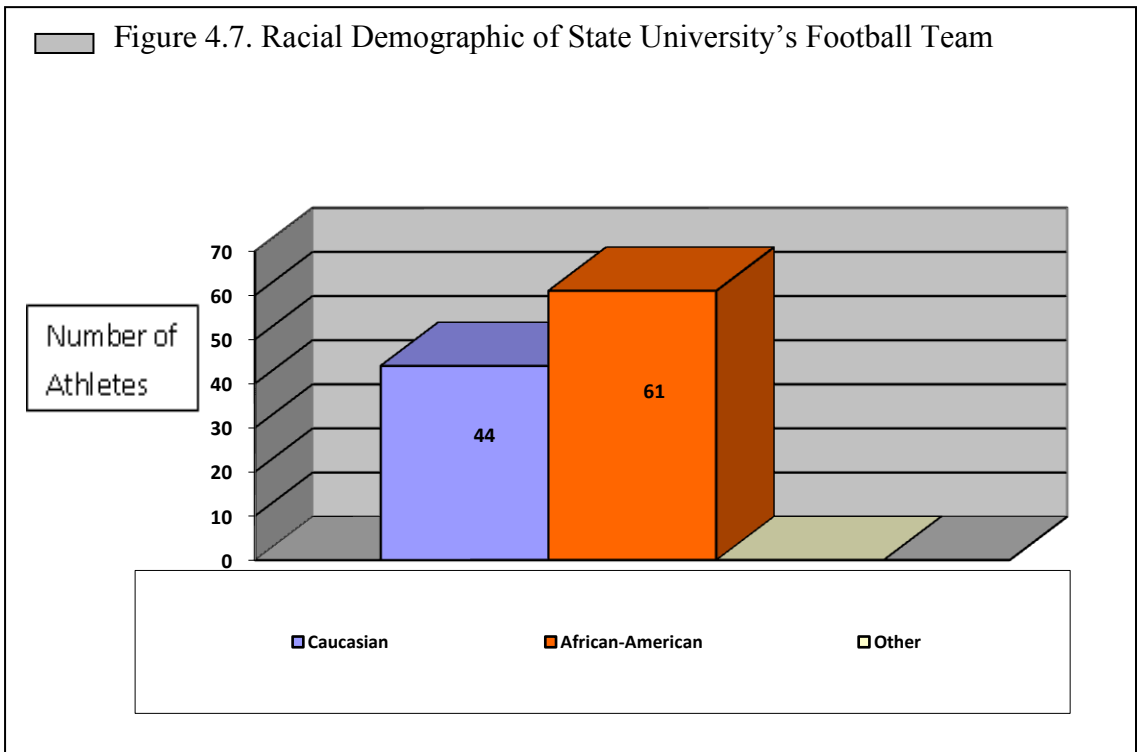
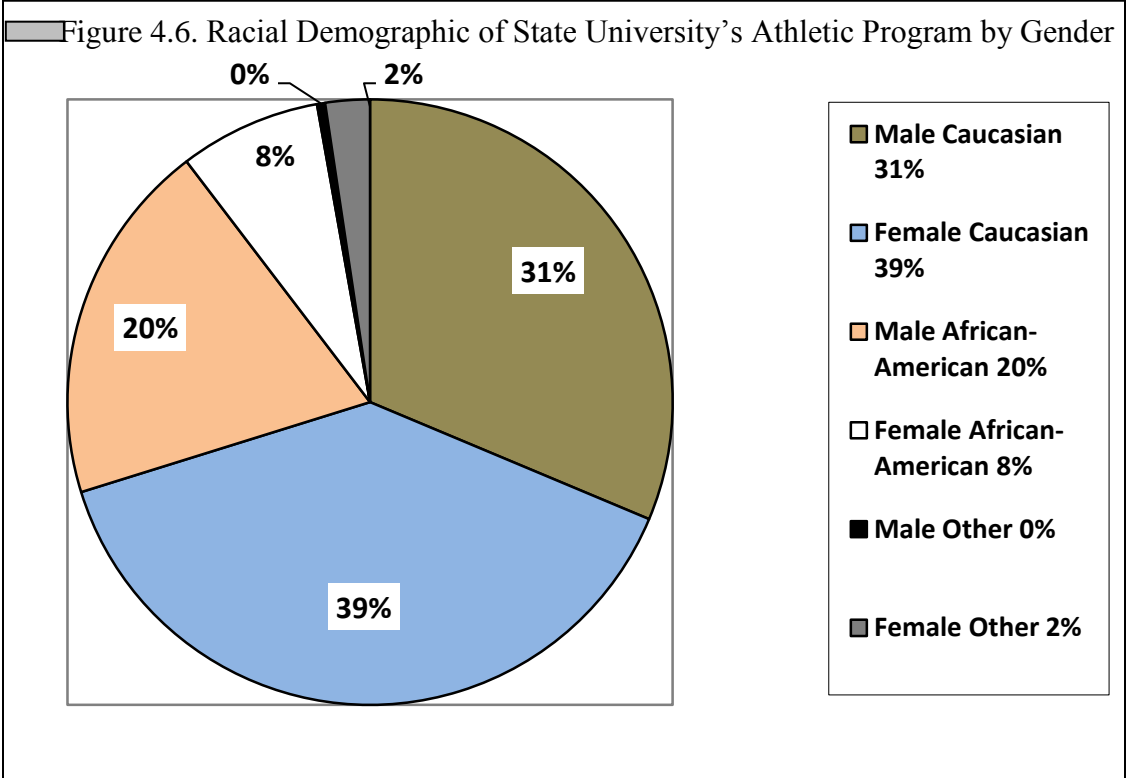


Figure 4.8. Racial Demographic of Research Participants

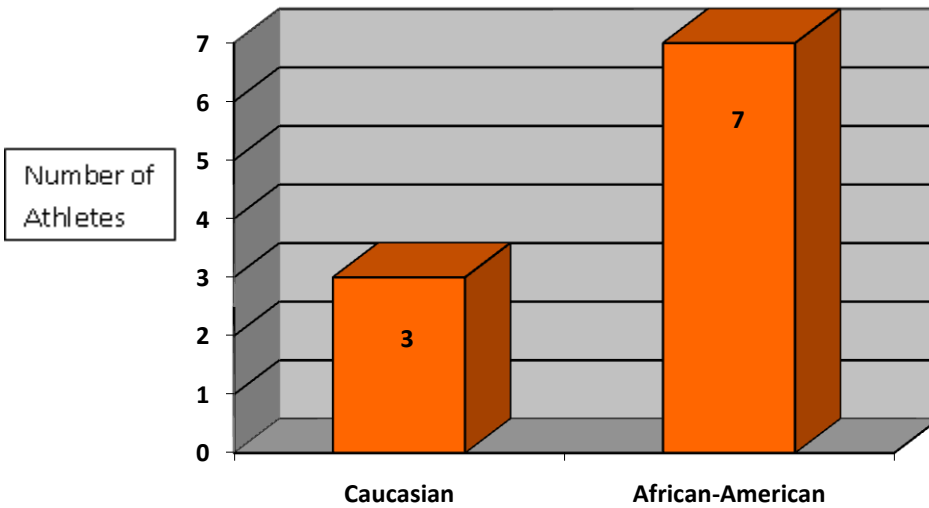
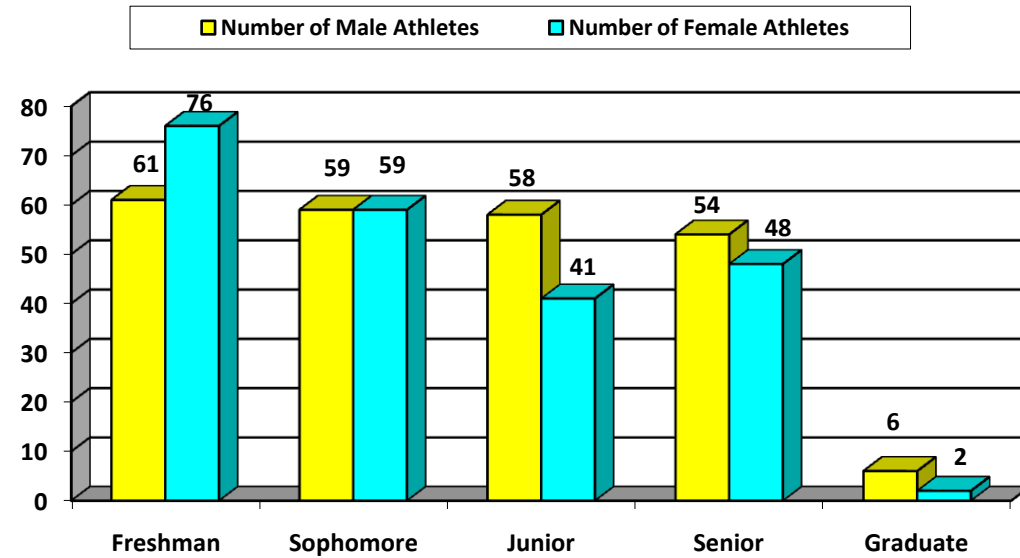
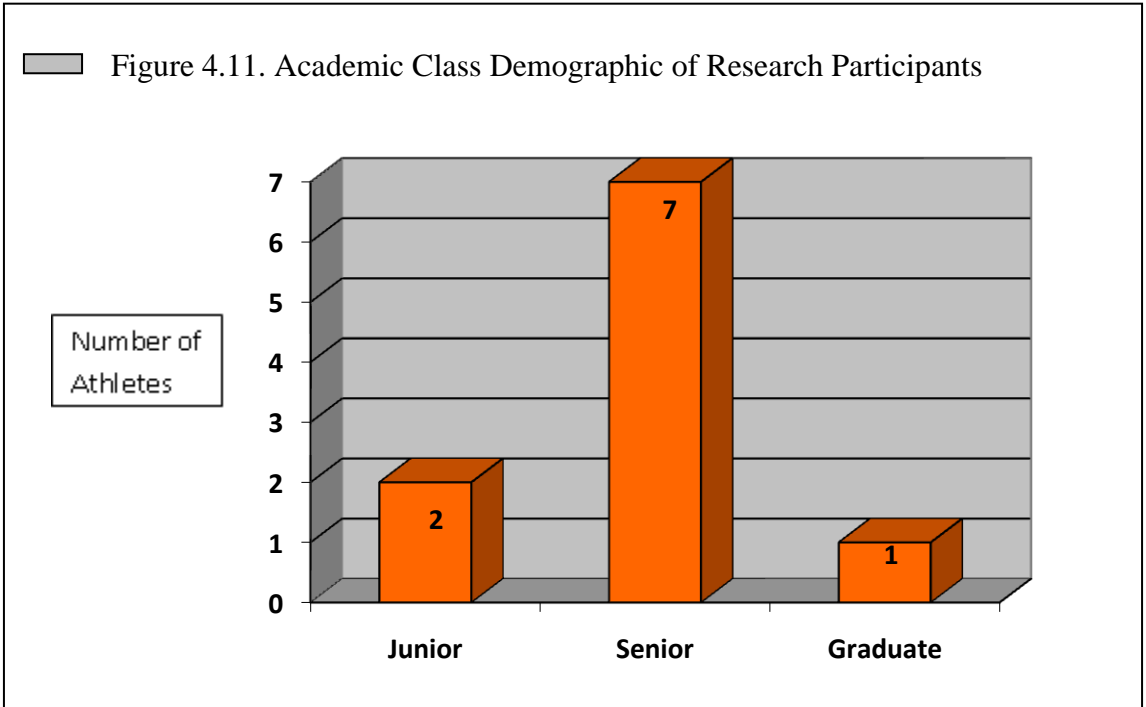
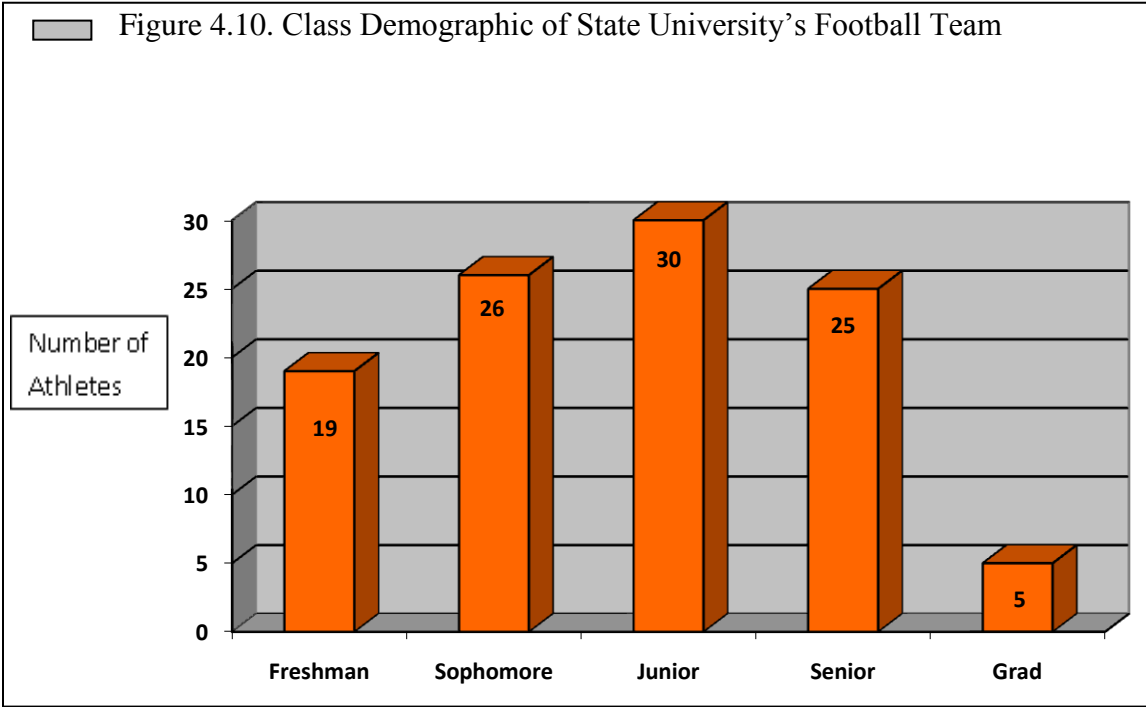


Figure 4.9. Class Demographic for Student Athletes at State University





Coding

At the conclusion of the initial interview process, each interview was transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcribed interviews were then submitted back to each participant for review, in which they were asked to read the transcriptions to ensure accuracy and provide an opportunity to add or retract any information regarding the questions and answers provided. As each response was received from the participants, appropriate changes were made to the transcriptions to provide the researcher with all of the information needed to begin the process of coding, horizontalization and significant statement selection.

The process of selecting significant statements from the interview transcripts was accomplished using the following steps from Moustakas (1994, p. 122): (1) Consider each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience and (2) Record all relevant statements. For preparation of the significant statement selection process, the researcher printed the ten transcribed interviews, separating each statement of the interview into individual strips of paper. These strips were then placed into a large wastebasket and then sorted individually to determine experiential relevance and meaningfulness to the research.

After the initial significant statement selection process, the researcher collected 1,390 statements that individually described participant experiences. Of these, twenty-seven statements were discarded due to their being incomplete thoughts or sentences, or repeated thoughts within the same sentence by the same participant. Therefore, 1,363 statements were used in the coding process for this study.

These significant statements were then put into lists or groups to create the horizons or meaning units of the experience. Table 4.2 lists the thirty-one meaning units created from the significant statement analysis.

At the conclusion of developing the meaning units for the research study, the research participants were emailed to update them on the process of data analysis. This email included a list of the devised meaning units, and each participant was asked to comment on them for agreements or disagreements. While no participants disagreed with any of the meaning units, one participant did add the idea of religious faith and its role in the college experience. The idea was then administered to the participants (5 by phone and 4 by email) to discuss the roll of religious faith in a person's college experience. The results from the inquiry were varied as the participants differed in their religious practices, faith and overall belief. Therefore, it has been determined that religious faith does not play a roll in the overall college experience that can be generalized to these participants. The decision was then passed along to each participant with no rebuttal and the researcher moved on with the data analysis and moved to the stage of developing meaning clusters.

Meaning cluster development is a method that further organizes the data and allows the researcher to relate and cluster the meaning units to begin the process of thematic development (Moustakas, 1994). The thirty-one meaning units (displayed in Table 4.2) were clustered into ten groups and developed into six experiential themes that describe the experience of being a student athlete in higher education. Table 4.3 lists the ten meaning clusters associated with the six themes.

Table 4.2.
Meaning Units

1. Family Oriented	17. Other Students
2. Thank You Mom	18. We are different
3. Family Role Model	19. Expectations
4. Blessed	20. Responsibility
5. Goals of Graduation	21. The Mood
6. Independence	22. Pressure
7. Life Changing	23. From Friend to Foe
8. Awesome	24. Fan or Fanatic
9. My Brothers	25. Fatigue
10. My Team	26. My day
11. My Friends	27. Hard Work
12. How others see me	28. Strained
13. Teachers	29. Time Management
14. Classroom Attitude	30. Not Prepared
15. School and football affect each Other	31. We are People
16. Underappreciated and misunderstood	

Upon completing the thematic analysis, the data was entered into the qualitative analysis software of Nvivo 8. The researcher completed the Nvivo 8 software analysis with the same results. The Nvivo 8 software analysis was beneficial in developing the textual descriptions of the six themes as the overlap in the data and significant statements became apparent.

Additionally, the researcher participated in peer debriefing throughout the analysis process with three individuals experienced in working with student athletes. The peer debriefing process was used to elaborate on the experiences of the participants and comparing their experiences to that of the general student population. The peer debriefing process allowed the researcher to remove himself from the analysis to ensure accuracy so participant intent was accurately portrayed.

At the conclusion of the analysis process, each participant was scheduled for a second interview. The purpose of the interview was to describe the findings that had been accumulated throughout the data analysis process and provide the participants an opportunity to add, retract, discuss, or repeat any previous idea, information, or concern about the findings. In addition, the researcher was able to clear up some of the vague descriptions that were provided to ensure the best account of the student athlete experience. The follow-up interview allowed the researcher to discuss the themes and ask the question, "If this were a book about you, would it accurately describe your time as a student athlete?" At the conclusion of the second interviews and related communication associated with them, it was determined that a suitable level of saturation had occurred and the experience was ready to be described in text.

