

1-1-2011

Student athlete: From recruitment to the academic, athletic, & social experiences

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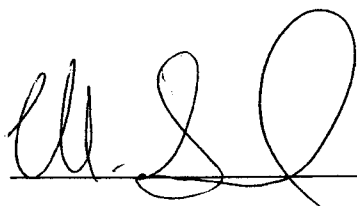
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family who has always pushed me to get an education regardless of obstacles that may arise. I love you all with the bottom of my heart for producing the young man before your eyes today. Without you, none of this would have been possible and I am forever indebted to each and every one of you. Thank you for all that you have done to support me.

This thesis is also a dedication to all the educators I have been honored and privileged to learn from. Each of my educators has taught me forever lasting values and lessons along the way. Included in my educators are the collegiate professionals who took a risk and gave me a chance as a Graduate Assistant and Housing professional.

Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to all who have walked the quads and hallways of Eastern Illinois University, for I have spent the last six years of my life here. The Charleston community and the institution's campus have helped in my growth and development as a knowledgeable, ethical and morally superior professional.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics at Eastern Illinois University, especially the student-athletes that helped with the present study. This thesis would have not been possible so I must give heartfelt thanks to the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Dan P. Nadler and Dr. Stephen E. Lucas, and thesis chair, Dr. James A. Wallace. Each of you has helped in my progress and assisted by providing feedback and support when needed. Dr. Wallace, this thesis could not have been possible without your advice and expertise in motivating me to make this study a priority when all other activities were taking time away from my advancement.

Abstract

Student-athletes in the present study seemed more athlete-students in that they were consistently more concerned about their athletic performance than their academic performance. With the number of road trips and early scheduled classes, students freed up their mid-afternoons to late evenings for the respective sport of which they were a part of. By conducting such research, a number of different elements became clearer during the researcher's efforts to find out why an athlete chooses a specific institution, the nature of his or her overall university experience, and the interpersonal relationships college athletes make throughout the course of their undergraduate careers.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The daily challenges for many college students often involve balancing their social life and academic studies. For student athletes, however, there is the added burden of also balancing an athletic career. Thus, the demands of university life for student athletes are considerable. Of significant importance is understanding how they live up to commitments to team(s) members, the athletic demands of coaches, and the scholarship demands of faculty, while also having what many would describe as the “typical” college experience. Perhaps no other students experience the difficulty of balancing all of the aforementioned concerns along with the many others of interpersonal relationships with peers, living considerable distances from home and immediate family support networks, involvement in the co-curriculum, or simply living in a residence hall dominated by non-athletes and athletes of other sports who share some of the same passions for sports. In general, it would be fair to say that the lives of college athletes on and off the court or field are simultaneously complex.

What all athlete students are likely to experience include random visits by coaches making sure players are following curfew and team regulations, notes from professors who care more about scholarly excellence than gridiron performance, stress in having an athlete roommate who may be experiencing the same challenges or more, and, in general, the normal responsibilities associated with being an athlete (e.g. daily practices, travelling, games and team meals that may take away from study time or other academic related activities). All of these facets of collegiate life require the athlete student to adjust

to no longer being the prized Blue Chipper they were before entering college. All together or singly, each of the aforementioned circumstances may have a profound impact on an athlete student's ability to perform to the best of his or her abilities in the classroom or on the playing surface.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the present study was to assess and compare what both women and men college athletes experience before stepping foot on campus and the subsequent lives they lead as athlete-students.

Athletes have been wooed by coaches for many years, some even before stepping foot in a high school hallway. Student athletes often remember the times coaches came into their living rooms and talked about their future along with members of their family, significant other(s), or high school coaches present. While sitting in their homes, coaches present many things as selling points about the institution, the athlete's potential for playing time, and options for degree attainment. These and other factors play significant roles regarding the ultimate decision for enrolling in a specific institution. Several contributing factors include, but are not limited to, the size and reputation of an institution, the sports programs, and the potential for future opportunities for the athlete. While transitioning to a larger arena, the college campus, women and men athletes are often overwhelmed by the classes, campus environment, pressure to perform well as athletes, and being away from former teammates and coaches.

University athletic departments are heavily invested in keeping the term "student" before "athlete," but the individuals wearing the uniforms may think that "athlete" takes precedence over "student." This can be a source of internal conflict for students who have been recruited principally for their athletic abilities. Their status as student-athlete

requires a mindset which places their desire to perform academically as secondary to their athletic performance. Yet, for many, acknowledging the reality of their status as athlete-student suggests their athletic performance is a more important component of their collegiate experience than their scholarly productivity.

Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of the present research was to explore and compare the recruiting process and the thoughts of collegiate athletes on their overall experience at their chosen institution. For years, society has stigmatized collegiate athletes as pampered with a free education and living. But for all the hard work and effort put in by the athlete, a price must be paid. Through the present research, student athletes were able to reflect on how they came about making their decision to attend the specified institution, as well as reflect on their time spent on campus. A secondary purpose of the study was to assess what student athletes value in their university experiences.

During the recruiting process and until the time an athlete steps onto campus, coach and others have to create positive and welcoming expectations for students to want to join the program and institution. The present research allowed students to voice their perceptions of all they have been through and how they decided to play for their specific school as opposed to a different institution.

In considering the five major factors that come into play (Kimmel, 2008), students were able to share their thoughts about what they would like to see done differently for future athletes attending the specific institution in the study. These experiences may include on and off the playing surface as well as in and out of the classroom. There are many opportunities for student athletes to have the same experiences that non-athletes have, but are they limited by their sport which takes up a majority of their time?

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the present study were:

- (1) How does an athlete ultimately decide which school to attend in pursuit of both a college degree and athletic experience?
- (2) What do relationships between coaches and athletes look like from the view of the athletes?
- (3) How does one go about choosing a major that fits both the schedule of the sport and the interests of the athlete?
- (4) What sort of support are athletes feeling from those around them to continue to succeed?
- (5) How do athletes balance their academic, athletic, and social lives?

Star athletes are a different breed of student and over the course of their lives may have had everything handed to them. As they have transitioned to the college atmosphere, the question that came into play was how much the students were really being students in that they were given a chance to earn a college degree and simultaneously participate in the full-time job of being an athlete.

Limitations of Study

There are several limitations to the present study. These limitations included, but were not limited to (1) not including the coaches' feelings and thoughts on the subject matter; (2) the student athletes studied are Division I-A FCS athletes and the survey instrument was designed for and initially administered to Division I-A FBS athletes; (3) the absence of parents' overall thoughts on the recruiting process; (4) the perceptions of student athletes that have transferred for some reason were not available to the researcher,

(5) gathering information from coaches regarding their reasoning and rationales about specific factors such as recruitment, athlete development policies, and their personal availability to the athlete was not possible due to the potential for individuals in positions of authority to retaliate against a player who says anything negative about the coach, the athletic department, or their athletic experiences. This would have allowed for comparison and contrast between what the student athletes say was available to them and what the coaches may have perceived as available to their athletes.

Athletes at the collegiate level across Divisions are treated and respected differently based on the level of competition. For example, FBS athletes are going to be sought out by more institutions and thus their recruitment experiences may be a bit different than those of their FCS peers. Also, at the FBS level, a bit of celebrity comes along with being recognized as a star athlete and more of the social life or more likely prospects for playing at the professional level are more likely than for athletes at the Division I-A mid-major level.

Definitions of Terminology

The following definitions are to assist and clarify specific terms as they relate to the present thesis.

Recruiting (NCAA Division I Manual, 2010-11): “any soliciting of a prospective student-athlete or a prospective student-athlete’s relatives (or legal guardians) by an institutional staff member...” (p. 84)

Prospective Student-Athlete (NCAA Division I Manual, 2010-11): “a student who has started classes for the ninth grade” (p.83).

Jock Majors (Suggs, 2003): “easy” majors as opposed to those majors in which students have to work to earn their grades. These majors are more of a breeze or compliment to the athletic world in which student-athletes are already invested.

Dumb Jock (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2002): “both black and white [students], are steered to an academic curriculum that is less than challenging in order that they remain eligible to participate in their sport” (p. 36).

Contact Period (NCAA Division I Website. 2011): “during this time, a coach may have in-person contact with you and / or your parents on or off the college’s campus. The coach may also watch you play or visit your high school. You and your parents may visit a college campus and the coach may write and telephone you during this period.”

Dead Period (NCAA Division I Website. 2011): “the college coach may not have any in-person contact with you or your parents at any time in this dead period. The coach may write and telephone you and your parents during this time.”

Official Visit (NCAA Division I Website. 2011): “any visit to a college campus by you and your parents paid for by the college. The college may pay the following expenses: your transportation to and from the college, room and meals (three per day) while you are visiting the college, and reasonable entertainment expenses, including three complimentary admissions to a home athletics contest.”

Unofficial Visit (NCAA Division I Website. 2011): “any visit by you and your parents to a college campus paid for by you and your parents. The only expense you may receive from the college is three complimentary admissions to a home athletics contest. You may make as many unofficial visits as you like and may take those visits at any time.

The only time you cannot talk with a coach during an unofficial visit is during a dead period.”

Quiet Period (NCAA Division I Website, 2011): “the college coach may not have any in-person contact with you or your parents off the college’s campus. The coach may not watch you play or visit your high school during this period. You and your parents may visit a college campus during this time. A coach may write or telephone you or your parents during this time.”

Overview of Study

The present study was designed to afford the researcher a deeper look into the lives of a number of college athletes and how they went about approaching the experiences of higher education while being engulfed in their sport. Contained in chapter I are the introduction to the study, a statement of purpose, the research questions that guided the present study, a list of limitations, and definitions of terms as they relate to the present study. Contained in Chapter II will be a review of related literature regarding the lives of college athletes in general. Specific attention is devoted to research studies and books regarding the collegiate experiences of athlete students including, but not limited to, the following areas of concern: recruitment processes, matriculation, interactions with other athlete students and non-athlete students (i.e., peers), academic (classroom) experiences, mentoring and post graduation expectations.