Table 4.3

Thematic Analysis with Associated Meaning Clusters and Meaning Units

Theme	Meaning Cluster	Meaning Units
The Fraternity of the Paw	Band of Brothers	My Brothers My Team My Friends Awesome
Family Focus	Family Oriented	Family Thank you mom Family Role Model Blessed
	Goals of Graduation	Graduation Independence Life Changing
Identity Adaptation	Who am I	How others see me Teachers Under appreciated and misunderstood Classroom Attitude We are people Other Students
	We are different	We are different
Exceptional Expectations	Expectations of Student Athletes	Expectations Responsibility The Mood Pressure
	Friend or foe	From friend to foe Fan or fanatic
Athletics versus Academics	School and football Affect each other	School and football affect each other
Time Fatigue	Long Days	Fatigue My Day Hard Work Strained
	Unprepared and Unaware	Time Management Not Prepared

As the textual descriptions were completed, a final portrayal was created in an attempt to provide the reader with a detailed description of the student athletes' experiences in higher education. The final description and each individual theme was then discussed through the process of member checking and continued until each participant was in agreement of the accuracy and reality of the work. For this study, the member checking process went through three separate stages and edits producing six detailed themes.

These six themes demonstrate a cultural experience that creates a specific reality for student athletes that alters their experience as college students. The six themes are: (1) The Fraternity of the Paw, (2) Family Focus (3) Identity Adaptation, (4) Exceptional Expectations, (5) Athletics versus Academics, and (6) Time Fatigue. These themes retain much of the participant's original language, but has been organized into a more coherent and logical account of being a student athlete in the sport of Division I football in higher education. Many of these themes overlap or contain elements of another; however, each maintains the substance and merit to be viewed as a single category.

The Fraternity of the Paw

A fraternity is an organization of male students, primarily for social purposes, that is associated by ties of brotherhood and possess a common purpose or interest (Costello, 1990). For football players, the brotherhood is a characteristic of being a teammate that forges a deep-rooted relationship of respect, unity, and love. The daily angst of being a college football player combined with the expectations of academic success creates a

tight and focused community among teammates. As individuals grow and mature, they tend to lean on those similar to them in their experiences and daily routines.

Intercollegiate football players possess a unique schedule in college that is exacerbated by the physical work and mental preparation that occurs on a daily basis. To understand this experience without participating in the daily rigors of a student athlete is difficult. It would be similar to reading about the sport of skydiving and believing that by reading about a freefall one would know what it is like to freefall. The mental, physical, and emotional toll that football takes on the body forges the bond between teammates. Therefore, the fraternity is created by growing and learning together as a team and becomes the foundation for positive college experiences.

The fraternity of the paw is a statement created and presented by one of the research participants. Jamal describes the connection between teammates in the following statement: “You know, being around your teammates, it is almost like being in a fraternity. Like when people ask me if I am going to pledge or do this, I tell them that the paw is my fraternity. That is my sign. That is what I represent. And I will choose that every time.” Football creates a loyalty in individuals. It creates a respect for one another that is forged through countless hours of practice and training. Despite the various social backgrounds, cultural differences, and personal goals, intercollegiate football creates a bond that withstands multiple criticisms, stereotypes and social hurdles unseen by the non-athlete student body. The requirements of the sport, at the collegiate level become a job in itself with pressures, expectations, and diligence that is only accomplished by pledging loyalty to the paw. This fraternity, the brotherhood, and the meaning of being a

teammate is a lived experience. It is felt in the blood, sweat and tears expelled on a daily basis. It is felt from the numerous ice bags all the way to the quiet rooms of study hall. The fraternity is much more than a passing moment in time or a group of guys to play drinking games with. The fraternity is forged in the daily battles of being a student athlete. The fraternity is a way of life. Although each participant expressed the difficulty of the sport, it was their teammates that pushed them to continue. The following participant statements describe the relationship:

Jamal: I love my teammates man. I love them with a passion. I was once told that, before I left home, that the relationships that I build in college, will last longer than any relationship that I had before college. And so far that has been true. And even though I just got out of college, these boys going to be in my circle for a long time. We are already planning on getting together once a year just to do something. I love my teammates. I love just being around them. I think that was one of the reasons I stayed here as long as I did, through injuries. I wanted to leave at one time but I stayed just for them. Just great relationships.

Chris: Well your football teammates are like your brothers and stuff. I spend the most time with them and they will always come first with any relationship.

Bryan: I have said this for a long time that the best thing that I have taken from college is the relationships I have made, and the guys on the football team, and the friendships I have made. My relationship with the guys on the football team... one thing I can say, the thing about football... we have 115 guys, so you really

learn how to mesh with guys from different backgrounds, or guys that you would not usually like or usually hang out with. But they are on the football team so you have got to make it work. And I am really grateful for that because it has taught me how to gel with a lot of different types of people. And I definitely feel like that is something that will help me later on in life. And thus, ultimately, I spend the most of my time with the guys from the football team.

Parker: I love my teammates. And they have been good for me. I get to see where these guys come from and they have all fought to get here and deserve what they have got. It has been good. I have some great relationships that I think will be there twenty years from now. So it has been real good. I have been blessed with that and I have met some good people.

This brotherhood is reinforced by the concept of family and the constant reminders of a special togetherness that is experienced within the team. The concept is repeated from recruiting visits through the last practice of the senior season. With each passing year, athletes grow to learn a responsibility to one another and for one another. The bonds that are formed create an atmosphere of camaraderie, leadership and responsibility. They learn to watch out for one another and pick each other up when football, school or life has a knocked them down. Bryan describes this as a learned responsibility that develops over time. He describes his role as a leader by stating:

If we see a guy down, it is kind of our job to, you know, kick them why they are down if that is what they need, or pick them back up a little bit. That is just part of

being a captain on the team. And the coaches call that feeling the pulse of the team. You can see when a guy has a bad game and gets down about stuff. The coaches are all over them the next week and this is part of being a teammate and good friend by picking them up.”

The researcher was intrigued by the connection felt between players. Upon further examination into the development of this concept, the bond is forced out of necessity. The role of the student athlete in higher education becomes a cultural reality that is separated and specific to age and sport, especially that of a football player at a school in which football is the highest revenue sport. The team becomes a separate microcosm of the student population. The student athletes’ role as a student is limited in both the amount of time available to fulfill that role and the experiential opportunities available for them to pursue. Therefore, conforming to the standards and norms within the team becomes the safest and most comfortable path to a successful academic and athletic career. The team, and the relationships developed within the team, is a safe haven of understanding, as student athletes find comfort in knowing that their teammates are experiencing the same stresses of balancing athletics with academics. The team represents the individuals who understand the process of intercollegiate football. The team represents the individuals who have bled by your side and pick you up when you have fallen. Having the opportunity to represent the team instills a sense of pride, unity, and closeness best described as a brotherhood. Young men, from all walks of life, coming together with the single focused goal of winning.

The experience of being a student athlete in intercollegiate athletics indeed creates a separate and unique experience compared to the general student population. The experience is different compared to the general student population, but not worse. The experience is a compromise of gaining athletic visibility by losing some individual freedom. Intercollegiate football athletes give up many of the luxuries of being in college. However, they have many unique experiences of their own that they see as better preparing them for life beyond college. The microcosm of the team is presented to them as real life. There are separate socioeconomic structures, political beliefs, religious beliefs, and personal perceptions of team goals. Within the team, these individuals have discovered a way to work through their many differences. They have found a common ground and they use it to further the group as a whole.

The team also represents a stable and safe ground for friendships. For intercollegiate football athletes, playing this sport often creates seclusion from the student body. The amount of time that can be devoted to building relationships with the general student population is limited. The limitation of time creates a division between student athletes and the general student population promoting the belief that they are different. Therefore, out of convenience, the football players migrate into friendships within the team. The deep and personal relationships with the general student population are rare and attributed mainly to schedule differences and the caution that one must have bringing outsiders into the group. The following statements provide some insight into this complex occurrence:

Bryan: Even friends that don't play sports, I mean, they look at me as an athlete more than they see me as just another guy at school. Most of my friends, my best friends are on the football team. I have a few that don't play any sports but most play on the team. It is a fraternity basically.

James reiterates this thought by stating, "I think early on the majority of my friends were not teammates, where now the majority of the people I hang out with are my teammates. I have a lot of friends that are not athletes, but it is harder to maintain those relationships because I see them less and less." Will and Anthony reflect on the social aspect of being a college athlete with the following statements:

Will: It's easy to have a social life because of college and who you are and the pedestal you are on, but it is hard to maintain and be consistent with the who and where in your social life. You have to be careful. So it's not hard, but you have to be careful. It's not hard because you attract people, people want to be around you for good and bad reasons. But it is just hard to maintain a good social life. Like you can't go out to eat with your friends everyday like normal students can. It is just harder to maintain.

Anthony: Well throughout the week it is (being social is hard) because of football. Because you have morning workouts or something and there are lots of times where there is a big party going on that night and you have to say I can't go because I have morning workouts. Everybody gets mad at you.

Jamal summarizes his social time as difficulties attributed to different lifestyles between student athletes and the general student population.

I have had a few non-athlete relationships, but they are kind of weird because they always want to do things and I am like, cant, I got to go to practice. Or lets go out, I cant, going to the hotel. Cant skip practice. I mean, they stay up all times of the night and we are trying to go to bed because we got to get up early. They sleep in till 12 because their classes don't start until 1, and by the time 1 comes we are headed to meetings because we have been up since 6. So, it's just a different life.

The team itself represents a bond. This fraternity represents a group of young men, often well over a hundred individuals that mesh and rely on one another in a world that does not always have their best interest at heart. They, just like the general student population, make mistakes. They grow academically and athletically by learning from those around them and they surround themselves with those that are like them. However, in football, being like someone is not a reference to race or religion or political establishment. To understand what it means to represent the university and bear the fraternity symbol of the paw is not a shared concept throughout the student population. This concept is exclusive to the team. It is guarded with pride, integrity, and a sense of family that filters down from the coach staff. The team is a secluded brotherhood described by the participants simply as "awesome."

Family Focus

The concept of family differs on some level for all people. However, the importance of family and the connectivity to family seems to remain a vital factor in both the success and encouragement for student athletes. With the simple question of “describe your support for going to college”, it was apparent where the participant’s minds drifted off to, as they immediately began storytelling of their hometowns, family life and relationships between family members. The relaxed nature created by talking about family provided the participants a release and a sense of relief that we were discussing something other than sports. Families were described as supportive crutches for the participants to lean on and are in constant contact. Participants described their families as a source of support. While each participant described the unconditional support from the family, the following statements reflect the deep connections:

Jamal: They are a great source of support. There were times in which I did not want to come back to school. I wasn’t coming back to college, but through them, they really wanted me too, and I am glad that I did. But my mom, my grandma, and my grandpa, they really helped me out. One thing I am, is that I am very family oriented. I love my family.

Bryan: I have been blessed with one of the greatest families in the world. From my parents, my brother and sister, and both of them have gotten married so now my brother and sister in law. But yeah, I really do have a great family that has

always been there and are always calling to check on me. My parents came to every game this year, home and away, so they have been great.

James: Absolutely, I have a great family support. Not going to college would have been unacceptable. The majority of my family graduated from college starting with my granddad who graduated in the 50's on a GI Bill. It kind of started a trend down, actually on both sides my moms and dads side, but I was going to college regardless of football. I actually had a better chance of coming here without football, and then football opened up some other schools into that mix.

Anthony: I do have a great family. I still have one. Talk to everyone all the time. I still talk to my aunties and uncles all the time, I mean, I talk to everybody weekly. They just talk to me, tell me to keep my head up and keep working hard and stuff like that. I talk to them a lot.

Will: Sure do. Mom, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, so great family support and all are very supportive of me being in college and being an athlete. Very supportive of me being in college and finishing college. Very supportive. They come see me. Call me, check up on me every day, so...yes, very supportive. IT helps a lot to have that to.

Parker: My parents were great, always saying that this was my 4 or 5 years and that they would support me no matter what. And it really wouldn't of mattered

where I went, they would have supported me and I have great parents. They have supported me the whole way.

Brett: Oh family it is so important. My parents even talk to my fiancé about my grades, to make sure she is even on me about my grades. I talk to them at least once a week and the first thing we talk about is my grades.

The support of family was highly centered on the academic aspect of college. For these student athletes who play in a high profile sport, football was not the focus of the conversation. This support consistently focused on academics, grades, classes and the demonstration of respect and pride for attending and finding success academically. With seven of the ten participants being first generation college students, parental pride was demonstrated through a constant supportive push to succeed academically. These individuals have been placed upon a pedestal of pride by their families in the form of academic achievement.

The pedestal of pride was not one-sided. The connection to the maternal mothers for these participants was heartfelt, sincere and humbling. While the socioeconomic situations these participants experienced growing up differed greatly, the respect for the mother was eerily similar. The continued connection to the mother exists in the form of supportive phone calls, daily reminders to do well in school, constant questions of football, and a love that can only be passed over the phone by a mother to her child. The respect was created uniquely over time with individual participants, but each presented a humor, passion and sincerity towards their mothers.

Mothers are always there and as expected, always poking and prodding with the issues concerning grades and graduation. Chris describes this as “a good family support” and then breaks out in a quiet laughter adding, “Mom pretty much calls me every day, almost, the only way she won’t call is if I tell her not to.” The support provided by mothers was accepted and used as a driving force to succeed in college, especially towards graduation. Will describes his relationship with his mother as “unbelievable” and supportive from day one:

Well actually, my mom did go to school for two years until she got pregnant with me and dropped out, so... but I talk to my mom almost every day. I did not grow up with much. My mom, she raised six of us as a single parent. And she always worked and provided, and through all of that, I got to college. I am doing good, and if I can take that and graduate and make something of myself, and show them I made something of myself, show my brothers and sisters and people from my town, I think it might inspire them. And that is a tribute to my mom. It is rewarding for her and it shows her that all those long nights and all those tears were worth it. It was well worth it and that she actually did a good job with her kids. You know, because my family, well, I don’t know if there are any graduates in my family. My mom’s brothers and sisters didn’t go to college and all my cousins dropped out. So immediate, I will be the first, so it (graduation) is very important. And I have come to understand that it is for my mom and for generations to come.

Another interesting family fact attributed to all the participants is that they all come from rather large families ranging from four to eight family members. Growing up in this family atmosphere and having the opportunity to go to college was seen as a chance to be a role model within the family. Anthony and Will describe this opportunity to be a role model. Anthony is focused on the family aspect and sees himself as a role model for his siblings. He states, "I got two sisters and one brother. And I am the oldest which is cool and that is one of the main reasons I came back (instead of entering the NFL draft), to set an example for them, so they can have someone to look up to, and make sure they graduate. I talk to them a lot." Will's perception of family extends beyond his home. Will's idea perception of role modeling extends into the community:

Graduating is very important. Because my family for one and where I am from. For my sisters and brothers it is huge. I want them to go to college and see what it can do for you and be a better provider and be more educated. It is getting to be now that if you are not educated your life is hard. And you may need more than just a undergrad degree. So it is very important to graduate and be that role model and show them what it can do for you. And also for my town, because not a lot of people in my town go to college. In my town, it is like a cycle. You graduate from high school, staying around, you get a factory job and then your done. Most of my town are black males and females so it is very important athletically and academically to show them that you can do what you want no matter where you are from. Your race, where you come from, what your family had and everything like that.

The ability to be a role model, give back to the family, and just say thank you with the action of graduation is an opportunity that is described by multiple participants simply as “blessed.” Having the opportunity to go to college, to play football, to receive an athletic scholarship from a Division I school and receive a degree from a top university is a blessing that is gladly passed back to the family as a thank you. Therefore, as we constantly perceive student athletes, especially football players, as being in school only for athletics, we may need to dig a little deeper as to their motivation and desires. The goal of graduation was presented as highly important, even for those headed to the highest levels of competitive football.

For student athletes, it can be a common perception that graduation is not important or that they only care about playing their sport. However, each of the participants viewed graduation as either “highly important”, “very important” or “critical”. Upon digging into the meaning behind these statements, the role of the family became apparent in the student athletes desire to graduate. While it is probably safe to assume most football athletes have the dream of reaching the National Football League, the reality of a professional football career is realized at the collegiate level. Football is not a guarantee. With the average career falling under five years in length, a college degree becomes a safety net for future success. It is easy for student athletes to be wrapped up within their sport and progress through college with a tunnel vision of future success. However, the family element is a grounding force for student athletes that often bring the reality of the world back into focus. The family plays a unique role in balancing the supportive role of chasing a dream and the reality role of expectations, life and

securing a future. Many participants discussed this concept and described the support in the following way:

Jamal: My expectation was that I was going to become a vital role on the team and to graduate. But once I started to understand the game, once my eyes were opened, especially to the NFL, then my priorities changed. It was totally different. Now I want to get a good education. I want to take advantage of this scholarship that I am allowed to get, and whatever happens past that then I will take it.

Kevin: First thing now is to graduate and hopefully make it to the NFL or something like that. Get a good job you know. Win a championship and stuff. Graduation is the most important.

Will: So it is very important to graduate and be that role model and show them what it can do for you.

Parker: Graduation is very important. I haven't had anybody in my family that's graduated. Especially to get a degree from this type of university. You know I played ball, been to some bowl games, you know, I've been there. But it is going to be awesome to graduate, I cant wait to get it (diploma).

As the family exists as a major source of support for student athletes, they also promote growth, maturity and independence. The desires to make the family proud and give back as a supporting member promoted a period of growing-up that most students experience when leaving home for the first time. Each participant discussed the difficulties the first few years being separated from the family during the holidays and

school breaks. Anthony responds to missing his family as: “I really miss them during the holidays. Knowing that everybody is with their families having a good time, and we are up here practicing. That is the only thing for me that I feel that we missed out on. I mean, football is fun for me anyway, but if I had that time to spend with my family during Thanksgiving and Christmas it would be a lot better.” However, just as everyone must grow-up and learn to face life on their own, the participants all referenced one of their favorite parts about the college experience was learning to be independent. Learning how to make decisions on their own and take responsibility for their actions, away from mom and dad, was constantly viewed as one of the best growing experiences of college. Accepting and appreciating college as a growing experience is expressed in the following participant statements:

Chris: I would describe it as one of the best experiences of your life, because you are pretty much on your own. And nobody is telling you what to do, you have no bed time and you are in control of your own responsibilities... it is definitely a good experience and definitely gets you prepared for the real world as you actually have responsibilities for yourself.

Jamal: Just having the experience and getting away from home and getting involved in different cultures and getting to see different people than what I was used to seeing living at home. It was an absolutely wonderful experience.

James: It is fun, yeah. You are growing up and making decision on your own.

Will: you have a lot of independence, responsibility, and a lot of room for error. It feels like you have all the choices in the world to make because before you were in college you don't make a lot of choices. But now that you are in college, you don't have anybody here with you, and it seems like you really do make all of your choices and it is... well its not a burden but more of a... well you suffer the consequences of all of your choices. You have to be a little bit more careful.

Parker: Probably getting the chance to get away from momma and daddy. The independence, getting out on my own and experimenting. It has been a good learning process. I have definitely matured over the past 4 years.

One surprising aspect that emerged from the data collection was the reference of receiving the athletic scholarship and its perception of being life changing. However, as it was seen as a life-changing event for the athlete, it is also seen as a life-changing event for the family. The scholarship is seen by the family as a proud symbol of dedication and hard work. The relentless hours of shuttling children to little league games and practices, the countless dollars spent on participation fees and equipment, and the constant worry about the financial burden of paying for tuition all comes together and is expelled in one sigh of relief the moment the scholarship is accepted. Graduating without the financial burden of student loans, not having to make the call to mom and dad every semester for textbook money and food money and tuition provides an atmosphere of relief. As James describes it, "there is just so much going on with football and school, it is just nice not to have to think about it. It just makes things easier for everyone." In addition, for the first

generation students, the scholarship was a springboard into a world that seemed unreachable. For Chris, Anthony, and Will, the ability to participate as a scholarship athlete was a turning point towards a successful future. Chris describes the opportunity as he admittedly reflects on this for the first time:

It definitely has benefitted me because I would not be able to go to a college like this without it. Because um, just financial reasons back home. Just to be able to get to go to school for free is definitely considered a blessing.

Anthony's reflection immediately turns back to his home town and his family. He states,

I would not have come to college without it. To graduate from a top 25 university with no loans, from where I came from, that is big. It has benefitted me a lot. Because I know I would not be in college without that scholarship. Even if I did want to go to college, I don't think there would have been there. I think my family might have pushed for it, but I mean it would have hurt them in a way also. To not have to put my family in that situation, has really benefitted me a lot.

Will was humbled by how different his life has changed, which he attributes to receiving his scholarship. After a few minutes of self reflection, he responds,

Huge. I mean it was so important. If I didn't get my scholarship, I probably would not be in college. I would probably have gone into the military. The scholarship was huge, because I would not have been able to pay to go to this university.

Never in a million years! So the scholarship, football scholarship was huge. One of the biggest life changing things ever in my life.

The relationship between student athletes and their families is built out of love. The relationship is strengthened through the tears of working double shifts just to provide for your children, the diligence of checking on academic progress, and the bond that is created over time watching children growing into adults and respecting your parent(s) for everything they have given up to provide for you. The single greatest lesson that the researcher gained from getting to know these student athletes was that family orientation grows from respect and the desire to succeed academically and athletically. Although the home lives may have differed, the goals of success and graduation was a tribute to the parents to say thank you for everything you have given.

Identity Adaptation

The theme identity adaptation is a reference to the perception of cultural reality that the research participants experience during their time in the collegiate setting and what it means to be a student athlete. As an intercollegiate football athlete in a setting in which football rules the athletic realm of the university, it is particularly difficult to separate the student from the football player. The importance of football to the students, faculty members, and administration within the culture of the university makes it difficult for these student athletes to establish themselves as students.

The student athletes also have problems identifying simply as students due to the time that is focused towards their sport. Identifying as athletes does not diminish the importance of academics, but it does present how important and influential the sport of football is to establishing their identity. Upon separating the concept of student athlete and creating a choice to identify by, the participants all chose athlete. The athlete identity

is reinforced by the time dedicated to their sport and a loyalty to the scholarship. Their perception of college, athletics, and academics transforms and grows as personal maturity and development occur. The student athlete reality is more focused on a job concept than pure education, but identifying as athletes does not decrease the desire to graduate or be an educated member of society. As the awareness of professional football careers grow combined with the physical toll the sport takes on the body, these individuals begin to reestablish their self-identity and thus their individual cultural reality. The focus becomes concerned with not wasting the opportunity that has been afforded to them in the athletic scholarship, and academics grow into an equally important role in the life of a student athlete. The participants reflect the perception of growth and maturation in their own unique and powerful statements:

Brett: The answer my parents would want me to give is that I am more of a student, but the honest answer is that I am more of an athlete. Because most of my day, I spend like 10 hours a day on football. And then the other hours I am trying to cram in school. I think in the class is where I have matured the most. Like, when you are in class you actually have to listen and take notes, where as in high school I could listen and get an A on it later. I almost made straight A's in high school. It was easy.

Chris: Definitely an Athlete! I mean that is a persona that athletes have about them, that we don't really dress up a lot, and they don't care. We are hardly on campus all day anyway, so um, that is pretty much our persona.

Jamal: Honestly, being on the for real side, I would just consider myself just an athlete... but football is seriously like servitude. Now granted, you could always walk away from it, but seriously, who wants to walk away from a free education. Well, not free because you work for it, but I'm not leaving with a bunch of debt.

Bryan: Judging by the amount of time that I put into each, I am an athlete.

Judging by the one that is more important to me it would be student. Because I mean, football will end for me some day you know, but I will always have an education to fall back on. A degree, which is ultimately the most important thing. I know that is kind of a cliché answer, but it really is the way that I think about it. But that is a tough question... Part of being a football player and a student athlete, is that it is easy for football to be the thing that defines you.

James: I am more of an athlete. I think for most athletes, at the end of the day and you go back and ask how much of this was for me, and how much I retained and how much I have learned, I think you learn more about life and growth through the sport than you do information from school and classes. For me at least, I would say that has made me more of an athlete. I mean, I would say my grades have gone down, well not gone down but not been as high as they could be if I did not play. So those are the sacrifices. You prioritize and being an athlete takes precedence.

Anthony: I consider myself as more of an athlete, I feel that that is where more of my time is given anyways, so... I mean, I feel it should be student, but we give so

much time to football that being a student comes second. I mean, they tell us that we are student athletes and that we are students first but that is not how it always works. I mean, we are always doing so much with football, it seems like we are rushing to do our schoolwork. But I think of myself as an athlete... In the past, I felt like all I was doing was trying to stay eligible. Where now, I am trying to be a good student and a good football player.

Will: Well, 2 years ago I would have definitely said that I was more of an athlete. But now, I can see the importance of it and I focus on making myself more of a student. And that can depend upon the coach or administration if you let it. I think the student athlete determines that. Obviously you are going to give a lot of effort to your sport but that does not mean that you cant do your best in school. So I guess I consider myself an athlete but I am more focused on my education now because I understand the importance of it.

The student athlete has to adapt to the different settings they find themselves in throughout the day. The constant rush between classes, workouts, and practice create unique situations in which the athlete has to change focus and concentrate on separate purposes. The classroom presents itself as the most difficult change due to the environment in which they enter. The academic perception regarding student-athlete football players varies among students, faculty members, administration and other athletes. These perceptions can be stereotypes, admiration, understanding or disdain and

each class and faculty member create a different cultural environment within the classroom.

The student body creates a unique atmosphere based on their appreciation and, to some extent, adoration for the game of football, but the student body also possesses some stereotypical assumptions regarding student athletes that can affect classroom experiences. The research participants' perceptions of the general student body, or "normal students" is how the participants reference them, is a reflection of classroom treatment, social experiences and specific statements aimed at individual participants. These comments range from receiving inappropriate help with academics to questionable scholarship funding. Kevin reports multiple comments from students such as "you get everything paid for" and "we pay for your scholarships." He also reports that these perceptions held by the student body create a "different relationship between the two" (students and student athletes). There appears to be a perception of jealousy among some students that create tension for student athletes both inside and outside of the classroom. Parker also reported multiple encounters with students stereotyping him in this way. He reports, "Well I have definitely had a few people come up to me and say stuff like that (being provided extra benefits). I definitely let people know where I stand. I don't hold anything back, because I don't want to feel like I have been given anything because I haven't. I seriously haven't. And I am sure there are athletes out there who are probably given stuff, but I haven't and I have earned everything I've gotten. It is pretty irritating, especially when people come with stuff like that and you just realize how ignorant people really are. They are just going to believe what they want to believe. You can't just assume

something. But I have had a few that I have had to get into and let them know what is really going on.” Davis also stated the effort sometimes needed to create a balance in the relationship between the two groups. Chris reiterated this by having to respond to student comments by stating, “It is great to play football, and this environment is great, but I always tell people that I play football but I am a regular student like you, everyday, except I just play football on Saturdays.”

This appears at first to be a modest reflection of the relationship between the student athlete and general student population, but it does offer some evidence of being treated differently. Just having to make the statement is an indication that a difference is being felt among the student athletes, and the general student population plays a role in that difference. Will sums up the perception of student stereotypes with the following statement:

Well most students here at State, for the most part, stereotype athletes regardless of which sport you play and probably more so the black athletes. The relationship in class is very... it is not bad... it is just not close. You don't feel like they want to interact with you. And probably because you an athlete they just think or have disrespect for you because you an athlete. And if they do talk to you it is generally about football. If you are talking about something else, then you probably brought it up. But for the most part it is about athletics.

The general student population can also present multiple positive experiences for the student athletes but there is a caution among the athletes as to the purpose and reasons

behind such treatment. Jamal noticed the affinity between student athletes and the general student population early in his academic career:

I know for about the first 2 to 2 ½ years here I did not even have to take notes in class because other people would just offer theirs because I played football. And I was like cool, because regular students take notes better than I do. The regular student just reached out to you saying hey, I have notes or do you need help with this. And I think that comes from so they can say they helped a football player or that I helped an athlete. And a lot of people were just cool with it because they were friendly, especially the females.

Bryan was more skeptical of the purpose behind the relationships between student athletes and the general student population. He states:

There are some people that you can just kind of tell. I mean, for me, I kind of blended in a lot, and people just looked at me as a taller white guy. So I could sit back and hear what people said whether it was downtown or whether it was in the classroom, but you can just kind of tell. For one, they are a superfan, that is what we call them. The ones who will just come up and start asking questions and constantly think they know everything or 2 guys that will just try to be friends with you just because of who you are. But you really can tell. It is pretty obvious, at least for me and my friends because we talk about it and the people that just try to hang out with you and talk to you just because of who you are.

Brett's experience reflects a perceived cultural stereotype of receiving academic benefits because of the status of being a student athlete. He reflects on his relationship with the general student population as "different." He continues with the following comments:

You know, sometimes, people will not even acknowledge you, because they think that we are shown favoritism or they think that I get everything for free. And honestly, I think the stuff I have gotten for free, was not really for free. I had to bust my butt for it to get it, so I mean, sometimes it is not that great of a relationship in all honestly. Sometimes I do not even like to talk to kids. They think I am stuck up or something or that I get free stuff or something like that. But you do get a bunch of people who are nice to you but you don't know if that is because I play football or if they genuinely want to be my friend.

While the relationships among students body exists as a vital component to the lived college experience, for student athletes, the relationship can best be described as strained. The participants described relationships and friendships with the general student population as "few" and "limited", especially as their college careers progressed. The trend that became apparent between the interaction of the general student population and student athletes is that they misunderstand one another and extreme caution is held in accepting new members into an individuals group of friends. The role of the individual as a football player is perceived to take precedence over the individual and the person, thus creating an identity crisis for student athletes. They become chameleons within the classroom who adapt to the atmosphere of the environment. The perception of the student

athletes as being different from the student body is in fact created by the student body treating them as if they are different.

A separate yet equally important factor for student athletes is the relationship they possess with faculty members. For student athletes, academic success is highly dependant on having a sustainable and open relationship with faculty members that exists both inside and outside the classroom. As faculty members become more accustomed to student-athlete time restrictions, the student athletes are becoming more aware of the importance of timely communication and classroom participation for academic success.

The following participants reflect on the relationships and overall perceptions of faculty:

Chris: Had really good relationships with faculty members. It has been a lot of fun. My teachers have been really cool and I just like that teachers don't look at you differently just because you are an athlete. If you do have something to do, they will try to work around your schedule or if you need something to work out you can go and talk to the teacher. I like how they are capable of adjusting to what you need.

Jamal: I have made some wonderful relationships with faculty. I will say that having a professor that understands what you go through as an athlete because they were athletes or they just understand athletes really helped out a lot. You know, when you have a professor that doesn't understand or doesn't care to understand it makes things difficult. Because you are going to bump heads.

Bryan: It has been good for the most part. I would say overall that the faculty, well most of the faculty understand what we go through. And some guys may ask for special treatment for some things but for the most part we as football players don't ask for special treatment for anything. We just ask for teachers to understand, and maybe sometimes just give us a slight break. Give us a few more hours to get something done or try to understand why we are half asleep in your class. We are not asking you to throw stuff under the rug or anything you know, talk to us after class to find out what's going on at that time. And then try to understand and be encouraging and help us push through to focus. Give us expectations and tell us what you want. We are not asking for special treatment or grades or anything like that, just that teachers try to understand.

James: You never really know, especially in my major, how you are going to be treated. You know, the dumb jock, we can blow this guy off, or you might have a person who appreciates the time management, the demands and that we are in school. So I keep a low profile and feel it out first, before I offer that up (being an athlete). Generally I have had good and bad experiences, but mainly good. Especially last semester, I had a lot of teachers who understood the time restraints and kind of worked with me a little bit.

Anthony: I think the faculty are good. I mean, I don't really deal with them outside of school. They are always willing to help you. Most of them try to understand that you are playing football and work with you. I mean, we aren't

asking for no breaks because everything is still due the same time as other students. And they take that into consideration and give us the benefits with presentation dates and stuff like that. And I have met some that literally just don't care about it. I understand that they don't want us to feel different or feel special.

Will: I have found faculty to be very helpful. I really can't think of a time in which they have not been helpful, unless I have brought harm my way. Unless I have done something to make them not want to do something for me. But for the most part, I mean you are going to have some that are mean to you, but for the most part the faculty have been real helpful and resourceful and open. They are good and really helpful and really providing.

Parker: I think it has been good. I don't try to put myself up on a pedestal or anything, and I think it could be real easy to do that, but everybody treats me the same. I haven't had anybody treat me better because I am an athlete. And I try to do everything that regular students are doing and when something pops up I let them know. I don't expect anything different. It has been good. I have had great professors.

Brett: I have always had great relationships with faculty. I have never had any problems. I mean, people have never accused me of falsely doing anything or had to try and boost my grades because I have always done my own work. People always say that professors help athletes with their grades, and I don't think that is true. I have never had a professor help me, I just always got the grade I deserved.

I think communicating with them is very important. I have always had good relationships with my professors and that helps. I still have good relationships with lots of them. I will still drop by or call to say hay.

The keys for academic success as a student athlete are communication and diligence. The importance of early communication and sitting down with professors and mapping out the semester seems to open the door to a mutual understanding. Once the face-to-face introductions have been made, the faculty members are perceived to be more responsive to the constraints of being a student athlete and the student athletes hold themselves more accountable. Communication is a vital component for faculty members to garner a detailed understanding of the time management responsibilities of being a student athlete. It is the faculties' ability and willingness to bend and be flexible that creates a positive relationship and thus a positive experience. This was presented in multiple reflections of the student athlete participants. James begins each semester with a personal meeting:

I would come in as soon as possible, and let them know that this is the situation I am in, I want to do well in your course and want to contribute as much as I can, but here are some problem areas. I would always come in with a few options but then offer up for their opinion for the best way to handle it. I never would say I need to do this, or you need to let me do this. Just say this is my situation, I have a few ideas, but ultimately can you help me out with the best way to handle this. Come in ahead of time and do things the right way, just as a courtesy. And face to face meeting works the best. I am not sure I would have been able to survive

those classes if those teachers would not have understood and given me some leeway here and there and helped me out. Like they extended their office hours or gave me an extra session or allowed me to email an assignment and stuff like that.

Anthony and Kevin both restated this perception and added the personal component of establishing a relationship between the faculty member and student athlete. Anthony states, “You want that teacher to know you, and not just because you are a football player, but as a student.” Kevin agrees and discusses the importance of early interaction with the faculty member:

It is very important. Because they see that you are trying and that you want to succeed in there class. And most of them are willing to help you as long as you show up on time and stuff like that. Especially the first day of class you go up and talk to them and tell them who you are so they can put a name with a face.

The single concern from student athletes concerning faculty members was the possibility of stereotyping the student based on being a student athlete, especially a football player. The concern is that the actions of a few were going to be used to categorize the group as a whole. The participants discussed the importance of communication to quell the concerns; however, each also had instances of negative experiences in which they believed was based on being a football player. Kevin describes the experience with the following statement:

I have had a couple of problems with faculty, like being accused of certain things. Like a lot of them think we cheat just because we are football players. They think

the people over in Vickery does all our work and stuff like that... And like, if there is blame for some reason, it comes back to us, like I guess it is the stereotype now. Especially with some teachers... like talking, commotion over here or whatever, and a lot of times it is us but the other students are in on it. A lot of the time, the other students are asking us questions. How was this... how is he... who's the QB... and stuff like that. And we are not going to just sit there and ignore them. But we always get turned in for it. But most faculty understand that we are or have a lot going on. I think as long as you respect them they are able to understand what you are going through and they maybe will help you along the way if you get behind or just need help with anything. You can just go in and talk to them, but there are some faculty (members) that really don't care.

Discovering and discussing the causes of feeling different, being treated differently and having to put forth effort with the student body and faculty to fit in as normal students required an examination of the individual perceived realities of student athletes in higher education. These intercollegiate football players put forth extreme amounts of effort to represent the school and yet they feel underappreciated. The focus of understanding the experience of student athletes has grown and yet they feel misunderstood. They feel as if they are treated as football players and are defined only as such. They are treated different, they feel different, the culture that they become a part of is different and thus their experience is different.

Feeling underappreciated can have detrimental effects on experience. The amount of dedication, work, emotion, and mental preparation are unlike any aspect of the general

student population's undergraduate career. The amount of time and the physical sacrifice that an intercollegiate football player exerts throughout the year is diminished to wins and losses. The general student body's perception that they do not care about school and receive outlandish benefits depreciates the amount of work that is required to succeed academically and athletically. The mental and emotional toll that football takes on the mind and body is further diminished by the physical exhaustion that is created by a lack of sleep and high levels of energy expenditure. The perceived stereotypes and seclusion of being a part of a high profile athletic team add to the depreciation and misunderstanding of these athletes. Bryan and Jamal describes the association with winning and losing as an under-appreciation for the work and effort that goes into the sport. Bryan begins by describing the impacts of judging student athletes based upon winning and losing:

You know, that is what makes us as football players really mad sometimes, when people say or make off-hand comments about us... you know if we lose a game or something, everybody thinks we just tanked it on purpose it seems like or like we have nothing invested in the game. I mean we have worked for a year, and you work so hard for a year to play 12 games guaranteed, 13 if you have a championship game and 14 if you have a bowl game. So you work the entire year for 14 opportunities. Maximum. And you work an entire year for that. And people sit there and act like we have nothing invested in it, like we just decided to throw a game or that we just weren't feeling it that week.

Jamal agrees with Bryan and recalls personal experiences of differing treatment based upon winning and losing:

I think a lot of people want to understand what we go through. I think a lot of people try to understand what we go thru, and then I feel like a lot of people really don't care, because when it all boils down to it, this is a business. And we are the entertainers. No matter how you want to sugar coat that, I think a lot of people don't care what we go thru simply because they expect us to perform. And that is the bottom line. And you really notice that when you lose. Because when you are winning everyone is like, oh hey, State, etc. and as soon as you lose a game you are the scum of the earth. So...by the same people.