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

In *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, Kimmel (2008) dedicates an entire chapter to sports in which he discusses how young men live, eat, drink, and sleep sports, possibly starting at an early age before they become attracted to members of the opposite sex. Even though Kimmel focuses on men and their psychosocial development, the chapter is relevant to both genders in that women who are passionate athletes share some of the same experiences and characteristics. The categories that seem to be more specific to men than women are: “loving sports, the crying game, and sports vs. girls” (p. 123-134). Though these categories, Kimmel discusses how men are more inclined to show emotion than hold back emotion when talking about sports than possibly women. More importantly, “breathing sports” allows for men and women alike to connect with someone they may care about during ordinary interpersonal conversation. The driving forces behind male or female athletes playing sports and performing well may include providing those who are important in their lives opportunities to experience pride in their accomplishments. The majority of student athletes at the collegiate level begin participating in sports they love at a young age and this quite often means family members and coaches have supported them throughout the entirety of their athletic endeavors.

Recruiting Process

One of the biggest factors in a student choosing an institution or university as a place to play their sport for the next four years is the recruiting process. More now than ever before, student athletes have a say in which institution they want to attend to play

the sport they love, and what coaches or athletic department officials say may sway the athlete's decision one way or another. In "Factors influencing the college selection process of student athletes: Are their factors similar to non-athletes," Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, and Palmer (2003) focus on five factors that influence teenagers to choose a school: degree program options, head or position coach, academic support services on campus, community in which the campus is located, and the school's sports traditions. All of these contribute to the overall liking or disliking an athlete takes to a specific institution. Among the many things the authors suggest which do not influence the decision making process, yet may be critical factors, are college choice of friends, prospects of television exposure, other non-athletic related factors (financial aid), school colors, and opinions of high school teammates. With all these important factors coming into play, and the voices of both the institution and parents in a student's ear, a high school athlete still chooses a school he or she sees as a best fit at the moment.

The recruiting process has made all the sports television channels for all the wrong reasons, as of late, with improper benefits being given to prospective student athletes. With the advancement in technology (accessibility to prospects), many coaches, boosters and others seem to be getting caught more often now than ever before. Wolverton (2011) wrote an article on the recruitment of college athletes and their overall thoughts about their own recruitment which he titled "Elite athletes say many coaches stretch the truth in recruiting." Wolverton described the enticement offered one student-athlete: "One former high-school recruit says coaches told him they would change their offense to suit his style. That didn't happen." During recruitment, college coaches face the ultimate challenge of getting a teenage student-athlete to commit to their institution

and program over handfuls of college coaches seeking that same student. Coaches do whatever it takes to woo that indecisive student athlete to get him or her on campus.

Wolverton also discusses how the student-athletes are partly to blame as well, suggesting that not all recruitment violations belong to the coaches. "More than a quarter (of athletes surveyed) said they would take \$50,000 from a recruiter if they knew that no one would find out." The issue that has come to the spotlight as individuals are getting caught is that athletes that are currently professionals are being penalized for their actions as a teenager.

In juxtaposition to what Wolverton (2011) reported, some college student athletes have only been overwhelmed by the recruitment process from high school to college, but not wooed or bribed in any way. Sander (2008) wrote:

Despite all the alarm that recruiting in college sports has spun out of control, for many athletes the process was neither as intrusive, nor as lavish, as its critics have warned, according to a *Chronicle* survey of hundreds of current Division I athletes.

Sander also wrote "For college athletes, recruiting is a fair (but flawed) game" in which student athletes were asked about their overall recruitment process from prep school to the collegiate atmosphere. In a (2008) survey, *The Chronicle* asked current college student athletes at the time about their overall recruitment, mainly revolving around the overwhelming time spent in contact with the perspective college coach. Of the approximately 300 surveyed, most stated "the institutions they now attend were fairly portrayed to them during the recruiting process," while a select few did not commit to that statement. Sander also defers to the National Collegiate Athletic Association in stating, "NCAA rules governing athletics recruiting have grown ever more intricate, restricting how and when coaches may communicate with prospective athletes." Sanders continues by confirming how the rules are put in place to help the perspective athletes

from becoming overwhelmed and too engulfed with calls from coaches instead of focusing on finishing a high school career strongly.

With the times changing and the overall access to student athletes more immediate due to technology, the NCAA has put forth new rules and guidelines when it comes to recruitment via social media. In “Social media and recruiting” (2011), NCAA website officials have acknowledged the continually changing media and make the following statement:

NCAA rules do not allow comments about possible recruits on an institution’s social media page or a page belonging to someone affiliated with the institution. In addition, these pages cannot feature photos of prospects and messages cannot be sent to recruits using these social media technologies (Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, etc.) other than their e-mail function.

Coaches and institution officials are more cautious when using technological advancements as recruiting tools, knowing the NCAA has made more rules and regulations regarding such media. Not only are institutional officials and coaches concerned about social media, another item they have to take into consideration is when a prospect may or may not be contacted. Such periods are known as *contact periods* or *dead periods*. The contact period allows for coaches to watch the prospect play and have full in-person contact with the athlete and the parents; a coach may e-mail or telephone the student as well during this period. The dead period restricts the coach from any in-person contact or even watching the student play; however, the coach is allowed to write or telephone the student athlete during this period.

Academic Success

Before even entering visiting a college campus or being admitted to a college, some athletes have more power than society recognizes. Getting admitted to college is not an easy task for many. Due to heavy involvement in athletics and not having time to

focus on academics, many high school students face the challenge of having the grades to support athletic talents. In “Intercollegiate athletes and effective educational practices: Winning combination or losing effort,” Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) discuss college admissions processes and requirements and how certain athletes who lacked the grades actually received an acceptance letter due to their athletic ability, gained through the channels of the athletic department. Admissions have seemed to allow low-test scorers to file in and fill up college classrooms. The authors stated, “Research suggests that student-athletes routinely receive preferential treatment in the admissions process and are more likely to be academically under-prepared than their peers” (p. 710). For athletic departments to have the power to dictate which students are allowed to attend the university is unique in and of itself. Athletes who get admitted because of their athletic skill set(s) and because a specific coach sees that individual fitting the program well are seldom admitted based on how they have performed in high school, on standardized tests, or their potential to perform in the classroom. Poor performance in the classroom seldom results in limited performance opportunity on the playing surface.

In order to combat the lack of passion for other academic subject areas, athletes do what is best for them to achieve the minimum grade-point average that will allow them to receive maximum awards for their athletic performances. Often, athletes who are truly undecided regarding a major choose a degree program that will keep them involved and geared towards athletics (e.g., Sports Management, Radio/TV Broadcasting). Suggs (2003) wrote “Jock majors,” in which he describes “guaranteed majors” as opposed to academic majors in which students have to work hard to earn their grades. Suggs also writes, “Whether or not [institutions] admit it, academic advisers sometimes steer athletes

into specific courses and degree programs to make it easier for them to meet the NCAA's academic standards." In this tactful advising, the athlete is happy because he or she is going to graduate with a degree (with possibly the lowest grade point average needed to be eligible for sports participation), instead of remaining on the sidelines because of academic ineligibility.

Not only do specific degree programs get labeled as "jock majors," student athletes at the collegiate level must also endure the myth of being characterized as dumb jocks. In "African-American college athletes: Debunking the myth of the dumb jock," issues of being viewed as an illiterate, undeserving, athlete are discussed. While debunking these notions of stupidity and bearing the responsibility to prove some sort of worthiness, the author states, "Both black and white, are steered to an academic curriculum that is less than challenging in order that they remain eligible to participate in their sport" (p. 36). Making an argument as to why African-American athletes are successful in the classroom, the author goes out on the limb by stating that any race is pushed to easier majors, so that athletes remain eligible to play for their teams. The confusion for the athlete-student comes from the contradictory positions of first praising admission departments for their efforts in accepting minority students, and the bashing athletic departments receive for focusing almost exclusively on athletic performance to the detriment of student involvement in the university experience as a whole.

Just as the NCAA has kept up with the importance of not overwhelming students with recruiting efforts, the NCAA takes the academic success of college student athletes very seriously as well. There are many different ways an athlete can stay eligible for a given institution. On the NCAA website page "Eligibility" (updated April 2010), college

student athletes have two main requirements to follow in order to continue being eligible once in college. Officials of the NCAA write:

Student-athletes must complete 40 percent of the coursework required for a degree by the end of their second year, 60 percent by the end of their third year and 80 percent by the end of their fourth year. Student-athletes are allowed five years to graduate while receiving athletically related financial aid. All student-athletes must earn a minimum of six hours each term to be eligible the next semester.

If a student were considered or ruled ineligible, he or she must comply with the regulations before applying for what is known as reinstatement. Upon receiving an application for reinstatement, the NCAA decides one of three options: “reinstatement, reinstatement with conditions, or denial.” If denial or reinstatement with conditions is the ruling, the institution has a right to participate in an appeals process. In order to show full dedication to academic success, the NCAA, with the help of Division I institution presidents, have adopted a *Graduation Success Rate* statistic in which the graduation rates of all student athletes by institution and by sport will be published to “accurately reflect the mobility among all college students...it differs from the methodology of the rate mandated by the federal government,” because the government rate does not include incoming transfer students who graduate and student athletes that transfer as non-graduates.

Athletic Career

Specifically, the title of student-athlete seems to have lost its meaning due to coaches being more concerned with the program than the athletes’ academic life. In “Are athletes also students? The educational attainment of college athletes,” Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel tend to mock actually putting “student” first. Sections of the study revolve around the importance of marketing and the constant flow of money sports programs

bring into a university. However, the authors' focal point rotates around athletes' versus non-athletes' academic lives when they state, "Our research assesses the degree to which college athletes are disadvantaged educationally by their sports participation" (p. 440). Spotlighting the differences between athletes and non-athletes, the researchers discussed issues of gender, race, sport specificity, and scholarship status. The findings suggested that athletes were less ready for college upon immediate graduation from high school than those who did not partake in athletics while attending high school.

Balancing sports, academics, and a social life at the collegiate level encompasses far greater stressors than at the secondary education level. There is a sense of understanding that at the high school level, an athlete could possibly have a full time or part-time job outside of the school environment. However, at the collegiate level, that job may be the respective sport. In an article titled "Self-efficacy, stress, and academic success in college," Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) focus on traditional students instead of athletes. The main point of the arguments made is that if "regular" students have a certain amount of stress which often results in lack of self-efficacy and difficulty meeting academic requirements, athlete students are beset with similar concerns at the collegiate level. The theory really just involves the academic aspect of all three variables, but an athlete would have to add the additional stress from his or her respective sport. The authors define generalized stress as, "a state of psychological arousal that results when external demands tax or exceed a person's adaptive abilities" (p. 679). For an athlete, the leap from high school to collegiate level sports is extreme. When a student is recruited at the high school ranks, he or she is often one of the best athletes at their school or within their district. The transition to the college level most likely results

in that athlete being the third, fourth, or even fifth best on the team; this added pressure of performing as well as, if not better than, in high school may add to distraction from scholarly productivity.

In the article, "Great expectations: An examination of the differences between high and low expectancy athletes' perception of coach treatment," it is noted that coaches tend to treat star athletes differently than a role player. Within the research, two different theories are put into practice, a six stage approach and a four stage approach. The longer process is:

A coach forms an expectancy about an athlete, the coach behaves in a manner congruent with his or her expectancy, the athlete interprets the coach's behavior, the athlete responds to the coach's behavior, the coach interprets the athlete's response, and, finally, the athlete interprets his or her personal response to the coach's behavior (359)

Within this process, the athlete and coach may end up on the same page, or completely opposite of what is expected of the other. So, when centering around a coach's approach to the player regardless of his or her role and personality, the six step approach allows for the coach to change his or her coaching towards the player; thus creating a unique relationship between coach and player. Each athlete will need to build a personal relationship with the coach because each athlete will differ in coaching styles (and relationships) needed in order to succeed.

One of the many jobs a coach holds is motivating his or her players on and off the playing surface. What seems to be interesting is how coaches use aggression or other harsh forms to motivate their players. For example, Bob Knight, former basketball coach at the University of Indiana at Bloomington, experienced some players responding very well to his aggressive and harsh style of coaching and were fine with it. In "Relationship

between coaches' use of behavior alteration techniques and verbal aggression on athletes' motivation and affect," Martin, Rocca, Cayanus, and Weber (2009) discuss the issues of rewards and punishments, on and off the field of play. Their research states, "When coaches tell their players that they are stupid, yell at their players when they make mistakes, and tease their players in an attempt to motivate their players, players report that they are less motivated to participate and are less likely to like their coaches" (p. 233). The study shows one way athletes may react to an aggressive coach, but in actuality all players are not the same and some welcome the yelling as a source of motivation.

Social Experiences

Throughout the sports world, athletes are bound to get injured and their relationships once again take another twist. When an athlete is injured, does he / she get treated differently because of what has transpired? In "Injured athletes' perceptions of the social support provided by their coaches and teammates during rehabilitation," Corbillon, Crossman, and Jamieson (2008) discuss social support to an injured athlete and the role coaches and teammates play. The study reads, "Throughout the duration of an injury, athletes will typically require more emotional support at the beginning of their injury than when they return to competition" (p. 94). The individuals surrounding the injured player need to continue to show support on and off athletic facilities. When a player is injured, he or she is more likely to feel unwanted or unneeded, especially if the athlete played a key role on the team in the first place. Sport related injuries are among the many different facets that play a role in a college athlete's everyday life. Putting oneself at harm or risk for the greater good of the team is just one of those unthought-of expectations.

Even more than looking at the different injury processes and how they affect an athlete's well-being and social life, college is known as a time for students to find

themselves whether that is going out and partying or staying in and focusing on academics. In “An alarming number of college athletes charged with serious crime”, Benedict (2010) writes, in regard to the social scene, about the outrageous comparisons between college athletes and professionals. With the majority of the study focusing around the major sports of football and basketball, (NCAA, NFL, and NBA) college athletes have far more run-ins with law enforcement officials than do their professional counterparts. With crimes including a plethora of different offenses, Benedict focuses on the types of crimes with the greatest number of incidents. Over the course of the 2009-2010 school year, drugs and alcohol, assault and battery, robbery, weapons, and domestic violence were the most frequent offenses. Benedict reported that as of August 2010, 125 college and professional football and basketball players had been arrested on serious charges. Additionally, 70 of the 125 players arrested were college football players. Of the 55 cases remaining, 15 involved college basketball athletes, leaving 40 of the 125 total incidents to the professionals. The numbers presented may be a bit more skewed due to the greater number of college athletes in comparison to the number of professional athletes throughout the nation. The other factor one needs to take into consideration is the availability the different athletes have to certain situations. College student athletes have a higher risk being the most visible group on college campuses, while professionals have to go out of their way, in most cases, to seek out excitement.

The social scene is not just inclusive of committing crimes, drinking, and partying, et cetera. College student athletes face a great deal of pressure from family, coaches, friends, and peers, many of whom they have never personally met. The pressure is to make everyone else proud, whether that means within the sport of choice, the

classroom, or college life in general. In an effort to grow as an individual, students attending college away from home experience the need to find, an identity. In searching for the different characteristics that builds the self, students use a number of locations, organizations, and ideas to adjust and adapt to make their own to fit who they truly are. Jacobson (2002) wrote “The loneliest athletes” in which she discusses the lives of athletes that act one way but deep down inside have the opposite sexual preference. Jacobson writes, “At most colleges, the athletics department is the most homophobic place on campus. The culture of sports tends to be conservative, and most people within it equate male heterosexuality with strength—and homosexuality with weakness.” College athletes, regardless of sexual orientation, have this understanding of strength and weakness, and when a student athlete does find himself or herself in a questioning situation, the ideals of strength and weakness arise. Student athletes who may be of the GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender) community feel a need to hide themselves until the last possible second. This is what Jacobson describes in a section subtitled “Quiet in the closet.” Having a sexual orientation different than the rest of the teammates and possibly other athletes creates an uneasy environment for that particular student athlete. He or she will be looked at differently not only in the sport of choice or in the classroom, but definitely on the social scene.

The NCAA is proactive in helping students with life outside of the sports world and academics. In their own survey to find out what is going to best suit the athletes, the NCAA, on the website page “Life Balance” (2011), indicates understanding of the time commitment sports draws out of athlete-students. Creators of the website state,

There are tradeoffs to keeping such a hectic pace, however in multiple studies, student-athletes acknowledge, not surprisingly, that athletics commitments do cut

into their participation in other campus activities, their ability to work to earn extra spending money and even affect their academic performance.

During one study, the top three extracurricular activities among college athletes outside of their respective sport and academics were determined to be intramurals, academic groups, and religious groups. Among trying to find multiple ways to assist the transitioning of high school students to the collegiate level, the NCAA also takes initiative in helping students become more educated about alcohol and drug use and healthy choices.

Institution

Eastern Illinois University is a mid-size institution located in the east-central region of the state within 40 miles of the Illinois-Indiana border. With an annual enrollment of approximately 12,000+ students, the institution has strong athletic history and traditions. Of the 12,000 students, 400 are involved in intercollegiate sports competition. The university supports 21 sports teams:

Football, Baseball, Men's Basketball, Men's Cross Country, Men's Golf, Men's Soccer, Men's Swimming, Men's Tennis, Men's Indoor Track, Men's Outdoor Track, Softball, Women's Rugby, Women's Basketball, Women's Cross Country, Women's Golf, Women's Soccer, Women's Swimming, Women's Tennis, Women's Indoor Track, Women's Outdoor Track, and Women's Volleyball.

The NCAA and E.I.U.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a governing body over collegiate athletic departments in the nation, but even with the required policies and procedures each institution has to follow, any given institution is allowed to implement and create its own mandates as long as they comply with the guidelines of NCAA requirements. Each

student that steps foot on the campus of Eastern Illinois University as an athlete is directed to the Student Athlete Handbook (2011). The handbook, an extensive document, starts off with a letter from the Athletic Director, followed by an explanation of the mission, values, and philosophy of the athletic department. An open letter from the Athletic Director states, “Eastern Illinois University is dedicated to being the best in the nation in the integrated academic and personal development of students” (p.3). Just as the NCAA has requirements, policies and procedures all members of athletics departments and student athletes are expected to adhere to, the institution requires their athletes to exude excellence on and off the field as well.

E.I.U. Athletic Recruitment

Just as the coaches and athletic departments have guidelines, current student athletes that help out with the recruitment of *prospective student athletes* have guidelines as well. Current student athletes play host to high school or transfer athletes interested in playing at E.I.U. in their respective sport (i.e., a current football player will play host to a high school football standout). These host athletes have specific instructions outlined in the Student Athlete Handbook for *official visits* regarding the recruitment of a *prospective athlete*. The handbook depicts the specific requirements to current athletes by stating:

You are responsible to behave in an appropriate manner and to utilize good judgment...Alcohol and drugs have no place in the recruitment process...You are responsible for keeping your recruit on time for all appointments...The student-athlete host money may be used only for you, your recruit, your recruit’s parents/legal guardians and athletic department personnel for meals and permissible (legal) entertainment/activities...The recruit may be entertained only within a 30-mile radius of campus...You will need your own transportation...Representatives of the University’s athletic process (e.g., boosters) are not allowed to be involved in recruiting a prospect (52).

E.I.U. Athletes’ Academics Experience

A great portion of the Student Athlete Handbook revolves around the academic success and variety of approaches in achieving academic excellence. In the effort to push student-athletes to succeed in academics just as much as within their sports, Eastern Illinois University has dedicated a service center specifically for student-athletes. The initiative put in place to oversee the academic success according to the handbook is: “The Panther Athletic Support Services (PASS) unit oversees the academic and compliance efforts of the Intercollegiate Athletic Department” (p. 12). PASS is put in place to provide the opportunity and oversee that student-athletes are getting their work done in order to stay eligible and supportive. Within the PASS program, students are required to complete a number of study hours. “...Student-athletes with a cumulative grade point average of 2.50 or below are required...two-to-six hours per week. All incoming freshman and transfer(s)...are also required...a minimum of four to six hours per week” (p. 13). Not only are there programs and expectations put in place to meet and exceed a certain GPA requirement, but student-athletes at Eastern have to follow a number of procedures regarding class attendance, dropping classes, excessive absences, academic standing, and compliance and eligibility (p. 17-21). In addition to the above stated variety of procedures, athletic department staff keep students on task by comprehensive monitoring of the academic process via an Academic Support Program. “The major components of the [Academic Support Program] are:

Orientation sessions which supplement those of the University; development of an academic plan with updated time management schemes for each semester that balance the academic, social, and athletic responsibilities of the student-athlete; consistent monitoring of students academic progress and study table requirements; and availability of a professional tutorial staff that reinforces the classroom teaching (14).