Brett describes the same perception and feeling, but his accounts are related to interactions with the student body. He reports:

You know most of the people that talk to you ask you about football and it does bother me because they make me feel like all I know is football. Like that is all there is to me or that that is all there is to Brett. But you know, I had a really high SAT score coming in. I know a lot of stuff.

To complicate the occurrence of under appreciating the student athlete is the general misunderstanding of what it means to be a student athlete and the requirements necessary to succeed in both athletics and academics. Few people outside of the athletic and academic world understand the mental, emotional and physical struggles of succeeding as both a student and an athlete. Yet, it is fully expected by all parties for the

student athlete population to succeed in both. The daily rigors of playing football combined with academic work severely limit personal and social time and create a momentum of fatigue as seasons and semesters wear on. To understand the psychological toll on the student athlete, you have to be immersed in the sport. Otherwise, understanding these rigors is an unrealistic assumption. It is possible to see a schedule that runs from six o'clock in the morning and ends at eight-thirty in the evening. It is possible to hear about the external requirements of being settled at home late in the evening and then be expected to complete hours of coursework. What is difficult to understand is the individual toll that fatigue takes on the body and mind. Fatigue for intercollegiate football athletes primarily exists as physical fatigue from hours of non-stop activity, weight training, and practice. However, the fatigue is enhanced by the mental and emotional fatigue created by academic and athletics preventing the student athlete from reaching a plateau in which balance between athletics and academics is achieved.

For intercollegiate football athletes, each week is a new course that has to be perfected by game time. This weekly course exhausts the psychological nature of a person, as it exists in a physical state through practice and training preparation, as a mental state through game planning and time management, and emotional state through pressure situations and the perception that their grade exists as a pass/fail in the state of wins and losses. Combining the external course load on top of a full academic course load further exhausts these three psychological states and creates a need for a level of mental toughness only student athletes can understand. Trying to explain the process of

moving through a season was difficult for the participants, however, they were emphatic with their assumption that the general student population and faculty members do not truly understand the reality of being an intercollegiate football athlete. The following statements are participant accounts and perceptions of others' ability to understand this process:

Bryan: No one understands. No one can completely understand until they do it.

Jamal: Most regular students have no idea what we go through. They may think oh you have to get up at 5 to do something, but they don't understand after class and what all we have to do.

James: NO! NO! NO!...NO! Not in any sense. I don't think they really understand our lives and our time constraints, nor do I think they understand what is going on.

Will: I don't think all of them do. Some may because they may see us more than others but I don't think they can understand all the areas and the mental part of it. And like I said, it is the mental part that can break you down, and it is very emotional. And a lot of them look at us as big tough guys and for them that covers up the mental and emotional stuff that we go through and they don't see. So not a lot of them no, at least I don't sense that.

Parker: No, they don't. Maybe we should write a book and let everything out, and just make money. Cause people want to know. But they don't realize there is just

so much stuff that goes on. From relationships to working to time management, it all comes into play.

Brett: No, not at all. They don't know the half of it. All they see is when they drive by the practice field and we are warming up or standing around or at least it looks like that because they drove by at 60 mph. Or they see us on game day and we look like we are in brand new everything and they are thinking that it is easy, but they don't know the half of it. I think a lot of teachers do, well not the new teachers to the system, but those who have been there a while do. But they will eventually learn. Like, when I am dozing in class or really having to work to stay awake, it is never because I am bored or don't like the class, It is just because I am getting killed from football and working off of 3 hours of sleep.

The misunderstanding of the football athlete does not pass by unnoticed by the student athlete. They become fully aware of the misunderstanding in their daily communications with faculty members, the general student population, and even non-football athletes. Yet they seek nothing in return except to be treated as normal people or normal students. These individuals have lives and experiences as every other student possesses. They have a unique perspective on life that exists away from the lights and field and locker rooms associated with their sport. These individuals see themselves as intelligent individuals who happen to have been blessed with a gift that has provided them an opportunity to go to college. These individuals want to be social and visit the party scene and live up college to the fullest; however, when they signed to be a student

athlete, they accepted a responsibility and level of accountability that cannot be taught in the classroom. These individuals are representatives of the university. They accept this role and fulfill it through countless hours of community service, hospital visitations, and autograph sessions. Therefore, to view them simply as an athlete is a failure on those around them.

The general student population most likely has the greatest amount to gain from these participants. These individuals have unique experiences, family conditions, and backgrounds that create a diversity that universities honor and cherish. The seclusion of the football team based on the requirements of the sport and time restrictions needed to succeed in academics promotes division between the general student population and student athletes. Student athletes do not view themselves as normal students because they do not feel like they are normal students. Student athletes get to listen to students gripe about waking up for eleven o'clock classes and staying up all night. Student athletes get to watch relationships fall apart as the general student population does not understand why they cannot go out multiple nights a week or spend excessive time with one another. The only interaction with the general student population revolves around football. Therefore, their personal social time, which exists as a release from the mental and emotional fatigue of athletics, gets exhausted. Conversations with other students generally revolve around their sport. While each participant commented on this, Brett sums this up by stating:

You know most of the people that talk to you ask you about football. And it does bother me because they make me feel like all I know is football. Like that is all

there is to me or that that is all there is to Brett. But you know, I had a really high SAT score coming in. I know a lot of stuff.

The constant change between sports and class and student interactions exist for student athletes as different worlds. While they can try to keep them separate, it becomes important to integrate the three to provide an improved experience for student athletes. Intercollegiate football players are different types of students. They identify with their sport but that does not mean they let their sport define them. Their chameleon-like ability to adapt their personalities and don different hats throughout the day is both exhausting and separate from the experiences of the general student population or “normal students.” These individuals are dedicating full-time professional hours to their sport and attempting to balance academics to the best of their ability. There is another population of students that exist in higher education with similar schedules and outside responsibilities. This population is the cohort of graduate students in higher education. These individuals work full time jobs only to attend class at night and fit in their academic work around careers and families. Ironically, the graduate student population is also the most highly regarded population of students on campus.

Exceptional Expectations

The expectations associated with being an intercollegiate athlete reflect the microcosms of higher education. While each student athlete brings many personal expectations to college, they are not prepared for the combination of external and internal influences forced upon them as student athletes. These expectations can be spoken or

unspoken; however, they are real and create a different experience for athletes participating in high profile sports. These expectations include athletic and academic success, maintenance of acceptable GPAs and progressing towards graduation, upholding the standards of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and abiding by multiple structures of rules that are both written and unwritten. The rules include team rules, unwritten coaching expectations, and university honor codes. The student athlete must adhere to these rule structures all the while conforming to the normative value structure outlined by the team and university. The culture of the university further increases the student athlete expectations based off program history and external expectations of success. For student athletes, these expectations are real and continuously grow throughout a college career. Bryan describes the combination of expectations as:

I think there a lot of different categories of expectations, especially when you are an athlete. As far as sport performance goes, the expectations are to win championships and that expectation comes from coaches, teachers, students, fans, anybody you name it. Academically, the expectations come from your family more than they come from the coaches or fans or anyone like that. I think people care more, honestly, that you just pass and get your degree than what your grades are. I think it is definitely an expectation to get your degree, but I would say my expectations for how I do in school are a whole lot higher. I don't just want to get a degree, I want to have good grades and actually get an education. And there is a big difference between getting an education and getting a degree. Socially, being a student athlete, we are under a microscope.

The specific personal expectations for the participants of this study differed, yet they all revolved around athletic success that leads to professional opportunities and graduation to prepare them for life beyond football. Each participant mentioned the specific goal of reaching the National Football League (NFL) but also reflected on the reality of limited careers, injury, and not making the transition into the league. As the NCAA and its member universities have focused on the purpose and importance of education and graduation for student athletes, it appears the message is being received. Statements of long-term success and sustainability followed each subject's response of NFL expectations. Financial sustainability and long-term success in life were attributed to graduating and receiving an education rather than the chance of playing professional football. The following statements reflect this level of understanding by the participants:

Brett: My main goal was to get here and be good at what I do (athletically). I mean, I am not the greatest, but when I am on the field, I get the job done. I don't cause any problems and I always go over and beyond what I need to do. I have accomplished all my goals here. And I wanted to go to the NFL originally, but now that I have gotten more and more into it, if I don't go it won't hurt me because I have a backup plan. Which is why I came here, for the backup plan.

Will: My athletic expectations is to, uh, well when I first got here, and you are not as much aware of the reality of athletics and the next level and stuff like that, and your expectation was to play football. And those expectations don't change, but now I just want to fulfill the potential that I know that I have. For me, I want to leave college knowing way more than I did (before coming) and leave college

educated. I want to be able to be aware of the life experiences that are going to come. And be able to understand how to do all the simple things... and being able to cope in the real world, Survive and provide for yourself and your family or whatever it may be. I just want to be educated. Graduation is very important. It is life and death for me.

Anthony: School was not my favorite, and now that I gotten older, I understand how important it is to pursue my life goals what I am trying to do anyways. Trying to keep my grades up and be a good student athlete.

Kevin: First thing now is to graduate and hopefully make it to the NFL or something like that. Get a good job you know. Win a championship and stuff. Graduation is the most important.

In addition to the long-term personal expectations of the participants, the weekly performance expectations for athletics create internal conflicts between athletics and academics. Kevin describes the performance expectations as, “Athletically, our expectation is to win. Compete with the best of the best. We are about championships here.” With this level of expectation, there is little room for error and little time to waste. The experience of being a student athlete and attempting to succeed in both the academic and athletic realms is a strained relationship that complicates time management and personal goals.

While academics maintain an important role for student athletes, the expectation of academic success is competing with athletic success. The expectations for success as a student athlete are felt from the university, coaching staff, student body, fan base, and family relationships. Personal expectations become intertwined with the cultural expectations of participating in a high profile sport at the Division I level. Academically, expectations change depending on the time of year. The amount of time available to succeed in academics fluctuates with the athletic season creating internal conflicts as to which should be the most important. Additionally, the external pressures of winning have extended the athletic season from a fourteen-week schedule to a fifty-two week schedule with little time off between sessions. Student athletes competing at the Division I level no longer have the opportunity to step away from their sport. There is no true off-season in which the student athlete is removed from football, thus limiting the student athletes' ability to focus primarily on academics. The expectations of athletic success continually affect academic success no matter how much effort is applied to separating the two. Anthony describes the relationship in the following statement, "We want to keep a good GPA and produce on the field. They (the university) want to make sure you focus on both aspects. I mean, people want you to do well in both, but sometimes it is just kind of hard. It is just a lot of stuff."

The university also upholds expectations of intercollegiate football teams that are felt by the athletes. The level of expectations is both athletic and academic in nature and exists in the form of normative values and historical perceptions of the athletic program. At a university with a tradition of athletic success in football, the expectation is to uphold

and further that success on the field. At a time in which success falters, the expectation is to return the program to national prominence. Student athletes feel these expectations as they move around campus and the associated athletic facilities. Visual signage of national championships and conference championships are a constant reminder of a student athlete's purpose. The reputation of the athletic program is based upon the success of the football team; therefore, exerting high expectations and focus on performance.

The academic reputation of the university influences expectations for student athletes to be successful in the classroom. Intercollegiate football athletes, with the weight of the university's athletic program on their shoulders, must adhere to the academic expectations of representing the university as students. Although student athletes were limited in choices of majors in higher education and the time available to focus on academics, the university expected them to be successful in the classroom and graduate (Jolly, 2008).

The responsibility of performing and successfully navigating college course loads becomes a cultural norm for these participants. These responsibilities constantly weigh on the minds and bodies of football athletes and affect the college experience by creating a mental and emotional exhaustion they are happy to survive. Jamal describes the combination effect of these responsibilities by stating:

It goes true to the old saying that pressure busts pipes. When I was put on the big stage and I failed... just to be honest, I am surprised that a lot more athletes don't harm themselves. Because the things you go through with your social life, your academic life, and your athletic life and they all crash, you break down. And I

have seen a lot of guys just breakdown, and I myself have broken down. So stressed out and not knowing what to do next.

A unique expectation for student athletes separate from the general student population is created from the general student population itself. The expectation to win in the sport of football is experienced from the classroom to social events. Student athlete treatment from the general student population often changes based on athletic team success. Student attitudes, responses and body language reflect athletic success and changes on a weekly basis. Jamal describes this in the following example:

If they know who you are, and you had a good game last week they are like hey you want this, you need this. If I am like hey, can I borrow a pencil, you got 6 pencils getting thrown at you. So it (success) definitely plays a part. Now if you lose, you know if you lost. Class will be quiet on that Monday. Whereas if you have a big win, you walk into class and there is a party going on. But if you have a bad loss, you walk in and ask to borrow a pencil and all you hear is crickets. The mood just changes.

The transition from friend to foe is a reality student athletes learn to accept and deal with over time. Student athletes learn to handle and disregard the comments and actions of students. They grow to understand the general student body's passion for the sport and the level of emotion associated with football. Although the responses are not always appropriate, it demonstrates the emotional connection between athletics and

academics in higher education. Participants described this relationship in the following responses:

Will: And I have overheard people talk about coaches and players and you just try to walk away. You just try to play it off. I mean, people are going to be people, so I just blow it off. I just block it out. I could care less about what John Blow, Curley and Moe have to say about what happened last weekend. It doesn't really bother me, I have never been tempted to say anything back to them.

Bryan: I mean, everybody is an expert, but no one has any idea what they are talking about. It got to the point where, and I am a really mild-mannered guy, but I was about to snap. I mean, I just wanted to stand up in front of the room and yell at this kid and then yell at this kid, etc, etc, etc. Just go down the row and tell everybody something, and go off on every kid, but obviously it would not have been worth it. I mean it just comes with the territory. Everybody thinks they are an expert. But you know most people, well it seems like there is always one in every class or every other class, but for the most part people are respectful. I mean, I get a good kick out of it now, I really do, I usually get a good laugh out of it. It doesn't bother me anymore, where my first 2 and a half years it did. But now I just kind of laugh about it and forget it.

Parker: I mean people love it. And you will have some people that will take it too far with situations like that when people are talking about you but, I think it is just part of the program and understanding that we are something that a lot of people

look up to. And being around it, you just have to learn to take stuff like that in and you get better at it.

One of the most interesting concepts derived from the participants' expectations was the connection between the mood of the university and athletic success in football. The mood of the university fluctuates with the wins and losses of the athletic program. Anthony describes this by stating, "The university expects a lot of the football team. The better the football team is, the happier the university is. As long as we are doing good, I feel like the university is good."

The expectation of winning creates a unique aspect of accountability to the university and is felt throughout the athletic team. The winning expectations exists as a separate experience and level of responsibility felt only by being an intercollegiate football player. In a university setting where so much emphasis is placed on the sport of football, the stakes of winning and losing become higher creating more pressure to perform. This pressure exists as an external pressure creating an emotional bond between the athletes and the university in which the actions of a few affect the emotional state of those who choose to be associated with the university. The following detailed accounts explain this perception of the mood shifts within the university experienced by the student athlete:

Chris: You can actually feel the mood of the whole university after a win or a loss. After you win a few games and then you actually take a loss, you can just feel the mood of the team just... well not the mood of the team but the mood of

the university just goes down a little bit. You can just feel that people are sad and upset and these students, they are crying just like we would cry.

Bryan: You know that is just something that you can feel when you walk around. You know, it is not very tangible but you can really...as you are walking around you can hear people talking about the game on Saturday. Whereas when you are losing and people are talking about how terrible we played. IT is a different tone of voice. I think the mood of the campus changes.

Parker: You know, when you win everybody is in a better mood, more easy going. I think it trickles down from the staff into the athletes. It definitely does, it makes things a whole lot easier. And we have had some rough times with the coaching changes and going through hard seasons, but I think that made us a closer team this year. And going to class, man. After a loss, everyone is going to class with their heads down. You know everybody saw the game. There are some sick people. But when you winning, everybody is patting you on the back, saying good job so it definitely does make a difference. And the university changes when you are winning. The students and fan base, I mean they love it, really love it. When you win, everybody talks about it, everyone is smiling and you can feel it, you can just feel it. There is just something in the atmosphere around here.

Brett: I remember when we had a losing streak during the season this year or even parts of last year, people would not talk to us or say hey to us. People would say we suck, just randomly, so it was horrible. Then we start winning, and people are

coming up to you, hug you, high five you, and I am like where were you 3 weeks ago. It is way easier (when winning), everybody acknowledges you.

James: I think so, especially here. I think the school really fluctuates with the success of the team. And that is weird to think about, that is has that much influence. It is. It is something that you kind of learn to expect and learn to deal with over the past few years. Like my position, where I have a limited opportunity, and it may be an important opportunity, but I have to only think about my job and narrow the result down to a make or miss. Whereas if I start thinking about the outside aspect it can get crazy.

The final aspect that influences expectations for student athletes is that of the fan base. Just as the student athletes become accustomed to handling the general student body responses to winning and losing, they must also learn to handle an ever-growing fan base that donates millions of dollars to the athletic program, thus becoming emotionally and financially attached. The fan base far exceeds the ninety thousand-capacity stadium and feels free to voice their opinions of the team through multiple media and internet outlets. While the radio has been a consistent outlet for fans in the past, the present generation of student athletes is submerged into media frenzy with sport television, internet, and message boards. The accessibility of information and multiple outlets to submit opinions provides a previously uncharted territory for student athletes to navigate.

While student athletes feel a deep-rooted connection to a loyal fan base, they are also subjected to the expectations of the fan base. These expectations are voiced through

media outlets that cannot be controlled by the university or coaching staff. Often individuals with little connection to the athletic program voice expectations with team criticism and athlete assessments. This aspect of athletics is an experience the general student population is unfamiliar with and further creates the unique experience for the student athlete. Chris describes the fan adoration for football as, “The fans just really love this program and care a lot about it. I have never been a part of a university where... well I have never seen another university that actually has fans that care like that.” Jamal furthers the experience by commenting on the expectations of the fan base, “They expect winning. And I mean winning and winning big. Regardless of who we play or how we play. Physical football, You don’t stop hitting them until they quit, and then you hit them some more. That is what the fans expect and when they don’t get it that is when you hear all the bad mouthing. Oh somebody should be fired. He’s a bad coach. But as long as you are winning it does not matter.”

While the fan base is not the only source of expectations, their role is important, as they are not concerned with the academic aspect of the student athlete. These external expectations and the passion associated with the fan base affects the collegiate experience by increasing the importance placed on athletic performance. The opinions and expectations set forth by the fan base is felt from the campus to the stadium and across multiple media outlets. Anthony describes the fan base expectations as:

Oh their expectations are higher than anybody’s. I mean with the school stuff, they just want you to stay eligible. They want to see you on the field. As far as

expectation when you are out on the field, they want to see you do well and win.

Win and win big. But I think that is for every school.