In compliance with the NCAA, Eastern has a portion of the Student Athlete Handbook to provide the athlete with sufficient knowledge of what to expect as far as hours taken up by the sport of choice. In a section titled “Playing and Practice Limitations,” the handbook states: “A maximum of four hours per day and twenty hours per week of countable activities; competition counts as three hours per day for ALL sports; and a required day off per week with no countable activities” (p. 24). What is also explained to student athletes, both current and prospective, are non-compliant interactions student-athletes have with boosters as well as taking extra benefits that are not permissible to other students of the institution or university. A specific section of the handbook is also dedicated to benefits and agreements student-athletes must follow titled “Student-Athlete Statements” (p. 9). Within such statements, student-athletes agree to not break their amateurism as a collegiate athlete, accept awards, benefits and expenses that are not “available to the general student-body,” and abiding by not participating in any discriminatory acts (p. 9). Along with the participation in the sport of choice and statements, student-athletes are asked to wear E.I.U. athletic gear during team activities and on the road.

E.I.U. Athlete’s Social Experiences

In agreement with the University Student Handbook (2011) and the NCAA, the Student Athlete Handbook also provides athletes with substance abuse policies, drug education, testing procedures, and violations. In a section dedicated to what most individuals believe is the social life revolving around college student-athletes, Eastern Illinois University has taken the proactive approach to educating their athletes on the information so that they know the violations and approaches upfront as opposed to after

the fact. The handbook further emphasizes the importance of being proactive by stating: “it is mandatory that each student-athlete and each sport’s coaching staff attend a drug and alcohol education session each academic year” (p. 38). Also described to athletes and coaches are the different violations and testing procedures one has to follow. “All selection for testing is done randomly by the National Center for Drug Free Sport EXCEPT when a student-athlete is selected due to reasonable suspicion” (p.39). The reasonable suspicion varies but the majority revolve around a student-athlete being alleged or having given three or more dilute samples (in compliance with the NCAA) (p.39).

Alcohol and drugs are not the only social activities in which collegiate athletes get involved. One of the greatest activities outside of the respective sport an athlete partakes in is intramural sports. There are rules and guidelines that a student athlete must meet before participating in such sporting events. In the section “Intramural Sports Participation” the athletes understand, “NO varsity athlete is to compete in ANY intramural sporting contest without first securing permission from his/her coach” (p. 53). Furthermore, student-athletes injured in intramurals have to pay their own medical expenses, and those that are on scholarship and get injured put their scholarship in jeopardy.

Eastern provides a number of other opportunities for social experiences, some of which are within team activities. A social experience teams tend to participate in is giving back to the community. Serving the community is one of the main focuses with the core values of the athletic department (p. 4).

Chapter II Summary

To go from having a teenager make a decision on which school to attend, to carrying out a childhood dream of being an athlete, to getting that student on campus and allowing them success in the academic, athletic and social realms is no easy feat. Student athletes are pulled and pushed in all sorts of directions by their friends, coaches, professors, family, and teammates. Is being the athlete everyone is cheering for all that it is hyped up to be, or are the pressures of being a jock too much? Student athletes live the lives many seek to enjoy, but with all the pressures and eyes lurking, one might not seek the excitement and thrill of competing after being on campus.

Chapter III

Methodology

Methodology of Data Collection

A mixed (qualitative/quantitative) approach was used in the collection of data for the present study. Specifically, 12 athletes from twelve different teams at Eastern Illinois University were interviewed about their overall recruiting process and how they chose this specific institution. Each participant, a senior athlete or athlete in the last year of eligibility, was presented with a number of questions about their overall experiences of being recruited until their current state as college athletes. Their one on one interview with the primary researcher was approximately 30 minutes to 45 minutes to complete. The interviews occurred in the fall semester in which the primary researcher and student-athlete met in an office style setting. The athletes were contacted by email and phone to confirm their interest in helping with the study. The questions covered their athletic, academic, and social life, and how they felt about their overall experience thus far.

As for the quantitative approach of the process, using a survey distributed to FBS athletes by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) titled “National Study of Student Athletes Regarding Their Experiences as College Students” (2006) a random sampling of the athletes of the institution was gathered. The survey was distributed by the primary researcher with the help of the help of Academic Services for Student Athletes at study tables. These surveys were also distributed in the fall semester to 30 random athletes who were willing to participate. Of the surveys that were distributed, 27 were returned as successfully completed and secured in an envelope. Each participant signed a consent form and all consent forms were placed separately from the completed surveys.

These athletes did not have to be a specific grade or eligibility level, as long as they were a current athlete of the institution. Questions for the survey focused on the overall college experience, commitment to education, contribution of athletics to student development, academic behaviors, non-financial support received, participation in campus and community educational opportunities, time-demands, and diversity experiences.

Research Questions

- (1) How does an athlete ultimately decide which school to attend in pursuit of both a college degree and athletic experience?
- (2) What do relationships between coaches and athletes look like from the view of the athletes?
- (3) How does one go about choosing a major that fits both the schedule of the sport and the interests of the athlete?
- (4) What sort of support are athletes feeling from those around them to continue to succeed?
- (5) How do athletes balance their academic, athletic, and social lives?

Methodology of Data Analysis / Presentation

The analysis of data consisted of the identification of themes, commonalities and dissimilarities between athlete student perceptions of their recruitment experiences, adjustments to the collegiate environment, interpersonal relationships, and their experiences as athlete-students in their chosen college environments. After the perceptions and experiences have been examined, suggestions for future researchers, student affairs administrators, and athletic coaches are made based on what the athletes have presented and stated.

Athletes focused on their lives and how the coaches have helped them once they stepped foot on campus. The data presentation process included an analysis of the most important factors that participants reported helped in the creation of a welcoming and experiential environment for college athletes. In response to the questions, there was overlapping of statements that will seem consistent and vital to the overall experience of college athletes and their views of being an athlete-student.

The data collected presents the balanced or unbalanced lives of college athletes. Both males and females were asked to participate to see if there is a different view or approach on college life between the genders.

Chapter III Summary

All participants in both approaches were given a consent form to fill out before the survey or interview began. This third chapter contains a description of the different methodologies in conducting the research, the instrumentation used, the approach to the data collection, and how the data will be presented for the present study in the chapters to come.

Chapter IV

Survey Findings

Introduction

This chapter contains the findings of the survey conducted for the present study. Data from the quantitative portion provide viable thoughts and experiences of the student-athlete participants. The following sections of the current chapter deliver responses from student-athletes with specific tables drawn out to illustrate the variety of replies.

The Survey

The “National Study of Student Athletes Regarding Their Experiences as College Students” was a survey conducted and distributed by the NCAA to Division 1A student-athletes by two professors at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. After obtaining permission for use, and a few minor adjustments to personalize the instrument to the target population, 30 surveys were distributed to student-athletes from freshmen to senior standing at Eastern Illinois University. Of the surveys distributed, 27 were returned with complete responses to the questions asked. The survey was comprised of 57 questions regarding with the overall experiences of college student-athlete while on campus at the respected institution.

Survey questions 1-3 sought demographic information; including current academic standing, sport of choice, and gender. The remaining 54 survey questions allowed student-athletes to describe their experiences thus far. Specifically, survey questions 4-8 inquired about the *overall* experience at Eastern Illinois University as both students and student-athletes. Questions 9-10 inquired about their commitment to

receiving a university education, while questions 11-14 queried about the contribution of athletics to their personal development. Responses to questions 15-27 indicated academic behavior(s) with focus on academic degree choices and personal focus on academics in general. Questions 28-35 were inquiries about types of support received (e.g., emotional, motivational, family) from individuals involved in the athletes' campus and personal lives. While questions 36-44 addressed participation in campus and community education opportunities, questions 45-52 addressed academic time demands and what student-athletes believed to be their time commitment to sports. The survey concluded with questions 53-57 regarding experiences with racial, ethnic and gender diversity.

Findings

Over the course of a college student athlete's secondary education career he or she must make a decision of where to continue an education and a passion for the sport of choice. In trying to combine both a worthwhile education program and growth in the once extracurricular, any given teenager must ultimately make the choice of which institution to attend. In electing one college over the next, a student athlete must take the recruitment of each institution into consideration as well as which place will ultimately be the best fit. The students surveyed and interviewed once had to make such a difficult choice, ultimately when all is said and done (true freshmen, transfer, walk-ons, etc.) decided as E.I.U as their collegiate home.

Research Question #1: How does an athlete ultimately decide which school to attend in pursuit of both a college degree and athletic experience?

In order to answer each research question, student responses to a select number of survey questions were conjoined. The first research question, for example, is addressed using the responses to questionnaire items 4, 8, and 10 in which student athletes describe

their perceptions, thoughts, and decision making process regarding their choice of Eastern Illinois University as the institution for their higher education and athletic experiences. *Survey Question*

Table 1

#4: *“If I could start all over again, I still would attend this university.”*

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	12	44.4
Agree	11	40.7
Somewhat Agree	4	14.8
Somewhat Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

For the majority of the participants, Eastern is still a choice for athletics and education. As the above chart indicates, more than 85% of the athletes surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that if they had the decision to begin their collegiate career again, E.I.U. would still be their institution of choice. Of the 27 student athletes who participated in the present study, only 4 (14.8%) were “somewhat” in agreement that they would enroll at E.I.U. if given the chance to do it over; knowing what they now know about themselves, the institution, and the sports program(s) in which they have been involved. Not one of the student athletes in the present study indicated being opposed to enrolling at the institution if given a second chance to do so.