Will agrees that winning takes precedence in student athlete expectations. He concludes, “Win only, and everything else after that is a plus. If we graduate that is a plus, honor roll, and awards are all a plus. I don’t think there is many more expectations other than to win, and everything after that is icing on the cake. Brett’s perception of expectations agree with both Anthony and Will and he concludes that the expectations come from all aspects of the university:

I think they are mostly to win and win any way you can. Just win. They try to make it sound good with sub-expectations but when it comes down to it they are to win. In the end, that is what it comes down to. People just come up with different ways to say it. And we feel that from the students and the fan base, just everybody.

Student athletes appear to have a firm grasp on the pressures of academic life in higher education, especially as they move closer towards graduation, but the expectations concerning winning and athletic performance are creating pressure that affects all aspects of the student athlete life. The participants admit that the focus towards success and winning rather than development and growth affects the experience of being in college, although it admittedly affects them differently. As student athletes mature and progress towards graduation, they develop the ability to maintain these expectations and delegate the importance of them to be successful. While these pressures can be overwhelming,

they create a level of focus and concentration for the participants that motivate them towards success athletically and academically. The following statements reflect the perceptions of pressure in regards to athletics:

Chris: Well yea, it can definitely be pressure a little bit. I mean, there is really nothing you can do if you know that you went out there and gave it your all. I just try to stay to myself as much as possible so that I do not get distracted.

Jamal: I think it is a little of both, because being expected to perform is so much pressure and not meeting those expectations is stressful. For me, I hate losing; I hate losing with a passion. And, to not win, after you have put in so much preparation and so much time, you think that it is not worth it now, thinking I did all this work and we lose or we come up short. All this pressure that was put up on me and I could not rise to the occasion. So it is really hard.

Bryan: Yes (it is pressure), if you think about it. I have really changed a lot from my freshman and sophomore year compared to my junior and senior year. There was a big difference in how much pressure I felt from other people. I think it started out...well a lot of that comes from my background in that this (university) was my only offer and a lot of people never expected me to play here. And I ended up starting for 4 years. I was constantly trying to prove myself and gain the support of people and it finally got to the point where I was like why am I working for these people who will throw me under the bus in a heartbeat if something bad happens.

Kevin: I don't think so, well at some point it can be. Not all the time. As long as you are having fun and stuff like that and don't let all of that get to you then it is not as bad but whenever you let it or you start thinking about all of that then that is when it gets overwhelming.

Will: As a freshman yes, there is a lot of pressure. But the pressure we feel is mainly the pressure from the expectations that we put on ourselves as a team and for each other. I think that is the pressure we feel. I mean, we put pressure on ourselves and each other. But again, I think we could care less about the other stuff. I mean, it is going to come, but you cant worry about all of the outside pressure. You just have to go and whatever happens just happens.

Parker: Well it doesn't really hit me that way. I've been around sports so long, you know it kind of molds itself out and you begin to realize what is expected of you, it kind of comes with the territory. I mean it can be at times but that is part of it. Knowing that those pressures are there makes you want to do better, so it can be, but you learn how to take things in and how to not let it bother you.

Brett: Yes, it is a whole bunch of pressure. Cause one of the biggest things for me is not letting people down, especially people I am close to. And Sometimes, we have had people crack. We have had people just stop and take a breather because you really feel that pressure and you have so many things going on and you cant focus. And you are trying to live up to everyone's expectations and also live up to

your own. I mean, once you get on the field you are not just doing the things you want to do you are doing things for other people to.

Examining personal, team, and community expectations can be overwhelming. The mental toughness required to sustain your drive to succeed and motivate yourself in both worlds of athletics and academics is learned from participating in intercollegiate athletics. These expectations, realistic or not, have an affect on student athletes and their experiences in higher education. In a high profile sport such as football, especially at the Division I level, the reality is that winning is important. The expectations associated with football revolve around winning and society reaffirms that concept by over-publicizing winning. The question then becomes are the expectations fair to the group of students athletes. The student athlete population experiences such enormous external pressures that the role of the athlete affects the role of the student. According to the participants, they believe the expectations are realistic; however, fairness is in the eye of the beholder. They understand that their lives are different. They understand that fairness is a personal concept and attitude, and despite all of the expectations and differences between themselves and the general student population, they unequivocally believe that it is worth it.

Athletics versus Academics

There has always been the assumption that athletics and academics were at war with one another for student athletes with each component trying to establish itself as the most important reason for being in college. We assume that the faculty members and

administrators enforce the academic aspect on student athletes and view them negatively if they happen to hold athletics as more important. We assume that the coaching staffs are fighting for their professional careers and thus enforce the athletics aspect on student athletes and limit the amount of time available for them to focus on academics. The reality is that these two may be a bit more intertwined than we think. While the relationship between academics and athletics may exist as unstable at times, it also can exist as a driving force to assist both towards success.

The responsibility of intercollegiate football and academics takes a physical, emotional and mental toll on student athletes. The balance between the two seems to exist when both are simultaneously successful. Football becomes more difficult when the mind is clouded with academic shortfalls, and academics become more difficult when football is faltering. For student athletes, learning to balance these two responsibilities is an accomplishment. Examining the relationship between athletics and academics for these student athletes provide examples of their experiences in achieving balance as student athletes.

For student athletes, the entire academic year consists of balancing athletic requirements with academic responsibilities. Balancing academics and athletics is often a roller coaster of emotion and stresses that change on a weekly basis. The relationship between the two is undeniable. Participating as a student athlete in the sport of football affects every aspect of college life. Football is not an extracurricular activity for these individuals; it is a way of life. Football can have positive and negative effects on academics, but academics can also have positive and negative effects on football. The

balance between the academic and athletic lives of a student athlete reinforces the importance of both for intercollegiate football players.

Football affects academic in many ways, but none more than the pure time restrictions placed on the athlete. There are not enough hours in the day to suffice the needs for both athletics and academics. Football requires the student athlete to spend multiple hours a day in sport related activities that range from weight training, injury treatment, film study, practice, and game preparation. Student athletes are required to squeeze classes in between football related activities and often the time that can be dedicated to academics arrives late at night. After a full day of rushing from activity to activity and exerting tremendous amounts of physical energy, the time that can be dedicated to academics is threatened by physical exhaustion.

The mental challenge of succeeding in both academics and athletics also poses challenges to success. Football is as much of a mental activity as it is a physical activity. Each week during the season requires a new game plan, a detailed focus on a new team, and hours of mental preparation to be successful. Each week produces new study guides in the form of game plans and strategies vital to team success. Therefore, on top of the physical exhaustion created by the sport itself, the mental exhaustion also steals time away from academics.

Athletic success, or lack of success, affects academics in the form of emotional stress. Success affects classroom environments and individual desires to be successful in the classroom. The emotional turmoil of athletics creates an ever-changing academic environment, and learning to adapt to these changes is vital to academic success. The

physical, mental, and emotional fatigue created by participating in intercollegiate football affects the desire to be successful in other aspects of academic life, most importantly the classroom.

Success on the football field can have positive and negative effects on academic life. Athletic success can improve the environment in which academics exist; however, it can also create a desire to focus more on football. Winning promotes the desire to keep winning, and student athletes may cut corners in academic study time and increase focus on athletic responsibilities. Chris describes this situation, “Sometimes you might become a little lazy with academic work and concentrate a little more on football and I have actually caught myself not really caring for school and just trying to get by. Not trying to get A’s and B’s, especially in a tough class and just settling for a C, but I definitely do think it looks better when you excel in both athletics and the classroom and people look at that as a great accomplishment.” While this scenario is not an ideal aspect towards academics, it demonstrates the counter effect of success on academics. Parker describes the perception with the following comments:

Honestly, I think I have gotten to the point where I know that I have to get my academics done so I can play football. Football is my life and that is all I got right now. I feel like that was what I was born to do. So if I have to do a little extra work for an assignment or whatever I just do it. Football is what I got.

Will agrees, however, he believes student athletes can be successful in both academics and athletics:

I think you can give your best at both, but maybe a little bit. I mean if you are having a lot of success in one, you may not have as much success in the other. And that is just a time thing. I mean, it can be a mental thing or an emotional thing to. If you suck in a game it can carry over into the classroom, but mainly it is a time thing.

Success can also positively affect academics. Bryan describes a positive scenario by stating, “For me they don’t go hand in hand, however it gets easier to do your academics when you are having success in football. It is easier to go to class. You are just in a better mood. You spend the majority of your time in football. And when you are winning, your coaches are not pissed off at you, and everybody on the team is in a better mood. And that puts you in a better mood, and that makes it so much easier to come home from football and sit down and write a paper when you are in a better mood.” Success in football improves the mental outlook on academics and improves the environment for all students promoting a friendlier atmosphere on campus and in the classroom.

For the participants of the study, the lack of success in athletics tended to have more of a negative effect regarding academics. The psychological effect of losing affects the individual student athlete and the environment in which learning occurs. The participants describe the effects of losing in the following statements:

Chris: Definitely the mood of losing a game and then going on campus it is just disappointing because you don’t want to show your face. I mean, I definitely

think it takes a toll on academics. You don't want to do anything because you are so upset about the game. And me myself, I take losses very hard. If I didn't do something right I am going to be hard on myself about it. And I've gotten a lot better about going through that whole process, but it definitely makes it harder to study for when you lose a game.

Jamal: No, Actually when you lose, it creates a desire to figure out what you did wrong and make the corrections not to do it wrong again. I think it is harder to go to class. You don't want to have to deal with the scrutiny from the students when you lose. People talking about you. A lot of people take losing pretty hard and they get like I don't want to do anything else until we win again.

Will: I have lost a big game, and I didn't want to go to class. Not necessarily because of other people or what they would say, but just for personal reasons. Couldn't get it out of your head and couldn't focus. That is just where my attention was. For the most part, I think the bigger the game, the more it affects guys.

Bryan: Whereas you can come home (when losing) and you just want to sit around and not think about anything, and the same goes for going to class. If everybody is in a good mood like students, and I wake up in a good mood because we are winning then its easier to get out of bed. As opposed to getting embarrassed on National TV. I literally did not want to get out of bed for an entire

week. I did not want to go to class, I did not want to show my face that entire week.

As athletic success can affect academics, academic success plays an important role in the athletic success for student athletes. Maintaining good grade point averages, class work, and assignments provides the student athlete with the opportunity to focus on football. Properly managing time and staying up to date with class requirements eases the difficulty of athletics and decreases the mental and emotional stress of attempting to balance the two. Jamal was the first participant to express the connection as he stated, “Well when you are successful in the classroom, the average player on the team, was successful on the field. It reflected that. The time that you would put into your school notes, you would try and put that same amount of time and effort into your assignments on the fields, so there was definitely a connection.” Upon further investigation into this concept, it was discovered that academics does in fact play a role in the athletic success for student athletes. The stress of being a good student athlete is relieved by being successful in the classroom. The failure to maintain academic standards in the classroom adds a dimension of stress that negatively affects both academics and athletics. Parker and Kevin describe these effects:

Parker: It does affect you from practice to everything. It can be tricky, especially during the season. You get very tired. Especially when you have a little work do and you are trying to prepare for tomorrows workouts and you are thinking you might have to skip that (school) work. It is just about growing up and maturing and holding yourself accountable for the things you have to do and get it done.

When you get it done you feel so much better. When you are doing good in class it is just easier to play football. Having a good semester and (academic) stuff is flowing real easily and you are getting your stuff turned in and you are on top of your stuff it definitely translates onto the field. When it (academics) is running smoothly, you can be on top of your game. You know, it sucks being out on the field when you know you have a big paper due tomorrow and you haven't started. And it just drains you. There is a lot of stuff involved in it. From academics to the athletic field to the coaches and meetings, it can get frustrating.

Kevin: When you are doing well in the classroom, you don't have to think about it on the field, like oh man I got all of this stuff to do. You don't have to think about it, you can just focus on football. If you are doing well in class, you actually have the time to focus on football. You don't think about it (on the field).

As higher education professionals begin to understand the effects athletics and academics have on one another, the concern becomes how to separate the two or at least learn to balance them. Attempting to separate athletics from academics in higher education is not an easy task. With so much external focus placed on athletics from the fans, student body, faculty, administration and coaching staff, there are no environments that provide an escape that separate the two. Separation becomes an individual task for student athletes in which they must chart their own path and determine what methods work the best.

Achieving balance between athletics and academics requires constant effort on the part of the student athlete. Neither athletics nor academics act as a stationary condition and the requirements needed to succeed in both change on a weekly basis. Athletes attempt to separate academics from athletics. Davis states, “ I really tired to keep the two away from each much as possible, unless I had a class that dealt with sports.” Other participants describe the challenge of separation between athletics and academics as difficult, especially when trying to minimize the affects of academics and athletics on each other:

James: I have really tried to separate them. And it is hard, there is some carry over there that can affect it. You just cant control... when you are taking a test, you cant control something that happened in a game and thinking about it will take away from what you are trying to do in that moment. It is not easy to separate. There are times when it is almost impossible to do, you just try to minimize them.

Brett: I don't think it is something that you can put into words. It is something that you have to find within yourself and you have to put some personal things on the backburner. Mostly and get whatever done that you can. It is hard. That is not something that everyone can do, but it takes a special person to balance that emotionally. It is a lot of stress and a lot of stress all the time.

Will: It is tough to be a student athlete. And it takes a year or so to transition into that (dealing with academics and athletics). A lot of people complain so much about how hard it is, but life is hard. You are the determining factor, your attitude

and your work ethic. You can make it hard on yourself if you don't make a schedule or take the time out to do this and do that (the work).

James: I have worked with sports psychologist a few times about this and just talked about things but this has come up a few times. And one of the things I really try to do and we have harped on is to really try to separate the athletic side and the demands there and the academic side. Control the things you can. When you are in class, you cant control what is going to happen at practice and when you are in practice you cant control what is going on in class. Leave school in the classroom, and leave football at practice. I have had my most success when I have been able to separate the two.

While each participant stressed the importance of separation, there was an admitted difficulty in achieving it. There is a deep connection to football in higher education, especially for student athletes who are provided the opportunity to earn an education through athletic scholarships. Because of football, these student athletes will graduate from college with the luxury of financial freedom from student loans and relief in knowing they did not have to place the burden of college tuition on their families. For student athletes, athletics provided the opportunity for a quality education, producing a loyalty to the sport. The student athlete loyalty to their team and sport does not undermine the academic aspect for student athletes; in turn, it justifies the thought that athletics is their primary role in college. Because student athletes consider themselves athletes rather than students does not indicate that they misunderstand the importance of

an education or are unwilling to work for one. Classifying themselves as an athlete is a reflection of time. The majority of their time is spent in athletics, thus creating an athlete identity.

This identity designation is similar to a working professional, and is no different than the individual who works eight to ten hours a day in the bank and considers themselves to be a banker. The athletic aspect for intercollegiate football players is a job with real responsibilities. Academics is not less important than an individual's professional career, but it often comes second to a person's career. This perception demonstrates the conflict that is created between athletics and academics, and another difference in the experience between student athletes and the general student population.

The general undergraduate student population rarely is working professionals. While they may choose to take on part-time jobs, the responsibilities and requirements for those jobs do not compare to participating in intercollegiate football. These student athletes are more closely related to non-traditional students and the graduate student body than the traditional undergraduate population.

The coursework and classes may be similar to those of the general student population, but their time restrictions and external responsibilities create an experience in higher education more consistent to the graduate student body.

Time Fatigue

The thematic analysis of time fatigue is a result of the restrictions athletics and academics exert on intercollegiate football athletes. The typical day for an in-season

football player is a non-stop commute between athletic and academic responsibilities that spans and often exceeds fourteen hours per day. Six of seven days a week, intercollegiate football athletes are up early in the morning to receive treatment or complete an early workout before classes only to return home after dark to complete individual studies and prepare for the next day's schedule. These individuals have very little free time to dedicate to social activities during the season, and time management becomes an essential tool to overcoming the time constraints created by academic and athletic responsibilities.

The physical nature of football practice, training, and competitions combined with the mental and emotional affects of the sport places a strain on all aspects of college life. The experiences a student athlete chooses to participate in have to be managed around the athletic events of the week and academic needs. The mental, emotional and physical fatigue created by balancing academics, athletics and social expectations is difficult and takes a few years in the system to grow accustomed to as student athlete. The work is hard and relentless and serves as a limitation to the college experience. The time restrictions created by participating in intercollegiate athletics involves full-days of non-stop action that more adequately resembles life outside of the university compared to typical college experiences.

The typical day in-season for a student athlete exists very different from the majority of the general student population. The days begin early, often before sunrise, and end late into the evening. The day is filled with activities that revolve around football or academic courses, with little personal time in between. The student athlete's day is a

constant blur, as they rush from building to building throughout the day mixing in workouts, meetings, practice and treatment with classes. The activities are nonstop and often physically taxing on the body creating high levels of mental and physical fatigue. The day for the student athlete is limited with few hours of personal time that is often used to prepare for the next days schedule, thus throwing the balance between academics and athletics into chaos. Bryan describes the affects of football and academics on time availability in the following description:

In the mornings, you are in classes and then in the afternoon from about 1:00 until 7:30 you are in football. If you have treatment, then you are up at 6am. You are getting 6 hours of sleep maximum, because you are studying at night, up for a test or something like that. I mean, it really just varies on the week, and teachers for whatever reason, there is always a test week. And you always have three or maybe four test within a week, and so for that week or week and a half you are losing sleep, because we do not have all afternoon to sit there and study. And then another thing you know, group projects. You have some people who are in your group who are just really anal about everything. They don't understand that I can't do this this afternoon. Not only can I not meet, but I cant work on this. So then you have to meet later because you have to go from football, grab some fast food real fast, do your part of the project and then try to meet your group.

The difficulties of time management and balancing athletic and academic schedules begin with the daily requirements of football. While the academic requirements do exert their fair share of influence on time restrictions, academic coursework is often

filtered into the openings of the athletic schedule. Chris describes the hectic schedule as a blur, “It is pretty much wake up, school, practice, meetings and then you are back home maybe for like 3 hours and then you are back to sleep.” Upon further examination of the daily schedules of football athletes, the participants provided the following descriptions:

Jamal: It is something that you become adapted to do. Because when you get up in the morning, you go to class. After that, you have workouts, then after class you have meetings, then practice, then after practice you have a mandatory team meal after every practice, and then you have some free time. And that was maybe a 3 hour window, depending on what class you had or what you have coming up that day. When you got your schoolwork done...you have to compensate for maybe 7-8 hours sleep.

Kevin: Waking up at 5 o'clock to workout, man that gets tough. Usually I might have 2 classes a day so, I will get up around 830, go to class, get out and grab some lunch, then you have meetings and stuff, and then practice until dinner, and then try to go in and get some study hall hours. Any spare time you have, you might go in and do some extra stuff like stretching or stuff like that for football. It is very hard during the season.

James: Depends on the day. A typical Monday you have a 6am meeting until 7 or 8. Then you have class in the morning, well they are blocked in the morning because you have football all afternoon. But you have class until about noon and then you grab a quick lunch, maybe 45 minutes or so to yourself. Then you have

to workout, then team meetings and segment meetings, then 4:00-6:15 you have practice followed by flex and you get back into the locker room around 8:00. So loaded down, the day is loaded down. Then there is a dinner that is offered if you have time to run upstairs and eat. If not, you are on your own, but then you go home and try to get a few hours of reading or whatever in. Each day is different but a typical day runs from the early morning, depending on your class schedule, until about 8:00 at night.

Brett: It is pretty much like a 7-day week. There are no breaks at all. Mon – Sun we are watching film. Mon – Thurs we are up there at 6 in the morning lifting weights, and then go to class, come back, change clothes, watch film, go to practice for 3 hours, come back in and some people may watch more film so that is a full day right there. We don't get done until about seven o'clock at night and then we have a mandatory dinner so we don't get out of there until about 8:30. And then on Fridays, we have to go to the hotel, so Friday and Saturday are gone.

Parker: Well I try to get up and get something to eat and head to class. We are generally done with classes by 1 or 2, throw a couple study hall hours in there between class and then grab some lunch. Around 2 we usually start segment and team meetings. Those will probably last an hour and a half to two hours, which runs right into practice. And depending on what day it is, but practice will last usually around 2- 2 ½ hours. From there, I may be going back to study hall that night to do work, group project or something, you know, something always comes

up. But on average, during the season, I would usually leave the house around 9 or 930 and get back around 8 or 830 at night.

Will: In season, classes start around 8 o'clock and you might go grab breakfast and then have an appointment with a tutor, more classes, lift weights, lunch, maybe another tutor, then an hour break before you show up to the office. Once you show up to the office, you have meetings, you have practice, then treatment, and when you get home, it is around 730 maybe. After that, you try to find something to eat and you are ready to kill some time because you are at it all day long. After that, you face the decision of do I want to study or do I just want to go to sleep or watch TV.

With the time constraints created by football and academic coursework, the concern for student athletes begins with the how these restrictions affect the collegiate experience. Is there a life as a college student when you participate in intercollegiate football? Determining individual purposes and roles as college students becomes a personal endeavor throughout the college career of a student athlete. At times, their resolve for participating in football can be questioned as the time fatigue wears on athlete's emotional and physical states of mind. Jamal reiterated the thought stating, "And you are like, oh my God, I do have a life here?" Continuing in both a humorous and cynical manner, he says, "No, because on national signing day, you sign you life away (laughing), you become an indentured servant." James describes the time conflicts as having separate lives on campus. He states, "It (football) is almost like a job at times and

then it is kind of like easing yourself into a professional world ... it is a profession.” Brett contributes to this perception in reporting, “If you would have asked me a long time ago I would of said it was fun, but now I would more so say it is like a job. You have to be on top of this or on top of that. You just never have a dull moment.”

The perception of football as a job is described by each participant simply as “hard work.” The physical effort combined with the emotional and mental requirements of football create a strained relationship between the athlete and the sport. To succeed in football and academics over the course of four years requires a deep-rooted love for the game. The athletes have to find the fun in playing the game to resist the mental and emotional burnout that the extreme time restrictions can create. Kevin reports, “It is a lot of fun if you enjoy playing the game. It is so time consuming, so you really have to be dedicated to playing the game or you will get exposed in a lot of areas.” James adds, “It (football) is physically tiring, and it is mentally tiring if you let it. I have found that it is important to find...enjoy it and find the things that keep you going and not dwell on the stressful things. Enjoy your teammates, your friends and the little things you can experience.”

The time restrictions are further complicated by the physical fatigue created by participating as an athlete in the sport of football. The energy exertion from practice, games, and weight training sessions begin to affect the student athletes’ ability to focus in other areas of college life. The one-day a week away from football is spent recovering from the physical abuse of the sport. The day that the athlete should be using to solely focus on academics is being used to recover from the physical and emotional expenditure

that occurs throughout the week. Bryan describes his experience by stating, “And if it is in the fall, on Sunday you are so tired that you don’t want to do anything. You are so sore and tired that you just want to lay in bed all day but that is the day that you should use to get a lot of your work done because it is the only day with no football. I mean, I always said I was going to do a lot of work on Sunday, and I don’t think I ever did. Just laid in bed all day and watched movies and stuff and did a whole lot of nothing.” Anthony reaffirmed the perception in the following reflection, “You have to pay attention to your time at home. That is when your work (schoolwork) that you have to do at home becomes a problem (when fatigued from the week). I mean, you have to catch up on a lot of your work on Sundays, because after practice and film, all you want to do is go home and get some sleep. If you have work due the next day, you are like, well I’ll try to wake up early in the morning and try to do it. Sometimes you know you not, and you might have to send a teacher an email and let her know the situation.

Agreeing with the implications of physical fatigue on academics, Anthony and Will describe the impact of physical fatigue on focus creating a state of mental exhaustion. Anthony reflects on his past few years stating, “Well you don’t want to do anything. It is hard. I try not to get any 8:00 classes so I have some time to rest, but yes, it is hard. You get used to it. It is hard and it is more of mind thing if you let it keep messing with you. You can get burned out. You cant just sit back and think about it all or it will get to you.” Similarly, Will reflects on the time restrictions created by football in saying, “I would think that it can have a mental effect more than anything. It fatigues your mind. You get tired of thinking about having to do this and having to do that. So for

the most part, you get mentally weak. And when I say that, you may get down with different emotions. You may get sad, angry, happy, those sorts of things. But much more of it is mentally, depending on what you demand from yourself. You have your coaches in athletics demanding so much from you and your academic advisors demanding so much from you and your academics demanding study time from you. So, all of that is mental, different kinds of mental fatigue.

For student athletes, learning to manage time restrictions is the most important factor for academic success, but it takes time to learn to properly manage your time in a new environment. Entering college as a student athlete is an eye-opening experience as the responsibilities of athletics and academics begin to build. While the independence and freedom of college life exist for student athletes, so do the responsibilities and consequences of decisions. Learning to manage the time responsibilities easily gets overwhelming and requires these individuals to grow-up in a hurry and learn to be accountable for themselves and towards their teammates. Bryan describes the transition from high school to college as a student athlete as:

Well, its hard. As a freshman, my first semester, well you come in during summer school. I took 2 classes and got 2 A's. But my first semester, I failed calculus, got a D, C, and a B. Which was not near the expectations that I have for myself, nor my family has for me. I really learned it then, you know, just how you have to delegate your time. You really don't have any time, especially as a freshman, getting used to it. You don't have time to just sit around and watch TV a whole lot. You don't have any time to just sit around and relax and think about nothing.

It is just constant, so time management is really something that you have to figure out on your own. Some guys need the structure of study hall, or tutors and stuff like that. I would much rather study on my own and be able to do it on my own. It really is just kind of figuring out which classes you need to study more for and prioritize your priorities. Time management is just something that you have to kind of figure out on your own and develop and you get better at it. My junior year and this year, I have had no problems with it.

The learning curve of time management for student athletes is steep, and failure to adapt can result in severe penalties. The participants each spoke of the dedication and effort in learning to manage the time restrictions of academics and athletics and Davis describes the process as “hard work that takes a lot of determination, focus, and self-pride.” James and Brett describe the process of adapting to the time restrictions and developing time management skills as growing experiences:

James: I am a lot better at that now. Yeah. A lot of guys, when they first get here, they want to leave 3 weeks later. They are done. They are ready to be out of school and done with football and they want to go home. But the majority of people learn how to get through it and deal with the time and the stresses. During your 4th year you get a little bit better at it. It becomes second nature and you definitely get better at it.

Brett: Originally, it was hard, because in high school, the earliest I ever got up was 7 or 730, but now, I wake up at 530 every single morning. And it can be hard

with school, trying to get to practice, workout, watch film. And I never watched a lick of film in high school so doing all that and trying to keep your grades up was hard. I struggled at first but I have fallen into a routine now.

The process of developing efficient time management skills begins with learning how to balance the academic, athletic and social aspects of college life. As freshman, student athletes are thrust into an athletic environment upon entering college. Their time, focus, and passion exist between the sidelines and among their teammates. The amount of energy and time expended towards athletics exceeds the physical expectations of the sport and just as they begin to grasp their athletic responsibilities, the academic reality of coursework and social expectations begin to create time conflicts and test the student athlete's time management skills. Jamal describes the influx of responsibilities on the student athlete in the following statement:

When you have people outside of football wanting their time, and people inside football wanting their time, and people in academics wanting their time, it gets difficult to balance. Because its hard to tell your coach that you will be late to practice because you have a meeting with a teacher. Or to tell your professor that you are not going to be able to come to meet you because I have a meeting or practice at that time. Or to tell your girlfriend or your mom or any other person outside of football or academics that I cant talk because I need to go study and after that I have to go over the playbook so I can be ready for practice tomorrow.

It gets strained. You stress a lot. I think that we as athletes stress a lot, but you learn to deal with it.

Balance is achieved with experience. The longer a student athlete participates in the system of intercollegiate athletics, the more accustomed they become to successfully managing the responsibilities of academics and athletics in higher education. However, there are some aspects of athletics that can affect even the best time manager. Long seasons and sport success have the potential to have positive and negative influences on the methods in which athletes manage their time. Success is a positively reaffirming component. It becomes easier to justify the stress, lack of personal time, and mental fatigue when it is accompanied with athletic success. However, success can serve as a breeding ground for negative activities such as lack of sleep and isolation from the rest of the student body. Will reports, "It is easier to keep doing it and easier to believe that you can keep doing it when there is success, but also when there is success, it is harder to keep doing it, if that makes sense." The stress and fatigue that originally exists for student athletes is compounded by success as more success drives the athlete to continue and push harder. The conclusion of a season is met with a body and mind that is completely worn down from the constant physical, mental and emotional stress. Brett describes reaching the end of the season as being in disarray and crazy as "nobody can focus on anything." He continues the thought by stating, "Everybody has problems towards the end of the season. Relationships, school, mentally, emotionally, physically everybody is just beaten up and people are just hanging on by a thread by the end of the season. You know, by the end of the bowl game, everybody is just happy, just happy it's over."

Finding balance as a student athlete is a process of maintaining responsibilities, maturing and taking advantage of the assistance around you. Balance becomes an individual quest, and a weekly battle between academic fatigue and academic procrastination. As the season progresses, the stress on one can begin to increase stress in the other, making balance harder to achieve. Kevin describes the overall perception of balance as student athlete:

You have to make time, if you procrastinate, it is going to be hard. It just kind of happens, there is just so much stuff that goes on and time goes by so fast. It is tough and it is exhausting, mentally. It just gets to a point where sometimes you need to speak to someone because of it all, like trying to be a starter, trying to do good in school, trying to help mom out, and all that stuff and it really gets to a point where you are like can I do all of this stuff. Then you get to a point where it starts over (athletic season), and you are like oh no, I have to do this again and you ask yourself can I do this one more year. But you learn to section the year out. But I think it makes you a better person.

The limitations of time fatigue on the overall college experience can be dramatic. Adapting quickly to the responsibilities of athletics and academics is a key proponent; however, most student athletes come in unprepared to conquer this hurdle. The high school athletic responsibilities can and do not prepare incoming freshman for the time constraints created by athletics. The level of training increases, the days of the week increase and the individual perception of importance increases with the jump to the collegiate level. Secondly, recruiting trips and visits do a poor job of preparing incoming

student athletes for the obvious reasons of fear of losing recruits. Coaching staffs and recruiting coordinators do not hide anything from the student athlete, per se, but the fancy locker rooms, workout facilities and academic help centers can cloud the truth. Student athletes do not know or understand what they are getting themselves into. James recalled coming to college as a freshman, “I just didn’t know what to expect. And it is kind of on that extreme end of structured.” Brett agrees in following up by stating, “No, Not at all. I don’t think anyone is prepared to come to college. It is such a different environment. There is no one telling you what to do. You are sitting in the apartment and you have food, video games, TV, and books and you are not going to choose books first.” Davis’s thoughts confirmed this perception as he states, “When I first got here I was not good at all. There were just so many things. My hardest year was my freshman year because they piled so much on you that you have to learn between school and football. But you don’t know how to manage it at all and it feels impossible, but over time I have definitely gotten better at it.” Chris possesses a similar perception and concludes: “It is so tough at first and during the season it is really tough. I think it is really tough when you are a freshman. You are not used to waking up and going to practice and having all of these meetings and trying to find time for school work. You know you are just so exhausted.”

A separate limitation on the college experience created by time restrictions is the lack of availability to explore the world as a college student. Even though student athletes truly believe their experiences are great, and would not trade them to be a part of the general student population, they are aware of the activities and experiences around them. In their own words, they only receive half of the experience here. The time restrictions

created by athletics removes many freedoms enjoyed by the general student population. Choice of major, travel, elective courses, and general social activities are all restricted by the requirements of the sport. The following accounts are reflections on the participants' college experience:

Jamal: To an extent there was one, you know, but I missed out on a lot because of football. I had a lot of friends that were going on trips. And for the past 4 and a half years, I never done anything, never really went anywhere besides home on spring breaks or summer breaks. I have not been home for an entire summer since 2005...So you really miss a lot. And it is hard at first. If you are not used to being away from your family and traditions, then it is really hard. I had friends taking trips to Jamaica, going on cruises and I couldn't do all that because of football. Girlfriends, that was probably the biggest thing, because if you are not with a female that is an athlete, it is really hard for them to understand your schedule. They always want to talk and spend time with you, but due to the lack of time, you cant.

Chris: Yea it does. I think we only get half of the experience here because there is so much that we miss out on cause we don't have all the weekends that regular people have to just go somewhere. You know, we might get 1, 2 weekends throughout the whole fall semester. So, I mean, I don't think we get the full college experience to be able to go hiking in the mountains, like I have always wanted to go hiking in the Mountains, never went. Wanted to go to Charleston, never went. I mean there have been a bunch of things that I have actually wanted

to do but just haven't been able to do them because as soon as I go from the fall it is straight to the spring and its busy again throughout the week and into the weekends. SO we definitely don't get the full experience, BUT, we get as much as we can and we enjoy it.

Bryan: you don't have near as much time as a normal student to go out and socialize and party or go to different functions, or go out on Friday nights because you are in a hotel getting ready for a game the next day.

James: For me its The limits. I want more out of it, more time to do things, more opportunity to experience more of it. There are classes I would have liked to take but I don't have that opportunity. There are things offered through the school community, social networks and stuff like that, clubs and opportunities and things that you miss out on. Like I could never study abroad, and I have lots of friends that get back and say it was their favorite semester, so its just stuff like that.

Brett: I came here planning on majoring in pre-rehabilitation. And it would have been impossible. There was just no time. I could not have taken the labs and everything. ..You know there were a lot of things I wanted to do, like I wanted to minor in sign language but those classes are only offered in the afternoon. And in the fall. And that is when I am doing football. And I wanted to major in a lot of health stuff and those classes have a lot of labs that are only in the fall and at night time. So I could not do that. There are internships in the summertime that I could not do because of football, or like last summer I wanted to go to Australia and

couldn't because of football. But I mean, it is not that it held me back. I mean those are all things that I can still do in my life, they will just be under different circumstances and in different settings. Because of football, I just could not do it in college. But it is 5 years of free school, and that is a lot of money.

Anthony: All the time football takes up. And I know that is one of our jobs, and it is a job, but we really don't get to do too much. I mean, we can, but there will be a consequence for it. Like I say, if we want to go to a big party that night we can't. If we do, we will wake up that next morning hurting and there are consequences for it all, so that is pretty much it. Just the freedom. We don't get to see out families as much, so that's pretty much it.

It is important to mention here, that these were not complaints regarding college, only reflections of a perfect scenario. These participants are well aware of their unique experiences and the benefits of playing football at a Division I university. Almost as if on cue, each participant followed up their reflections with similar statements regarding the special opportunity that has been provided to them by playing football. Kevin and James reflect the appreciation and understanding of the opportunity of playing college football:

Kevin: Well, it depends; most people are not going to get the opportunity to play college sports so that is unique and the experience of a lifetime. But to just be a regular student, you want to have it sometimes, because you see these guys that can stay up late at night and get up at like 12 in the afternoon and you are like

what the heck. And then they go to class for a couple of hours and then they done. But we chose this and we have to live with it.

James: There are some things that I feel like I missed out on, but there are other things that the general population misses out on by not playing. I mean there will always be something. We got to travel to lots of places, play on national television in some great games and experience that on a personal level. Those are some experiences that you cant really give back. I would say it was worth it. It was pretty cool to represent the school like that. There are doors that open and opportunities because of what you do as an athlete.

Although the time restrictions created by athletics in the higher education setting can be severe, the student athletes adapt to the structured lifestyle and train their bodies and minds to handle the physical, emotional and mental fatigue of being a student athlete. They develop job-like attitudes towards the sport and do their best to represent themselves, their families and the university in an appropriate manner academically. The mental toughness and work ethic created through four years of the student athlete lifestyle has exceptionally prepared these athletes to be successful post graduation. While they admit on missing some aspects of college life, they are better prepared in many ways than the general student population to enter the work force and job markets based on their schedules and time management skills that develop as a student athlete.

The participants were never shy about discussing the effort and work that go into being a student athlete. The time limitations and fatigue created by maintaining this

lifestyle changes the experience of being a college student. The responsibilities of succeeding academically and athletically are a chosen path for these individuals. By accepting to participate as a student athlete, these individuals have accepted and learned to grow in their role as student athletes and representatives of the university and its fan base. The stress and pressure of existing in the role of an intercollegiate football player may be viewed externally as a negative aspect of athletics in the realm of academia; however, for the athletes who accepted the realities of being a student athlete, they unequivocally believe it was worth it.

Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the steps taken throughout the analysis process that led the researcher to develop the six themes that best described the “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p.52) of intercollegiate football players in higher education. The process begins with a general description of each participant and demographic table in the attempt to present some of the similarities and differences between participants. This allows the reader to follow the analysis process of the researcher and better understand the methods in which the data came together from transcriptions to thematic analysis.

These six themes produced from the data analysis process demonstrate a cultural experience that creates a specific reality for student athletes that alters their experience as college students. The six themes are: (1) The fraternity of the paw, (2) Family focus (3) Identity adaptation, (4) Exceptional expectations, (5) Athletics versus academics, and (6) Time fatigue. These themes include a great deal of the participant’s original language, but has been organized into a more coherent and logical account of being a student athlete in

the sport of football in higher education. Additionally, each theme was provided to the participants for additions, subtractions and authenticity. It was very important to the researcher to ensure the participant descriptions were accurate accounts of experience; therefore, each theme was treated as an individual topic for review and correctness.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

What is it about student athletes in higher education that require so much focus and concern? Traditional quantitative research presents student athletes, especially those participating in football and basketball, as academically deficient and regarded as lesser students by higher education professionals. However, qualitative methodology presents a more detailed understanding of the student athlete population. The student athlete population may indeed lag behind statistically in receiving academic marks, but their experiences on campus as both a student and an athlete are different. While their experiences are fulfilling and educational, the social reality of higher education for student athletes is filled with rules, values, and cultural experiences that separate the student athlete from the general population.