Table 2

Survey Question #8: "My overall education has prepared me well for life after graduation."

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Completely Satisfied	4	14.8
Satisfied	14	51.9
Somewhat Satisfied	9	33.3
Somewhat Dissatisfied	0	0
Dissatisfied	0	0
Strongly Dissatisfied	0	0

After asking about making a decision on whether or not to come back to E.I.U. after knowing the details and what to expect, student athletes were asked about their satisfaction with being prepared for life post-graduation. To this inquiry, responses were more positive than negative in the sense of students being pleased with their overall experiences. As indicated in the above table, 18 (66.7%) of the students were either "satisfied" or "completely satisfied" with their preparation for life after graduation while the remaining 9 (33.3%) were only "somewhat satisfied". Most important to note is that none of the survey participating student athletes were even "somewhat dissatisfied" with the education they were receiving

Table 3

Survey Question #10: "If I could start over again at a D1A institution and financially did not need an athletic scholarship, I would still play a varsity sport."

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
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Strongly Agree	11	40.7
Agree	9	33.3
Somewhat Agree	3	11.1
Somewhat Disagree	1	3.7
Disagree	3	11.1
Strongly Disagree	0	0

Responses to this query suggest disparity between the athletes across the board. Twenty-two (85.1%) of the student athletes surveyed, if given the chance to enroll at a Division I school and participate in varsity sports without receiving financial support would do so. Disagreement with this statement was indicated by only 3 (11.1%) respondents. Interestingly, the number of student who “somewhat agree” to continuing in athletics regardless of financial support equals the number of individuals who “disagree” on continuing in their sport of choice regardless of financial support (e.g., athletic scholarship).

Research Question #2: What do relationships between coaches and athletes look like from the view of the athletes?

Student athletes communicated their perception about their relationships with the coaching staff at the institution under study. Questions #12, 14, and 29 relate to how the coaching staff has helped prepare the student athlete for the next stages of their lives.

Table 4

Survey Question #12: “My athletics participation has contributed to my overall university experience in preparing me for life after graduation.”

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
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Strongly Agree	13	48.1
Agree	8	29.6
Somewhat Agree	6	22.2
Somewhat Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0

On the basis of their participation in athletics, students mostly “agreed” with being prepared for life after graduation. As the above table indicates, 13 (48.1%) of the student athletes surveyed “strongly agreed” to being ready due to their participation in their sport of choice having set them up for life in professional athletics after the college ranks. Not one individual surveyed disagreed to being ready for the next step in life (playing for a professional or semi-professional sports team, continuing an education, or even going out into the workforce).

Table 5

Survey Question #14: How much do you believe that the personal contact you have developed through your participation in intercollegiate athletics will help you in getting a job or career you desire?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
A great deal of help	8	29.6
Some help	10	37.0
A little help	5	18.5
Not much help	3	11.1
No help at all	1	3.7

In regard to personal contacts potentially being helpful in getting into a desired career in the future, a variety of responses were indicated. The student athletes were diversified in believing that contacts made would or would not help them obtain a job in the future. Whereas the majority (18 or 66.0%) of the athletes believed contacts made at the collegiate level would help them get the future jobs they want, 9 (33.3%) perceived contacts made during their collegiate careers would be of “little” to “no help at all.”

Table 6

Survey Question #29: How do you assess the influence of your college coaches on your academic goals?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Positive	26	96.3
Negative	1	3.7

The influence of coaches on knowledge acquisition goes much further than just within the particular sport of choice, and when asked about their coaches’ influences on their academics, 26 (96.3%) reported positive experiences whereas only one student reported having had negative experiences.

Research Question #3: How does one go about choosing a major that fits both the schedule of the sport and the interests of the athlete?

Student-athletes face the challenges of balancing life as an everyday task. The term student generally comes before the word athlete when references are made to individuals who fit both categories. Because academics are considered the root for furthering an athlete’s personal life, the student-athletes surveyed were given opportunity to provide feedback on their overall academic experiences thus far. Survey questions 23-

27 asked student-athletes to provide their perspectives on their overall academic careers and support received during their time at the university. In response to survey question #3, “What was your primary reason for choosing your major”, the below table contains the frequency of responses to each option. A majority (21 or 77.8%) reported “reasons unrelated to athletics” as influencing the selection of their academic majors. Whereas the “ability to stay eligible to complete” and “scheduling conflicts between classes and athletic schedules” were reported as primary reasons for major selections, 6 students (22.2%) indicated reasons other than eligibility requirements and scheduling conflicts as reasons for the selection of their current majors.

Table 7

Survey Question #23: What was your primary reason for choosing your major?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
To stay eligible to compete	3	11.1
Scheduling conflicts between classes and athletic schedule	1	3.7
Because of transfer	0	0
Other athletic related reasons	2	7.4
Reason unrelated to athletics	21	77.8

When asked to identify their reasoning behind picking a degree program, three of every four individuals reported choosing a major for reasons unrelated to their athletic program. The other four (14.8%) student-athletes took into consideration their athletic program in choosing a major. Three individuals chose a degree in order to be able to

continue playing their sport, while one individual considered scheduling conflicts when deciding.

Table 8

Survey Question #24: Did your athletics participation prevent you from majoring in what you really wanted?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	7	25.9
No	20	74.1

Just as in the previous question, a majority felt that their athletics had no influence in choosing a major of their choice. A number of students felt that their academics prevented them from gaining the educational content of their choice. A student who previously (Research Question 23) stated that their primary reasoning behind choosing a major was not related to athletics, indicated that athletic participation prevented him or her from majoring in a degree of their choice.

Table 9

Survey Question #26: "I view myself as more of an athlete than a student."

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	5	19.2
Agree	7	26.9
Somewhat Agree	6	22.2
Somewhat Disagree	3	11.5
Disagree	5	19.2
Strongly Disagree	0	0

To the inquiry about viewing themselves as more of an athlete than a student, the majority of the student athletes surveyed (18 or 72.3%) stated that being an athlete took precedence. As indicated in the above chart, only eight of the participants viewed themselves as students first, but none of the eight “strongly disagree” with being viewing themselves as an athlete first and a student secondarily.

Table 10

Survey Question #27: “I feel that what it takes to be a good athlete is very different from what it takes to be a good student.”

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	2	7.7
Agree	4	15.4
Somewhat Agree	4	15.4
Somewhat Disagree	8	30.8
Disagree	4	15.4
Strongly Disagree	4	15.4

The participants were allowed to compare their lives as good athletes and lives as good students in responding to what they perceive to be expectations of them in each role. Only 10 of the participants (38.5%) believed there was a difference between a “good athlete” and a “good student,” while the majority (16 or 61.6%) indicated perceiving no real difference among the two roles.

Research Question #4: What sort of support are athletes feeling from those around them to continue to succeed?

Student-athletes indicated feeling support and encouragement to continue to succeed in athletics and life from many sources. When given the chance to identify these sources, student-athletes in the present study were quick to identify faculty for their support and willingness to help. Questions #32, 34 and 35 within the survey contained options for the athletes to identify and describe their perceptions of faculty support.

Table 11

Survey Question #32: How do you assess the influence of professors in the courses of your major?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Positive	27	100.0
Negative	0	0

All 27 survey participants (100%) indicated feeling positively with regard to support to succeed received from the professors within their majors. Others who were viewed just as positively viewed included academic advisors in the athletic department, academic advisors in academic departments, in addition to favorite professors outside their chosen majors.

Table 12

Survey Question #34: "I feel that some of my professors discriminate against me because I am an athlete."

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	1	3.7
Agree	2	7.4
Somewhat Agree	3	11.1

Somewhat Disagree	4	14.8
Disagree	9	33.3
Strongly Disagree	8	29.6

While professors that are within a major were favored, as well as professors that were identified as “favorites,” participants described several professors a bit more critically, dependent upon their perceptions of how student athlete are generally treated. When asked about professors discriminating against them because of their being an athlete, the majority of participants (21) disagreed that a faculty member would hold different expectations due to someone being an athlete or not. Six student-athletes (25.9%) “strongly or somewhat agreed” with this statement, while 21 (77.7%) “somewhat” or “strongly disagreed” with an instructor discriminating against them because of their athletic status alone.

Table 13

Survey Question #35: “I feel that some of my professors favor me because I am an athlete.”

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	1	3.7
Agree	5	18.5
Somewhat Agree	6	22.2
Somewhat Disagree	2	7.4
Disagree	7	25.9
Strongly Disagree	6	22.2

When responding to the survey question inquiring about perceptions of favoritism shown to them because of their status as athletes, participants were almost equally split in their feelings. As indicated in the above table, a little less than half of the athletes (12 or 44.4%) felt there was some sort of favoritism shown toward them because of the role they have outside of the classroom. Conversely, a few more than half (15 or 55.5%) disagreed with the notion that they might receive special attention from the faculty members because of their status as student-athletes.

Research Question #5: How do athletes balance their academic, athletic, and social lives?

A life of academia, sports, and socializing needs balance and the athletes surveyed were allowed to reflect on their ability to time balance commitments. In an effort to better understand their perceptions of how much time was spent in each area, student-athletes indicated the amount of hours spent in their academic, athletic, and social lives in terms of (a) time spent at home during breaks or university vacations, (b) practice time and actual game hours spent during a given week, and (c) their overall perception of socializing time spent with individuals from different backgrounds.

Table 14

Survey Question #45: During a typical week during your athletic season, on average, how many hours per week do you spend on practicing sports?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
More than 10	21	77.8
9-10	3	11.1
7-8	2	7.4

5-6	0	0
3-4	1	3.7
2-1	0	0
0	0	0

Students' perceptions on their time spent at practice over a week during their athletic season is presented in the above chart. Overwhelmingly consistent is that most (21 or 77.8%) believed themselves to have spent more than 10 hours in practice each week. The remaining 6 student-athletes reported having spent less than 10 hours combined for any given week.