The reality of life in higher education for student athletes is different across the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars of institutions. The student athlete in the collegiate setting lives under a microscope in which every action is analyzed toward adhering to the rules of the institution, team, and NCAA. The normative values structure of the institution is separated into two separate pillars for student athletes. The student athlete must adapt to the values of the institution, but simultaneously adapt to the separate value structures of the athletic team. Additionally, the cultural-cognitive pillar for student athletes is also separated into two separate pillars, and it is within the cultural cognitive pillar that the higher education experience diverges from that of the general student population.

The student athlete's life while in college is consumed with athletic responsibilities. The amount of time student athletes spend directly involved with their sport is equaled by the amount of time they spend preparing for their sport away from practice and competition. The importance of high profile sports such as football creates a campus wide athletic atmosphere that affects every aspect of the student athletes' experience. Athletics becomes unavoidable while on the college campus. From decorations, signage, and student attire to verbal communications and moods, the student athlete plays a role in directing the pulse of the university.

Academically, student athletes in higher education are improving as the quality of student and education improve. As colleges and universities have better prepared incoming athletes on academic expectations and responsibilities, student athletes are adapting earlier to academic and athletic workloads and finding a successful balance earlier in their careers, but the athletic effects on academics has remained unchanged. As the importance of intercollegiate football grows, the time and training responsibilities for the student athlete increasingly affects the time available to dedicate to academics. As available time is limited, the mental, emotional and physical fatigue of athletics further declines the student athletes' ability to spend adequate amounts of time focusing in academics. Therefore, participating in intercollegiate athletics affects academic performance. The question now becomes how we assess student athletes and their ability to be successful in higher education. Are grade point averages the only measure of collegiate success? Is it correct or even responsible as higher education professionals to examine one aspect of college life and the college experience and pass judgment on a

population we only assume to understand? Is it appropriate to compare this population of students to the general student population who exist in a different reality within the higher education setting?

The answers are complex, as higher education professionals must evaluate and re-evaluate the methods for assessing separate college student populations and the means in which those populations experience college. This research begins the process of qualitatively examining the student athlete perceptions of experiences in the higher education setting. This study by no means is an attempt to dismiss the findings of academic deficiency in previous studies, only to give the student athletes a voice to bridge the gap in understanding of this population.

Summary of Research Findings

Student athletes in the higher education setting experience college through a variety of lenses. These individuals adapt to the separate value laden structures of the academic and athletic worlds. Athletically, student athletes possess tremendous amounts of responsibility from training, time management, personal health, and serving as representatives of the university. Academically, student athletes must balance full-time course work in a limited amount of time and among a limited understanding as they interact with the general student population. These restrictions on time severely limit the available social freedom of college life compared to the general student population, thus further isolating them from the “normal students.”

While all students must abide by the rules established by the university, student athletes experience a separate and often stricter set of rules. The rules established by the

NCAA and conference affiliation limit the freedom of being a college student. The team rules, written and unwritten, establish a separate code of conduct that is structured around conformity and responsibility that is non-existent for the general student population. These rules include class attendance and punctuality that is monitored on a daily basis. Grade checks, performance reviews, and class participation are all common requests by athletic departments and athletic academic support centers to ensure the athlete is behaving in an academic manner. This level of structure and detail is exclusive to the student athlete population, with the most visible acts reserved for high profile sports.

The implementation of these rules can have positive and negative impacts on the individual growth and college experience. Positively, these rules can create accountability and responsibility towards academics and the team, while establishing the expectations of academia as an athlete. On the other hand, these rules can negatively affect growth and the college experience by establishing a visual statement to the general student population that athletes have to be made to come to class. These perceptions can feed into the negative stereotype by the general student population that athletes are lackadaisical or do not care for academics.

The implementation of structure and rules for student athletes understandably needs to exist as athletics is trying to improve its image in the world of higher education. Inadequate academic achievements of the past by student athletes have created an apprehension towards athletics and student athletes that is slowly subsiding. Therefore, athletic departments must take extra care to ensure their student athletes appropriately

represent athletics. It would be beneficial, however, to decrease the visibility of classroom checks and student athlete assessments from the general student population.

Student athletes also experience an additional and separate set of values by participating in athletics. The values of the athletic program that are established by historical success, fan base following, and geographic location, and create a unique experience for student athletes. Student athletes are held to a higher standard. They are not judged merely by academic success as the general student population is judged, they are also judged by athletic success and the standards of expectations. These expectations are established by historical norms associated with a particular sport or group of athletes, thus creating a different experience for each sport.

Existing and succeeding in an environment where so much is expected of you athletically, academically and socially can be mentally and emotionally exhausting. Attempting to adhere to the rules and values of the general student population, when you do not consider your self a part of that population, is difficult. The awareness of the responsibilities of being a student athlete, especially those responsibilities that exist only for student athletes, can create a disconnect between athletes and the general student population and be perceived as a lack of understanding. This lack of understanding promotes traditional stereotypes towards student athletes and a distinctive cultural experience in the higher education setting.

The culture of intercollegiate athletics is ever changing. For the student athlete population, their experiences are directly impacted by the culture of the team and university. The perception of student athletes is a cultural aspect of universities that is fed

from all areas of campus life. The faculty members, administrators, students, other athletic teams, and the general fan base of the sport influence the perceptions. The faculty members are responsible for culture creation in the classroom and play a role in how the students perceive athletes. Negative comments or derogatory statements towards athletics promote negative stereotypes towards student athletes. The student body then adopts these perceptions and spreads them among the general student population. These perceptions do not go unnoticed by student athletes. They become aware of faculty member treatment and student attitudes of athletes as academics and work continuously to overcome those perceptions or isolate themselves within the team.

The fan base also creates a cultural influence that affects student athlete experiences in higher education. The social networking and availability of student athletes through media and Internet sites restrict the social experiences of student athletes. Socializing in public places becomes difficult as high profile athletes are easily recognized. At a time in which they are removed from athletics and their sport, the fan base approaches student athletes to discuss sports and ask for autographs. The social networking websites for student athletes become flooded with messages and friend requests, creating the need to escape for privacy and isolation from the public.

Additionally, the popularity of college football has given rise to multiple Internet outlets that house message boards for fans and students to discuss football. Whatever the intention of the site, they have become a venue for athlete and team critiques. Therefore, intercollegiate football players are being judged as individuals based off athletic performance and classroom culture. These judgments further alter their experience from

that of the general student population. The athletic media exposure has extended the walls of the university from one town to around the world providing the possibility of positive exposure for student athletes and negative evaluations from those who have no attachment to the university or athletic program.

These rules, values and separate cultures for student athletes combine to create the reality of intercollegiate football. This reality is socially constructed through the expectations and academic successes of individual athletes, and can change weekly based on athletic success. The time restrictions, social chaos, academic pressure, and physical expectations of football create an experience specifically defined for intercollegiate football athletes. No matter how hard we try to associate them as traditional undergraduate students, they are different and they know it.

It is important to mention that different does not mean worse. Student athletes accept the differences and attempt to be successful in all aspects of college life with passion and diligence. As they become aware of the extra normative and regulative pressures associated with participating as a student athlete, they grow to learn time management and academic expectations, which are often exceedingly different from those of the high school level. The greatest difference separating the student athlete from the general student population is the culture in which they exist. They try their best to be successful in both academics and athletics. The cultural concern regarding student athletes in higher education occurs when they are made to feel inadequate by trying to do both. The perception held by student athletes of being an athlete is not negative or wrong and making them feel as such is a disservice to this population. Instead, higher education

professionals can embrace their passion and dedication to both the sport and university and attempt to help athletes successfully separate athletics from academics in the classroom. Higher education professionals can hold student athletes accountable to the cultural standards of the university while at the same time embracing the differences between student athletes and the general student population. Academic faculties need to get athletes more involved in the academic processes and that begins with the re-examination of teaching methods and individual perceptions of student athletes.

The Student Athlete

Existing as a student athlete in a higher education setting requires a rapid maturation process to be successful. The attitude of being a student athlete develops into confidence and isolation. There are no individuals more confident in the team or its potential success than the participating athletes. The time and dedication provided to athletic success is immeasurable. However, the same confidence does not exist in the classroom. The athletic environment consistently revolves around what can be accomplished. Win or lose, teams re-focus each week and re-establish confident and successful attitudes. In the classroom, student athletes are isolated and immediately judged as an athlete. While faculty members can promote positive and negative reinforcement for academic success, the social gap exists from the general student body. This is a potential reason student athletes migrate towards majors such as sociology. The student population for those majors promotes positive reinforcement for academic success and understanding of different lifestyles thus promoting academic confidence.

Athletically, student athletes enter college with some aspect of playing professional sports. The athletic transition from the high school level into Division I college is as great as the academic transition between the two. Student athletes naively enter college with million dollar contracts and long-term professional careers in their future. While this perception may feed into the stereotype that student athletes only care about athletics, I believe it is no different from another student dreaming to be a doctor, lawyer, or rocket scientist. Most college students naively enter college with tremendous aspirations of future professions. However, once the reality of competition and requirements to succeed in those professions are realized, future paths diverge into a multitude of majors throughout the college. Athletics is no different. Once the student athlete begins to realize the potential for playing in the National Football League (NFL), their focus and purpose in college begins to change. As the realities of long-term careers in the NFL are realized, they become more aware of the advantages of the athletic scholarship and the opportunities an education can provide. Ultimately, student athletes mature just as the general student population matures.

A vital component in this maturation process exists in the relationship between coaching staffs and student athletes. The coaching staff must do a good job in enforcing the importance of education. It is understandable for coaches to focus on athletics as their livelihood depends on athletic success, however, these are impressionable young men entering as freshman who with the right motivation and leadership can successfully navigate both athletics and academics. Coaches need to prepare incoming athletes on the expectations and responsibilities of academic life to be academically successful. This

provides the student athletes a trustworthy opportunity to take responsibility for their own future and grow to be accountable for academic actions.

Nevertheless, the student athlete population is a complex one. Intercollegiate football players participating in a high profile sport responsible for bringing millions of dollars into the university are going to feel the effects of success and the responsibility of athletics as part of their experience. Judging this population according to the general student population successes will alter the true experience being created by the student athlete population. It will continue to feed the existing stereotypes regarding student athletes and further isolate them as a group on the college campus.

Thematic Recap

The data analysis for this qualitative phenomenology produced six separate yet distinctive themes. The themes existed for each participant of the research study and multiple revisions with participant assistance were used to produce the most accurate description for the group of participants as a whole. The six themes are: (1) The fraternity of the paw; (2) Family focus; (3) Identity adaptation; (4) Exceptional expectations; (5) Athletics versus academics and (6) Time fatigue.

The intercollegiate football athletes who participated in this research study were highly family oriented. Their families were a constant part of their lives and a continuous area of support and motivation for both athletic and academic success. The deep-rooted respect for the parental figure(s) was a driving force towards graduation and succeeding in life. Athletic and academic success is not an individual goal for student athletes. Successfully graduating and competing at the Division I level of intercollegiate football is

viewed as a family success. These accomplishments are a tribute to the family.

Graduating is a way to say thank you to the parents and a method of motivation for siblings. Successfully competing in athletics and academics is a way to give back to parent(s) who selflessly gave up so much time and effort to help develop athletic talents as a child. In a way, these student athletes are still the little boys in their mother's eye. They are young and vibrant with tons of potential, and for the first times in their life, they believe it.

The family focus of student athletes creates the need for a family away from home. Student athletes find this solace between the lines of the football field. A student athlete's teammates serve as a temporary family. The membership of being a student athlete creates a fellowship of individuals from many different lifestyles and backgrounds. The brotherhood or fraternity grows the longer the athlete stays with the team and increasingly becomes the social network. Just as in all areas of society, people tend to socialize with people who are more like them and those with whom they can relate. However, when you become a member of a football team, you are no longer rich or poor, black or white, or overweight or skinny. You become inducted into a family of brothers whom you will spend countless hours with over four-years in practice and competitions, academic study groups, injury rehabilitation, and social activities. You are a football player, and you are part of a brotherhood that will push you to your limits and challenge you beyond all previous knowledge. This fraternity becomes the family center for student athletes while in college. The bonds and friendships that are created are long

lasting and deep and come with a lifetime membership. Once you wear the symbol of the paw, you will always be a member of the fraternity.

One conceptual reason for forming such a tight bond among teammates is the general misconceptions of student athletes by those not in the fraternity. Student athletes are burdened with deep-rooted stereotypes in higher education and function in a reality in which most occupants do not understand the daily life of a student athlete. The general student population perceives student athletes to be lesser students, yet they have no concept of the time and effort that go into practice, game preparation, and competition. The general student population perceives student athletes to getting classroom freebies and special treatment, but they do not see the hours upon hours of practice, followed by trying to stay awake to prepare for classes. They do not see the travel schedule for athletic events in which a student athlete returns to campus at three o'clock in the morning only to be in class at eight o'clock a few hours later. They see the student athlete dozing off in class and jump to judge rather than attempting to understand. The general student population is passing judgment on student athletes based on the occasional classroom occurrences rather than the total reality of being a student athlete.

So why does the student athlete consider themselves to be athletes? The answer is simply because they are not students. They are not students in the sense of being a part of the general student population. Their experiences and socially constructed reality on a college campus are different, thus they classify themselves differently. Considering themselves to be athletes in no way degrades the importance of academic work, it only defines an identity for student athletes as a group on campus.

The inability for the general student population to understand the student athlete expectations and responsibilities is buffered somewhat by the willingness of the faculty to try to understand. It needs to be clearly stated that it is not the perception of the researcher or the perception of the participants that faculty members should create a different experience for student athletes. The student athlete expectations and experiences with faculty members were strictly to co-exist and work together. Student athletes are not asking for handouts, extensions, or grades. The only thing they want and need is understanding. Just as the athlete is not a “normal student,” they should not be treated as a normal student. Providing them a greater amount of flexibility increases their ability and willingness to learn. It increases their ability to perform well on assignments and exams. It creates a beneficial student-faculty member relationship that creates accountability and trust that promotes positive experiences in the classroom. By holding firm in treating the student athlete strictly as a student, we are preventing the one thing we are trying to promote, and that is education. If increasing flexibility of courses promotes learning and accountability, faculties must work with all students to redefine how we teach and how our students are learning. By taking the time to understand and respect the constraints and extracurricular responsibilities of student athletes, we may in fact find the key that equals the academic playing field between student athletes and the general student population.

The expectations for academic and athletic success overwhelmingly consume the student athlete. Personal expectations for success develop and are maintained through family relationships and support. Student athletes expect to be successful in college.

While each participant arrives at college with different expectations concerning academics, they all develop the desire and personal expectation to graduate. In addition, many aspects of college life create expectations for the college athlete that affects experiences in higher education separate from the general student population. The athletic expectations to be successful in football are great, especially at a school in which football is considered the priority sport. Student athletes do possess individual athletic expectations, but the popularity and perceived importance of football bring external expectations from all aspects of the college community.

The athletic expectation for intercollegiate football players is simply to win. Winning is the expectation of the general student population, fan base, alumni, and administration. To the student athlete, the focus on winning further separates the football player from the student body. It supports the notion that student athletes should focus on athletics, and it places them on a pedestal for praise and criticism. The individual exposure of being a college football player brings about different experiences in higher education to live up to the hype and continue success. A good game performance creates the expectations for great game performances, and unsuccessful attempts bring about severe criticism that is felt inside and outside of the classroom.

For student athletes, the expectation for success is the difference between a positive or negative week on campus. Just as the mood of the student athlete changes with success, at the collegiate level the entire institutional mood also changes. Losing is no longer a blemish in the record books or a stepping-stone for future success. Losing is felt throughout the halls of the university from the student body to the administration.

Winning just makes the campus a better place to be and affects academic performance for the student athlete and general student population. The mood of the university itself rests on the shoulders of intercollegiate football players, and as individuals, student athletes are only as good as their last game. Ever-changing moods and perceptions create a tremendous amount of pressure for student athletes to succeed in athletics. While each athlete may handle pressure differently, the expectations of success are real and have real effects on the student athlete experience. Athletic success creates a more inviting and comfortable classroom environment and campus atmosphere whereas losing creates the opposite. This aspect of the student athlete experience is the most dramatic difference between the student athlete population and general student body and plays a role in the decision making process of how the student athletes' time should be spent.

The success of intercollegiate football players in both the classroom and on the field is affected by the time restrictions each create on the other. Athletic preparation, practice, and recovery conclude most of the student athlete's day with academic classes, coursework, and study time spliced in between athletic responsibilities. Classes are scheduled early in the day as to not affect practice, and study hall or individual study time is only possible after football has concluded for the day. Therefore, the only times a student athlete has during the week to focus on academics are during the periods of time in which they are the most fatigued. Early morning classes are difficult when mixed in between physically exhausting workouts. Personal study time comes at night, after a full twelve-hour day of hustling back and forth between athletic and academic responsibilities. Nights are filled with cramming class materials and catching up on

coursework during periods of physical and mental exhaustion. This small amount of personal time at night also conflicts with the social requirements of being a college student. During the week, personal free time is limited to a few hours a day for student athletes to focus on the academic and social needs of the individual. Over the weekend, Sundays are the only day in which the athlete is removed from athletics; however, it is usually spent in physical recovery from the game and mental reflection on its outcome. The only day of the week for student athletes to focus on academics is often spent recovering from the physical, mental, and emotional stresses of the week in preparation for the week to come.

As the season progresses, the time restrictions become more intense as academic coursework increases and competition outcomes become more important. Success in athletics develops the desire to continue working hard and put forth more effort to keep succeeding. Failure in athletics promotes working extra hard to correct personal and team mistakes. Time becomes an enemy of the student athlete. There are not enough hours in the day for them to fulfill athletic and academic requirements and get appropriate hours of sleep to remain healthy. Even though the NCAA limits student athlete athletic participation to twenty hours a week, they take it upon themselves to put in extra time and work to promote athletic success. While each athlete understands the importance of academic requirements, the athlete often takes the path of staying afloat during the season with the perception of making up coursework and time in the spring and summer sessions. While the student athletes try hard to separate the athletic responsibilities and academic responsibilities, the time restrictions create the conflict and academics rarely

ends as the victor. Student athletes chose to either compromise academic consistency or physical sleep to compensate for the time limitations, and this choice is made due to the loyalty for athletics rather than a negative attitude towards academics.

These time limitations also become important factors of the higher education experience for student athletes. The time management skills that must be learned and adapted early in the collegiate career are the only chance to achieve some balance between academics and athletics. These experiences are specific to student athletes and further isolate them from the student population. The time restrictions create little social time to interact with the general student population and the perception that student athletes only spend time together. The time limitations create another wedge in separating the student athlete and general student population and further create a unique college experience for student athletes.

The greatest affects of athletics on academics revolve around these time restrictions. Combining the limitations in time created by athletics with the physical exhaustion and mental fatigue of the sport provides little opportunities during the season for student athletes to focus primarily on academics. The expectations created by being a student athlete are used as justification towards focusing more on athletics, especially when those expectations come from within the academic realms of the university. The time limitations, student interactions, and faculty member relationships are all impacted by the student athletes' inclination to be an athlete. Therefore, athletics without a doubt have an affect on academic performance. The impact on athletic performance is created by the time restrictions and pure physical and mental fatigue of participating in

intercollegiate football. Although the desire to be successful academically exists for student athletes, there are just not enough hours in the day to fulfill all of the responsibilities of both academics and athletics. Thus, the concern becomes how we can manipulate the requirements and responsibilities of both athletics and academics to better server this population.

A separate effect on the student athlete experience is the reciprocal relationship between athletics and academics. As athletics affects academics, academics have an equal effect on athletics. Being successful in the classroom provides the opportunity for the student athletes to focus individually on academics and athletics. When academic success is accomplished, there is less overlap between athletics and academics. When the student athlete is able to maintain coursework, obtain favorable grades, and openly communicate with academic faculty, they are less likely to bring the academic issues onto the field. Therefore, they are able to concentrate solely on football during practice instead of experiencing anxiety over upcoming academic events. Good academic standing allows the football player to be a football player and frees up time in both the evenings and weekends to focus on academics. Achieving academic balance creates a positive cyclical effect on the college experience. By starting the semester well academically, the student athlete has more time to dedicate to academics throughout the semester and more importantly during the season. The student athlete can enjoy the educational opportunities provided to them instead of treading through them barely keeping their head above water.

Successfully starting the academic semester also allows the student athlete to be more generous with their personal and social time throughout the season. It provides a

much needed aspect of mental and emotional relaxation and opens up opportunities to be successful in both academics and athletics. Therefore, while student athletes remain insistent on considering themselves as athletes, they are well aware of the importance of successfully navigating academia. As they progress towards graduation and mature as adults, academics move to the forefront in priorities as they begin to understand the reciprocal affects of academics on athletics. They understand that to be truly successful as an athlete, they first must be successful as an academic.

As student athletes become more aware of the importance of academics, their collegiate experience moves a little closer to the general student population. While their experiences remain unique among football athletes, they begin to understand the positive impacts of succeeding in academics on the other areas of college life. Just as the general student population can free up social time and activities by remaining in good academic standing, the student athlete can focus more on athletics and social opportunities.

The Participants

The participants in this study provided unique individual experiences as student athletes participating in intercollegiate football. In appreciation for their time, honesty, and willingness to be available for thematic review, it was important to describe them accurately as a group. The purpose of this research was to provide the student athlete with a voice to describe their expectations and experiences in the higher education setting, and it was important to ensure that participants was adequately represented.

To accomplish this, it was important to conclude the phenomenological methodology as described by Moustakas (1994) by constructing a “textual description of

the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes” (p.121) that represents the group as a whole. Therefore, the following description illustrates the experience of intercollegiate football players in higher education.

Textual Description of the Student Athlete Experience

To be an intercollegiate student athlete participating in the sport of football is an indescribable feeling. The honor and pride we have by having the opportunity to play at a school where so much emphasis is placed on the success of football makes us want to be better people. The passion of the fan base feeds our desire to be successful and the opportunity to represent this school and this town and this fan base will always be one of the most cherished periods of our lives.

Now not everything has been easy no matter what some may think. I go to school for free in the sense that I do not pay tuition, however, everything comes with a price. Those on the outside of the team looking in will never understand the amount of work that goes into representing this university. The hours of practice and year round preparation and training are evaluated over fourteen Saturdays and my accomplishments are externally narrowed down to wins and losses. Internally, however, life as a student athlete is filled with accomplishments. Sometimes, just making it though spring workouts that begin at 5:00am and make an hour seem like four is an accomplishment. Sometimes getting a passing grade in chemistry or economics is an accomplishment, and yes, sometimes winning a big game is an accomplishment. As a team and as an individual

player, accomplishments are judged by success and success is not some arbitrary number in a statistical column. They are the little accomplishments in practice and the educational accomplishments in the classroom. We work as individuals to be successful and we come together as a team to be great.

The opportunity to play football in college is very special and was a life-changing event for my family and me. The pride of leading my brothers and sisters to college and showing my town that attending and succeeding in college was a reality was a driving force to continue towards graduation. The pride in my parents eyes watching them talk about their son playing college football at a major Division I school reinforced my desire to graduate and to become a successful person.

The college experiences created by being a student athlete begin within the team. The experience of accepting people for who they are instead of what they have or where they come from was nourished through the team atmosphere. We consider our team a family and the athletes are a brotherhood. We stick together because we understand each other. Our connection goes beyond socioeconomic status and race; it is a connection forged by the sweat in summer workouts and battles between the sidelines. We become a fraternity out of necessity. We lean on and rely on each other because we are the only ones who understand what it is like to play. A teammate is more than a nine to five job. It is a life long connection to each other and comes with an unconditional lifetime membership.

We use our connection to our teammates to create a separate and unique identity as a student athlete. Let there be no mistake that we are and consider ourselves to be

football players. Football is a part of the soul and will continue to be no matter how long my career. Academics is more of a goal. The greatest accomplishment that can be gained from college is the education. Just because we are athletes does not diminish our desire to be educated. It only changes the methods and experiences in which we receive it. Academic success will always be a part of our individual expectations. However, it is not the only expectation we face.

One of the most difficult aspects of being a intercollegiate football player are the expectations that become associated with success. We are expected to succeed in the classroom, not survive but succeed. We are expected to win and win big on the field. We are expected to represent the university and athletic department with pride as we live our lives under a public microscope and we are expected to enter college at eighteen years old and bear the weight of the university on our shoulders. We become accountable to the university and we accept the responsibility with pride. The expectations are great, and they are worth it.

These expectations create many time restrictions that limit our external experiences. Our classes have to be in the morning and semester's abroad and specialty classes are not a reality for student athletes. The time restrictions limit our availability to the general student body and the time needed to succeed in academics, but we manage and the experiences that we gain by playing football outweigh those that we miss. Additionally, the experience of being in college is fulfilled through two separate lives on campus. Athletics and academics are both important. Winning championships and graduation are both important. There is not enough time in the day to give one hundred

percent to both lives. Academics will always affect athletics and athletics will always affect academics. We learn to balance the two through time management skills and developing personal relationships with faculty members and the general student population. These relationships are attempts to promote a greater understanding of student athletes and the differences in how we experience college in relation to the general student population.

We are different. Our experiences are different. We are no better or worse, just simply different. We are not normal students but we are students. We do not have the luxury of sleeping through noon and staying up all night. We do not have the potential luxury of studying for our classes six to eight hours a day. We are however, willing to put forth the effort and reach out for help when needed. We do not need special favors or special treatment, only understanding. We are much more than football players. We are smart and talented young men. We are individuals and we work hard to represent this university with dignity and pride. We are faced with multiple limitations by being a student athlete, but we choose this path. We are accountable for our performance, our grades, and our actions and as we mature through college, we grow to learn the values of responsibility. We are held to a higher standard in the classroom, socially and on the football field and it is worth it. We are football players, we are proud to be football players, and the effort and limitations created by playing football are all worth the experience of playing football.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that may have influenced the data analysis findings and conclusions. These limitations have been considered and are outlined in the section for implications for future research.

The most important limitation is that these findings are only representative of the ten participants and their experiences in the higher education setting. The findings do not represent the physical, mental, or emotional experiences of all intercollegiate football athletes or the student athlete population in general. State University is one of 119 teams that participate at the Division I level in intercollegiate football, and each university will elicit a specific experience and reality, as each possesses a distinctive culture. The characteristics of this university, its athletic administration, and coaching staff influence the student athlete experience making each university a distinctive setting that cannot be generalized across the research.

Another limitation of this study originates from the data collection process itself. Recall and self-reporting is potentially a limitation in all research studies gathering data through interviews and personal recollection. Due to the interview data existing as the primary source of data for analysis, reporting bias is a risk created by design.

The final limitation of this study is the method for participant recruitment and their personal evaluation of current experiences instead of the experience as a whole. Because participant interviews were collected during the final stages of their academic careers, important developmental information may have been excluded as the participants have matured into adults that are more responsible. It is uncertain how experiences are

evaluated or changes over the course of a collegiate career; therefore, we can only apply the findings of this study to these participants at one university and within the particular stage of college in which they exist.

Implications for Future Research

This phenomenological exploration of student athlete experiences in higher education has yielded greater awareness and appreciation for some of the specific challenges intercollegiate football athletes face on the college campus. This qualitative study provided the student athlete with a voice regarding their experience and highlights the need for continued research in this particular subject. The potential to extend this area of research exists in several meaningful directions: seeking a deeper understanding to the affects of external expectations on the student athlete's academic experience, or to continue to build the foundation of understanding the student athlete experiences to promote the most educational experience possible.

A useful direction for research would be to devise a study that examined the development of time management skills for student athletes and its relationship to academic success. Time management development is a transition process from high school to college, and essential to the long-term success for student athletes. A longitudinal study may benefit the population of student athletes and provide a clearer picture to the educational stages and preparation upon entering college and methods of adapting to academic and athletic responsibilities.

A qualitative case study would also benefit the student athlete population, and it would be necessary to have full access to the student athletes, that include practice,

classes, and competitions. This method of study would be useful in examining the individual themes described in this study to gain a detailed knowledge of this population.

With the understanding that there are academic and athletic specific challenges that intercollegiate football athletes face while in higher education, there is need for researchers to apply and conduct this study to other sport populations. These studies will help to distinguish between sport specific experiences, population specific experiences, and the methods in which they differ from the general student population.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of the findings in this research project are applicable to multiple areas throughout the university setting and indicate a need for a cognitive shift in the perception of student athletes, especially if the desire is to promote the academic aspect of their collegiate experience. From academic affairs to university athletic departments, the perception of student athletes needs move from that of a traditional undergraduate student into a separate and unique population of students. Student athletes are not the same as the general student population nor are they the same as the graduate student population. The reality of higher education for student athletes lay somewhere between these groups, thus creating a need for a campus wide understanding of the academic and athletic requirements that are unique to student athletes.

Academic faculty and administrators must continue to reinforce the academic component of higher education and take more ownership in controlling the classroom environment. Academic faculty and administrators need to be more involved with

integrating the student athlete population with the general student population and work to overcome the traditional stereotypes that have persisted concerning student athletes. Faculty members and administrators need to promote collaboration between student athletes and the general student population within the classroom. Simply requiring student athletes to participate in out of class group work is not sufficient in promoting this collaboration. It only adds to the disconnect between student athletes and the general student population as the student athlete is often unable to dedicate sufficient time and focus with group participation. Promoting in-class collaboration provides an atmosphere for the student athlete to educationally participate and interact with other students in a faculty member controlled environment.

Academic faculty need to continue reinforcing the academic role of the student athlete and holding student athletes accountable for all educational work pertaining to the classroom. However, the academic role and responsibility of student athletes should not be made to devalue the role of the athlete. This creates the perception of having to choose between being a student and being an athlete for student athletes. Academic faculties should be willing to understand the importance of the athletic role for these individuals and use this role as a means of promoting education and collaboration rather than perceiving athletics as a secondary role for student athletes.

Additionally, this study indicates that student athletes may not be as far removed from the required educational achievement levels we are led to believe, regardless of grade point averages and standardized test scores upon entering college. While many student athletes are presumed to perform poorly upon entering college, they attribute this

being unprepared for the combination of athletic and academic responsibilities rather than a lack of academic ability. Therefore, individually working with student athletes early in their college careers with time management can help them transition into the academic requirements of higher education.

The results of this study also implicate the need for student affair professionals to implement campus wide initiatives that are available to student athletes, particularly those who are first generation college students. This will not be an easy task with the time constraints of student athletes. However, if we desire to balance out the differences between student athletes and the general student population concerning higher education experiences, we must find a way to integrate student athletes into campus activities. This will require strategic collaboration between student affair practitioners and university athletic departments. Utilizing off-season periods for student athletes would be a starting point. The time restrictions are lessened during this period and provide the student athlete with more opportunities to become involved with the campus. This is not stating that student affairs should cater their initiatives and programs to student athletes, only to keep them in mind when scheduling events.

The results of this study indicate the need for athletic departments to monitor student athlete involvement in all campus activities. Athletic departments should focus on the overall experience of student athletes and the means by which further involvement can enhance the collegiate experience. Athletic departments must work with academic personnel to promote institutional values and the educational experiences of student athletes. Athletic leaders need to initiate the push towards educational excellence for

student athletes. Athletic departments need to work closely with individual faculty members and educational departments to promote unity between athletics and academics. While the student athlete is ultimately responsible for all academic coursework, athletic departments are responsible for providing the opportunity to be successful. While academic support centers for student athletes are a step in the right direction, further steps need to be taken to provide student athletes with college experiences that appear to be selective to the general student population. These experiences can include but are not limited to community involvement, study abroad opportunities, and the opportunity to enroll in classes and campus events that occasionally conflict with athletic requirements.

The results of this study can additionally benefit the NCAA. While the NCAA focuses on aspects of the student athlete's college career such as classroom achievement and time restrictions, the overall experience of the student athlete is rarely a topic of concern. Hopefully, this study and similar research initiatives increase the awareness of the importance of the college experience for student athletes. The results from this study do not indicate the need for further restrictions on participation time. However, the results do implicate that student athletes are entering college unaware of the true amount of work that is required to be a successful student athlete. Therefore, the NCAA might consider implementing a more effective program for freshman student athletes to acclimate to the requirements and responsibilities of academic coursework in higher education that coincides with athletic responsibilities.

The results of this study provide an understanding to a complex and unique population on college campuses. The student athletes on college campuses already

believe they exist differently than the general student population. Therefore, it is the belief of the researcher that creating new regulative policies only for student athletes will further the disconnect between student athletes and the general student population. However, creating policy changes for the administrative bodies of the university will be a positive step in promoting the experiences of student athletes in higher education. Policies regarding collaboration between athletic departments, academic affairs and student affairs need to be implemented with a focus on the student athlete. Although athletic departments and academic affairs are separate entities within higher education with separate purposes, they are both responsible for the educational development of student athletes. A university committee that consists of academic personnel, student affairs professionals and athletic department personnel that examines student athlete experiences will promote positive experiences for student athletes and serve to decrease the growing divide between university athletic departments and academic affairs.

Conclusion

This research provided an extremely enlightening experience. It appears that student athletes that participate in the sport of football are fully aware of the importance of academics and education at the collegiate level. These individuals experience a great deal of external pressures in the form of athletic expectations and as a result, expend more time towards the responsibilities for their sport than academics. This is not an indication that football players do not care about academics. On the contrary, the participants consistently commented on the importance of graduation and leaving the university as educated individuals.

These individuals possess a deep loyalty to the sport of football. The sport has provided an opportunity to receive a free education. The sport has carved their path into college and exists, for them, as the primary “reason for being here.” While they appreciate the benefits provided to them from education, they do not forget their purpose. The respect and gratefulness towards coaching staffs for providing scholarship opportunities is met with relentless hard work and constant preparation towards athletics.

Even though academics is important to student athletes, they feel like they were provided the opportunity of college through football and the football scholarship. The scholarship to play collegiate football promotes a loyalty to the athletic program and the perception that football holds an equal value and importance compared to academics. As student athletes progress through college and the reality of playing professional football becomes clearer, student athletes must examine the academic landscape for future professions. For the first time, these individuals have to see themselves as something other than an athlete. Even for the most skilled players, professional careers are often limited by injury creating the need to develop skills outside of athletics. The importance of education and graduating grows with the student athlete the longer they remain in college indicating that colleges and universities are playing a vital role in the maturation process of student athletes.

The overall experience of a student athlete is consumed with responsibilities, expectations, and limitations. The intercollegiate football athlete is responsible for academic and athletic successes, while feeling responsible for the mood of the university. These athletes are fully aware of how the university changes between winning and losing,

and put a great deal of pressure on themselves not to let the university down. The expectations for success come from all directions for the student athlete and are inescapable. From the classroom to the internet, the only expectation is to win. In a perfect world, student athletes would be able to freeze time. They would be able to practice 8 hours a day and focus on academic 8 hours a day while continuing to attend class, socialize, and sleep. However, the reality is that there are only 24 hours in a day and the athlete strains every second out of that time.

The culture of college football and the experiences associated with student athletes in higher education create a web of emotions as the student athlete tries to fit in. They work to be better students and athletes while living their life under the microscope of the public, the university and the NCAA. Their experience in higher education is quite different from that of the general student population of whom they even refer to as “normal students.” For the student athlete, their socially constructed reality exists among the expectations that drive athletic success. Everything they do revolves around athletics and all other aspects of college move down the priority list.

Athletics, especially the sport of football, exists for student athletes as a full time occupation. Even though coach-led practices only consume the twenty-hour maximum, student athletes spend countless hours mentally and physically preparing for competitions. The typical workweek for student athletes easily reaches the forty-hour mark making these athletes working professionals who are also enrolled in college rather than college students who have a job.

Intercollegiate football players exist in higher education in-between classifications. They are so far removed from the traditional undergraduate experience that it is hard to classify them with the general student population. They are more closely related to a working professional that is enrolled as a student or more appropriately the graduate student population. The concern with classifying student athletes as a separate population is that it indicates that they are or should be treated different and that is inaccurate and would be inappropriate, but judging them against a population that does not reflect them is also inaccurate and inappropriate. The means by which higher education professionals evaluate the success and failures of student athletes needs to be reevaluated. As we begin to deepen our understanding of the relationship between athletics and academics, so to must we expand on our understanding of the implications of that relationship. The relationship between athletics and academics does not exist as a complex conflict between two separate worlds in academia. Instead, they are reciprocating worlds that have dramatic effects on those that participate in them.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe being in college?
2. Did you have a good family support for college?
3. What was it like to play football?
4. Did/Do you consider yourself a student or an athlete?
5. What is your favorite thing about being in college?
6. What was the least?
7. How much time management have you learned?
8. How would you describe your relationship with other athletes?
9. How would you describe your relationship with faculty?
10. How were your relationships with other students?
11. What are the expectations that you felt as a student athlete?
12. How does athletic success affect the university?
13. How do you balance the commitments of athletics and academics?
14. Did your athletic success have any impact on your academic success?
15. If you look back on your experience, from freshman year to now, where have you grown the most?
16. As you look back on your time at state, how do you describe the experience?

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