Table 15

Survey Question #46: During a typical week during your athletic season, on average, how many hours per week do you spend on playing sports?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
More than 10	9	36.0
9-10	1	4.0
7-8	3	12.0
5-6	3	12.0
3-4	7	28.0
2-1	2	8.0
0	0	0

While each sport is different in the duration of games, matches, or meets, a third of the survey participants (9 or 36.0%) believed they spent more than 10 hours on the playing field during a given week within their season. Another 9 (36.0%) believed their

game time lasted anywhere between one hour to four hours per week. The close distribution of responses, suggest that the amount of time student-athletes spent participation in playing their sport depended on the given sport of choice.

Table 16

Survey Question #49: Have you spent as much time on athletic competition participation as you want to spend?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	26	96.3
No	1	3.7

As the responses listed in the above chart show, the high demand of practice and competitive play hours were in keeping with their expectations. Only one student-athlete surveyed expressed not spending as much time on athletics as they wanted to spend. More than 10 hours of practicing time and play in competitive contests any given week during a season seemed to be what student athletes wanted to spend.

Table 17

Survey Question #57: Do you believe your athletic participation has had an effect on your interactions and experiences with people from other racial and ethnic groups?

Response Options	Frequency	Valid Percent
Interactions would have been more negative had I not played	7	25.9
Interactions would have been unaffected by participation in varsity sports	17	63.0

Interactions would have been more positive had I not played	3	11.1
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Being social and balancing a social life involved interactions with members of other racial and ethnic groups. Add the effect of athletic participation, and the figures listed in the above table tell the story. Specifically, survey question 57 allowed the student-athletes to indicate their perceptions and social interactions with others based on their participation with athletics. While the majority (17 or 63.0%) of student-athletes believed their interactions with people different from themselves would have been unaffected regardless of playing sports or not, their peers (10 or 37.0%) believed otherwise. Of this latter number, seven (25.9%) believed interactions with people outside their racial or ethnic backgrounds would be more negative had they not played. Only three student-athletes believed more positive interactions with members of other racial or ethnic people possible had they not played a sport.

Chapter IV Summary

In trying to obtain as much information as possible about E.I.U. student-athletes and their overall experiences at the collegiate level, information gathered from the survey component of the present study allows for a more in-depth look at the lives of college student-athletes on the E.I.U. campus. The majority of the findings from the quantitative portion of the study were positive. Students stated feeling support from coaches, academic staff, and faculty. As for the athletic component discrepancy surfaced when student-athletes spoke about time commitments, as some sports asked for more hours per week than others. Other disparities included but are not limited to feeling more of an

athlete than a student, interactions with diverse groups or individuals, and favoritism or discrimination from faculty.

Chapter V

Interview Findings

Introduction

The current chapter contains the findings of the interviews conducted for the present study. Data from the qualitative portion provide a more in-depth look at the discussion of student-athlete experiences and perceptions while on the college campus. The following chapter provides quotes from current senior student-athletes to inquiries by the primary researcher.

Findings

Twelve student-athletes were asked to participate in an interview consisting of 23 questions dealing with their individual recruitment process and their athletic, academic, and social experiences while on campus. The 12 student athletes were seniors or in their last year of eligibility representing 12 athletic teams. All interviews were conducted privately in closed quarters. After obtaining written consent from all participants, the primary researcher audio recorded all interviews. Following the completion of each interview, the primary researcher transcribed each recording to further analyze participants' responses to interview protocols. The primary researcher asked each interviewee upon completion of responses to interview protocols whether they had any other thoughts or reactions prior to leaving the interview that they would like to share.

Interview questions 1-6, 10, and 22 asked the student athlete about their reactions to a variety of recruitment questions. Most questions dealt with the student choosing Eastern Illinois University as their institution of choice. Interview questions 7, 12, and 15 allowed the student athletes to describe their educational experiences while on campus. Questions 8, 13, and 16 focused on the social atmosphere outside of athletic and

academic settings. While questions 9, 14, and 17 focused on the athletic experience, questions 11 and 18-21 gave student athletes a chance to describe influential people and the institution on preparing them for life post their university experiences. Each follow-up interview provided the student athlete an opportunity to share any information they deemed necessary and to clarify any of their initial responses to interview protocols.

Interview Question #1: What about Eastern made you decide this was the correct place for you to continue your education and participation in athletics?

In responding to this question, many student athletes excitedly talked about their coaches and academic scholarships in adoring and vibrant ways. Participant A, for example, spoke of the impression the recruiting coach had on him and instilled within him the desire to want to play at E.I.U.:

Well, I think (coach) really convinced me to come here because I thought that he was an easy going type of guy, funny, and had the personality of a coach that I wanted to play for.

Participant D expressed the same sentiments about how the coaching staff and their experience really helped his/her make the decision of continuing his/her academics and athletics at Eastern Illinois University when s/he said:

When the coaches came over to visit, they told me what they expected from me and what they expected from me in the classroom, and how they were going to help me accomplish my goals. I just felt that they were real with me.

...Others, however, chose to describe how the institution's size and location allowed them to gain the best experience. Participant E seemed to speak for all when s/he smiled and began to talk about the main administration building on campus which resembles a medieval castle but is affectionately referred to by students and faculty alike as Old Main. Initially a classroom building for grades K thru 12, today Old Main serves as both an academic and administrative building. Participant E stated:

For me, what really sold Eastern as the place to be was Old Main. The castle was so beautiful and while looking online, I knew that was the deal breaker (of attending or not attending).

Participant L's response reflected the sense of connection and comfort with the institution's size, location and physical beauty of campus, several participants in uniquely sentimental terms:

Well, I am getting a teaching degree, so teaching was my main reason for coming here. Then, the location of Eastern was appealing to me because I wanted something different than the suburbs [of Chicago]. Other than that, I really didn't do much research, I decided to come here, so I came for a campus visit. I did things a little unorthodox, but well, teaching was my main reason in addition to my sport of choice.

Most students had the talents to be recruited by other Division I coaches, but Participant L, in a unique situation, focused on the academic degree and then athletic talents to make a choice on institution.

Interview Question #2: In the overall recruiting process, when would you say you were first recruited / contacted by Eastern Illinois University coaches?

When asked about their recruitment experiences, most student athletes were able to pinpoint a specific time of their high school career when an E.I.U. coach made contact. The majority of the responses indicated receiving their initial contact from E.I.U. coaches sometime during their junior and senior years of high school. Participants B and L, however, described atypical circumstances in which they were the first to make contact with the university's coaches. Participant L's parents first contacted the coach and the subsequent recruitment efforts on the part of the coaches resulted in his or her deciding to enroll at E.I.U.. Participant B was not initially considered for the sport s/he wanted even though s/he had initiated first contact with the coaches:

My situation was a little bit atypical in that I thought I was going to play a different sport throughout my career so I was in contact with coaches for a different sport, until I got hurt. So, I actually made the first contact when I switched [to the current sport]. My name was not really out there so I was the one that had to make the first contact.

Based on their overall recruitment to become a student athlete at the collegiate level, student athletes were then asked to talk about their time being spent on campus and within their respective sport.

Interview Question #3: Have you had teammates who have decided to leave the program, and why do you feel that happened?

When responding to the question above regarding teammates leaving the program, all participants indicated having awareness of a teammate leaving the program during their collegiate experience. A majority of the responses dealt with a teammate being asked to leave due to grades and academic reasons, while others talked about teammates leaving because they did not want to pursue an athletic career anymore due to lack of playing time or simply leaving the university in search of other playing opportunities. Participant E discussed the difficulty of being a student athlete in addition to many other factors being the reason for teammates leaving:

It is hard to be a student-athlete, it's not for everyone. More athletes seem to continue to do it to please their parents while wanting to just have a normal college experience. So some of my teammates have left because they just wanted that extra time in their lives.

Participant J also described how sometimes life circumstances influence student athlete's decisions regarding leaving the team and / or the university versus remaining at the university but no longer being a member of the team. When describing a former teammate who was faced with making this decision, participant J shared the following:

Freshman year, there was a [*teammate*] that everyone loved but who didn't come back the next year because there was a lot of family issues and other things going on at home. But, as much as [*that individual*] loved [the sport], it just wasn't working well with what she was doing and what [that teammate] needed.

Obviously, you just have to respect that [athlete's decision]. Athletics gives you a

lot, but it also limits what you can do, as far as other extra-curriculars and whatnot. So, you just have to respect what that person needs.

Interview Question #4: Have you had teammates get recruited as transfers to the program and how do you feel they are treated in comparison to a four-year recruit?

On the alternative side of describing a teammate's leaving, student athletes were accepting and generous to teammates who transferred in from other schools.. A few of the participants talked about not really having anyone transfer in during their athletic careers, while the majority talked about having people transfer in and how the current athletes created a welcoming atmosphere for those new individuals. Participant K's response described an atmosphere that allowed for any athlete to be accepted and become a team member and invest themselves in the institution:

I have had almost as many transfers as people have left, which I think is a good thing because it shows people are excited about this school and I think for most people it was closer to home for them, they love the size of the school, they love the makeup of the team, the team is better, the atmosphere is better, and the coaching staff is better.

Instead of thinking constant change in personnel on a given team is a negative, Participant K and others enjoyed having teammates transfer in who were going to invest their time and talent in the program and the institution as a whole.

Interview Question #5: If you were put in charge of recruiting future athletes at Eastern Illinois University, what would be your selling point to prospective athletes?

In response to the above question, a number of selling points for coming to play for E.I.U. were expressed. Most participants stated they would talk about the hometown feel that the surrounding area provides, while others chose to highlight the size of the institution and how nice everyone is treated by the Eastern community and local residents. From the plethora of positive responses, it was evident that the friendliness of the community as a whole played a great role in what prospective students were to be told. Participant G, for example, described the closeness of all student-athletes in general, not just among members of a particular team. Participant D, on the other hand, was unable to describe specifically what features of the university and its academic and athletic experiences s/he would sell incoming student athletes on but believed that there was definitely something to sell. Participant K, unlike any peers, went a different route with of the following response:

That's a hard question. I mean, for me personally, my biggest selling point would be the school. That's how I chose Eastern, because I was not getting scholarships through [my sport]. [My financial support] was an added bonus for me, but I was picking Eastern because of the school itself. And that is what I would sell. If all else fails and [your sport] is not what you want it to be and you just fall out of love with the game, you have the school and that is really primarily what you are here for. [An education] should be your first priority, regardless. That is what I would sell. [Your sport] is what you are here to enjoy but school is what you are leaving with.

Interview Question #6: What about the University has contributed to your staying here as opposed to transferring?

Surprisingly enough, many participants answered this question by describing teammates and individuals with whom they will forever be friends. Others took the time to talk about what the different academic majors at Eastern provided them and they would not transfer out due to their academic experiences. A few of the participants looked quizzically and affirmed that leaving never even crossed their minds. Participant L expressed a strong desire to finish what was started, so leaving was never an option. Participant B took a different approach to answering the question by stating:

A Presidential Scholarship for me has been huge. Getting full tuition paid for by academics is enormous. I can't overstate that.

Each student athlete was able to answer why they have chosen to stay at Eastern as opposed to leaving without any real hesitation. Participant K simply put it because of always feeling supported by faculty, coaches and other athletes.

Interview Question #7: What would you say about your overall educational experience?

Transitioning from talking about recruitment and choosing to stay at Eastern, the student athlete participants were then asked about their overall experiences on campus, starting with their educational experiences. Many of the participants were easily able to smile as they spoke about the multiple resources available for them to be successful. Most participants spoke highly of their academic advisor's helpfulness. One individual described the experience as not being "second tier" as originally thought, while others described an occasional professor not being enjoyable. Overall, their comments were consistently positive. An example are the comments of Participant F:

The overall educational experience that I feel was most important was that I had to actually work and do things on my own. In high school, you actually have teachers and whatever looking out for you; so that you can stay on task. But here, teachers have so many other students to worry about and make sure they are on task and actually like pinpoint every student. So you try to keep up with your education. I've had to watch that on my own.

Interview Question #8: How would you describe the social atmosphere outside classroom settings?

The social experience is relevant to both non athletes and student athletes because it is one that is shared by both. When asked about the overall atmosphere, participants were, for the most part, delighted to talk about their in-class experiences as a majority of them described enjoying the fun and having a great time meeting new people. One participant indicated not enjoying the social experience due to the lack of school spirit as well as the divide between Greek organizations, athletes, and students in general.

Participant K, however, shared a different approach to the question:

Kind of non-existent. I get the social aspect of being with my teammates and being with the (people) in my major because it is such a small department. We get that way. But those are kind of my social experiences which are fun because you get to build bonds that way, but if you think of the typical college experience, no, I haven't had any time for that. I mean, I've had some time here and there, but it obviously isn't a deal breaker for me.

Interview Question #9: What would you say about your overall athletic experience(s) at E.I.U.?

Talking about the athletic experience in a different light other than the typical pre or post-game interview allowed for student athletes to summarize their experience as a whole in relatively few statements. Whereas most student athletes talked about the ups and downs of being an athlete and how great of an experience it had all been, participant E honed in on the experience as being invaluable:

When it comes to my athletic experience, I do not know if I can put a price on it. I would not change it for the world. I truly feel honored to be this far in my career because I have earned it.

While some felt truly honored to play at this level, others described how difficult it was at times to adjust to the playing level. With a huge grin, participant F answered:

This was an experience like no other. I mean you have thousands of high school kids trying to go to college to play ball and I actually had the chance to experience it. This has been one of the best experiences of my life.

Interview Question #10: If you were a senior in high school again and were being recruited, would Eastern be on your list? Why or why not?

Having asked the student athletes to talk about their recruitment process, the university's selling points, and their overall experiences thus far, the students were asked to remember their senior year of high school and knowing what they then now about playing at the Division I level. Without hesitation, the majority of the student athletes

stated that Eastern would definitely be on their list of choices to attend. Participant A seemed to speak for the majority indicating being unable to compare their Eastern experience to anything else. "Having not played or attended another Division I school, it not fair to look back and say no to Eastern." Participant D, however, had a different response than other participants:

No, no. Eastern wouldn't be on my list. The system and the way we play are totally different than what I thought it was going to be. Just the fans. It's almost like it's a struggle to get people to come to the games. It's like when you look up there and you want the stands to be packed, but when you look up and see 15 to 16 people, you have to rev yourself up to play. So with that being said, Eastern would not be on my list.

Other participants discussed having bigger institutions on their list with Eastern still being one of them as well. Participant G talked about pushing himself/ herself greater to achieve athletic and personal goals:

Knowing what I know now and knowing what I have accomplished, I feel that I can always do a little better. Maybe I could have tried to walk-on to a bigger school and tried out there. But I am pretty happy here, but knowing that I probably would have gone a bit bigger to push myself.

Interview Question #11: Can you describe one of your E.I.U. mentors and what they have taught you?

When asked about mentors, the majority of the student athletes took a second or two more than they did for any other question to gather and think about the one mentor

that meant the most to them. After a little bit of thought, most described a coach, professor, or teammate that had really helped them along the way to become better in all components of college life. Participant A, for example, echoed what others depicted as a mentor:

Well, one of my biggest mentors would probably be my assist coach. (The coach) definitely taught me that the weekend was used for studying. Because in high school I was really smart and didn't really have to study hard, but when I got here to Eastern I was challenged academically to my max and (coach) taught me how to press on and fight through situations. In (the sport) when things were going wrong (the coach) would always come up to me and tell me "keep fighting and pushing" and tell me what the head coach was looking for but in more of a one-on-one situation.

Other than being a mentor within the sport, Participant A also described how a coach taught and drove home the message of "being knowledgeable in all facets of life, not just athletically". Participant C, on the other hand, took several moments to think yet could not come up with an individual mentor, but identified an office within the institution that really helped pave his way:

I haven't really had a mentor, but I have had the International Student office help a lot in get settled with orientation and getting setup with needing a bank account and going to Social Security and stuff like that. They helped out to start. From then, I really haven't had or needed a mentor at all.

Interview Question #12: What has been the academic highlight of your time here at Eastern?

When asked about narrowing down the academic experience to a single highlight experience or moment during their tenure, most of the participants talked about a specific semester or class that was particularly enjoyed. Participant J pinpointed studying abroad as the highlight of his collegiate career academically, whereas Participant E was delighted to just simply be invited to the athletic banquet for outstanding students. Several participants spoke about academic honors and awards over the years but Participant F uttered the most excited of all responses:

My junior semester when my GPA was a 3.2! That was the highest GPA that I have ever gotten since I've been in college.

The smallest of accomplishments to Participant F was the highlight of his/ her academic career, while Participant I was elated and described a research opportunity with professors within a given department on campus:

I would say probably doing research with my professors. Because the goal of that is I'm working with them on projects that they are researching . . . to write papers and get published. I have had one paper that has been submitted right now. It's not accepted yet, but it is being reviewed. So, if I was going to get published in a journal, it would be really cool.

Interview Question #13: What has been the social highlight of your time here at Eastern?

The social highlight of all student athletes interviewed mainly centered around the friendships that were built amongst teammates and simply just meeting people in general. One participant spoke about attending an after-party and being congratulated on the team's athletic performance earlier in the week. Participant K stated feeling pathetic because she was unable to think of a social highlight before mustering up the answer of spending time on a study abroad trip as the most delightful highlight of her social time. Participant B seemed to speak for all participants and painted a picture of social life beyond the E.I.U. campus by stating:

Probably, the location has to do a lot with my social highlight. Being right in-between Chicago, St. Louis, and Indianapolis, I have done so many cool things. I can't just pick out one. Being able to just pack up my bags and go and see a Cardinals game one night, be in Chicago the next night, is awesome. Having access to so many other great colleges to visit my friends and pretty much do whatever I need to in the Midwest.

Interview Question #14: What has been the athletic highlight of your time here at Eastern?

Until this point, many of the responses had been ensconced in the team aspect and the institution as a whole. However, responses to the athletic highlight inquiry allowed participants the opportunity to pick out a moment in their career that stood out for them athletically. The majority of the responses included the triumphant feeling that came with winning, whether that was as a team or individual honor. Participant F took the individual

approach and described a national award of the week, while Participant K talked about competing with bigger universities:

The one thing that sticks out is beating (a bigger school). Going the distance with (a bigger school) has been a highlight. It's been something to be proud of.

The majority had concrete responses to fill the athletic highlight, but Participant H talked about adjusting and practicing to become better overall, whereas Participant L talked about the overall energy of the team freshmen year. They spoke of no specific moments, but specific time frames that helped put multiple highlights to their athletic experiences.

Interview Question #15: What has been the least enjoyable aspect of your stay here at Eastern academically?

Student athletes were given the opportunity to talk about the least enjoyable aspects of their many experiences on campus. When it came to least enjoyable academic experiences, many directly spoke about a class or semester that was not so productive. Participant A echoed the rough semesters or classes by laughing through the struggles and stating:

Academically? That would definitely be my freshmen year when I failed biology and got a D in college algebra and a C in English. And I couldn't stand my teachers and it was a mess. The only class that I got an A in was E.I.U. 101; the foundations course, and thank goodness for taking that.

Others talked about professors or departments that were tough or difficult to understand. For example Participant E struggled with an entire department on campus:

The chemistry department just kills me. I do not know what it is about the course work load or even what is being taught, but I just never seem to do well. It's nothing out of the usual though I seem to have a hard time with those courses.

As for Participant G, real life set in and many other factors contributed to their least enjoyable academic memory:

I think probably the end of my sophomore year. I had a few things happen at home and my grades reflected that. I had a really bad time going to class and focusing, and getting good grades. That really hurt me. The end of sophomore year, I had a lot of problems and getting grades done and doing some other things.

One other student athlete talked about the time spent on the road and away from class being least enjoyable. For example, having to make up the work and catch up was least enjoyable to most and summed up well by Participant I's comment:

Times when I have had to miss a lot of class for [my sport]. I feel like I am behind missing lectures or test or whatever. There is a struggle to catch up.

Interview Question #16: What has been the least enjoyable aspect of your stay here at Eastern socially?

There are times in which the social life has to take a back seat to the athletic world or even the academic world and many of the participants were able to echo that phenomenon. A few of the participants described the drama that goes along with being on a team which hinders the social atmosphere. Participant H summed up the drama concerns best by stating:

Well, it is fun to hang out with the team, but I guess since we are together a lot of the time there is a lot of drama. It is nice to get away from them at times.

While most participants were having a great time, Participant A spoke about having to stay in and getting work done freshmen year, which academics took her / him away from the social scene:

Probably my freshmen year because I had 10 hours of study hall. I was doing so badly and I had to come in on the weekends from like 6-10 at night and my friends were going out but I had to stay in and study. It kind of was pointless because I was studying but still failing, so it wasn't making a difference, it was pretty horrible.

Participant D, on the other hand, was annoyed with how some individuals acted differently in different situations:

When you got class with somebody and they won't talk to you in class. But then, when you see them out and they all of a sudden know you and want to have a conversation with you. It is just really awkward to me to sit in class every day and you can't talk to me, but when we are out you can sit and have a full conversation with me to tell me about what I am doing and what I need to be doing (within the sport). It's just awkward to me.

Interview Question #17: What has been the least enjoyable aspect of your stay here at Eastern athletically?

Many of the participants knew the question was coming but did not really want to answer. Fear of what they had to say was apparent, but they were more ashamed to be saying it. The majority of the participants described losing a particular game or having a losing season. Some of the other participants talked about being injured and not being able to help the team succeed. Participant K spoke about the variability being a hindrance because so many people had come and gone. The most unique of the responses belonged to Participant G, in which the practice schedule negatively affected his / her academic and social life:

I'd say we have a new schedule. And, waking up early four to five mornings a week. Those mornings are really hurting right now. I just have to get used to it. The mornings affect that I have to go to bed early because I have an 8:00 am (class). It is really hard to study and if I wanted to do anything (socially).

Echoing the words of Participant G, the athletic experience greatly affected what went on in the other aspects of a student-athlete's life.

Interview Question #18: Seeing that you are wrapping up your career here, what are you most excited about next?

There is no doubt that E.I.U. student athletes have big dreams in which the career does not stop at the collegiate level. Many of the participants described goals of playing professionally or finding a way to stay in the game of their choice post college. Participant A, a little unsure of the future, like many other participants and this question stated:

After Eastern, hopefully playing overseas and getting the opportunity to try out for (the professional organization). And if I am unable to do that getting a grad position to help another team or our own team win.

Others spoke of continuing their education and applying for graduate school. Wrapping up the athletic career was an option for some and continuing with an education was the next option. Participant I, excited about graduate school, spoke about the next step:

I am just kind of excited to apply to grad school. I am excited to just be a student. It's hard for me to believe how that works. There are times (now) in which we have a week off and I don't know what to do with my time.

One participant described obtaining a doctoral degree to be the next exciting career step. Of all the responses, many involving long term goals for the future. Participant F had goals of playing professionally, but more so than that, was looking forward to walking across the stage during commencement ceremonies in May:

The thing that I am most excited about next, actually the thing that I continue to look forward to next, is that I am about to get my degree. Not too many people get a chance to finish through college and actually succeed to a degree.

With similar goals of receiving a degree and playing professionally, Participant L was just excited for anything new and spoke about being prepared for a variety of new experiences:

New! I love new things. I love meeting new people. I love learning new information. I am ready; I like variety in my life. High school was just whatever,

college is great, and now I am ready for that next new experience moving further away or starting the next portion of my schooling which will be great.

Interview Question #19: What are you most apprehensive about regarding your future?

Of all the questions posed, this specific one elicited the most unanimous of answers throughout the entire interview process. All participants stated that finding a job is what they were most apprehensive about. Whether that be on a team or within their degree field, each was quick and demonstrative in their response. Participant I responded tentatively and sentimentally with following apprehensions:

Moving on to grad school and not having a set group of people that I will automatically hang with all the time. Coming in playing a sport, you know that these are going to be your teammates and you're going to be with them the majority of the time. And then, you're with them so often that those are going to become your closest friends and you hang out with them on the weekends. And, going to a completely new school and completely different fields and not having that team. It's nervous to have to make all new friends.

Interview Question #20: Do you feel you are ready for the real world? Why or why not?

Whereas all of the student athletes that participated in the present study were apprehensive about obtaining a job, the majority were ready to take on the real world. Most talked about how sports participation had really prepared them for the next step, while others spoke of definitely being up for the challenge ahead. No matter the mentality, it was pretty obvious that each was ready for the next step. Participant I, for example, spoke about different time management skills that have become part of his / her

everyday life due to having to balance all of the roles at once of a college student-athlete.

Participant H, on the other hand, had a mixed answer:

Yes and no! I mean if I went and just got a job, I think I would be okay. But do I really just want to do that? I mean, no. I think I am just going to end up staying in school forever.

Even though Participant H was unsure of whether he / she was ready or not, there was no doubt in the minds of Participants J and L, who both quickly stated that they were absolutely ready for the real world without hesitation.

Interview Question #21: How has E.I.U. prepared you for dealing with diverse individuals other than your teammates?

Being on a team comes with many perks and one of those perks is being able to learn from individuals from all walks of life. Participant B described the experience with teammates from all different countries having different backgrounds and languages combined:

Absolutely! E.I.U. is extremely diverse. Even on my own team having a few [different continents] and dealing with different languages and cultures is about as good an education I could get without travelling out of the country.

A majority of the participants talked about a variety of classroom experiences in which group work and working alongside someone they have never spoken to provided for a diverse learning opportunity. Participant A said it best when describing the diverse situations as:

Well in the classroom because we are forced to work with different groups that you wouldn't necessarily work with. You put yourself in having to work with those people and everyone wanting to get a good grade. Your classroom is where you get to meet a lot of new people and in the dorms we all still became really close.

Others spoke specifically of their majors and how they have experienced a diverse atmosphere to learn in. Participant D described it best by stating:

Here you get a whole mixture of people. I mean the way you talk to people; a certain way. You meet a whole lot of different people that you are not going to talk to . . . like you are going to talk to your friends. Everyone is different . . . in a way. You are not going to have the same friends forever, but (E.I.U.) has basically taught me how to form relationships with different people. Like race doesn't matter. Whereas back at home, I probably didn't have a very diverse group of friends, but here I do.

Interview Question #22: If you had one bit of advice to give to future Eastern Illinois University student-athletes, what would your advice be?

Allowing the participants to share the advice they would give to future athletes of E.I.U. was such a highlight in that they brightened up, adjusted themselves in their seats, and imparted wisdom for those who would follow in their footsteps. The responses varied, of course, but the majority involved the hard work and dedication required to become a better athlete and successful at the Division I level. With regard to becoming a better athlete, many gave advice on getting ahead in school work so that focusing on

athletes could be an option, while others urged future athletes to train in their spare time. Participant J talked about not being scared and getting involved on campus more, not just within the sport of choice:

Don't be scared! Get involved! Too many people especially their freshman year are timid and don't want people to think they are stupid. When it comes down to it, you're a freshman. The more involved you are the better the experience will be. If nothing else, use (getting involved) as a networking tool. At least get involved in one thing: a fraternity/ sorority, clubs, intramurals, going to the recreation center. Don't be shy, life's too short to be shy.

To echo all of the advice, Participant K probably said it best by stating:

I think I can talk forever on this. I guess if I could think of one thing it would be, what's going to be important to you 10 years down the road. I mean, of course you're going to look back and be glad you enjoyed your college experience. But chances are, like the NCAA commercial states, chances are you're not going to go pro. So you're here to learn. You're here for your future. Pay attention in your classes. Get the most out of your education as you can so you're prepared to take the next step in the world. You can go out and do good things for yourself and in your future.

Interview Question #23: Is there anything else that you would like to add that maybe was not asked about your overall collegiate experience?

While the majority of the 12 student athletes stated they had nothing more to add at the time, some took the time to talk about the opportunities and chances that are

available to a student at the collegiate level. Several shared words of encouragement they would give to prospective student athletes: Participant B mentioned that “chasing ones dreams,” is all anyone can do, while Participant F stated, “the experience really opened my eyes to a lot of things and ideas.” Almost all talked about school spirit and pride. Whereas Participant E simply stated “Go Blue!” Participant A talked about hosting recruits and allowing the recruit to decide what they want to do:

My freshmen year on my recruiting visit, one of the reasons I would just recommend to people who are hosting, my host was just so pushy when it came to (being social)... That was something that I never did, when I hosted people I asked them if they wanted to (be social), but I wouldn't shove it down their throat.

Chapter V Summary

E.I.U. student-athletes were given the chance to discuss their overall experience while in college. The inquiries allowed for student athletes to talk a bit about their recruitment process but mainly about their positive and negative involvements in regards to athletic, academic, and social lives. Just as the survey produced, the answers given in the interviews were primarily positive. Student-athletes felt their collegiate experiences have benefitted them in the long run of life. The disparity that continued to be relevant was the separation between the different groups of students on campus. Student-athletes felt a separation between themselves, Greek organization members, and other undergraduate students. Other disparities included but was not limited to social lives dependent on sport of choice, individual struggles with academics but also individual successes in academics, and overall enjoyable and least enjoyable athletic experiences.

In the following chapter, the two sets of data collected are compared and contrasted to aid in the identification of possible trends or tendencies among the students who participated in one-on-one interviews and those who participated in the survey only. The comparisons are made to help better understand the messages and perceptions of Eastern Illinois University student-athletes regarding their academic, athletic and social lives.

Chapter VI

Findings Compared and Contrasted

Introduction

The current chapter contains a comparison and contrasting of the findings from the two methods of inquiry (i.e., a survey instrument and one-on-one interviews) as presented in Chapters IV and V.

In Chapter IV findings from the survey instrument completed by 27 student-athletes who ranged from freshmen to senior class standing can be found. Chapter V contains the responses of 12 senior student athletes in their last year of eligibility to 23 interview questions. In an effort to not harm any student-athletes from a loss of scholarship or fear of being as transparent as the primary researcher hoped, underclassmen and juniors were not eligible for interviews. Individual interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and were conducted in an office only accessible to the interviewee and primary researcher.

Interview questions were developed by the primary researcher (with the assistance of Dr. James Wallace and thesis committee members). Interview questions #1, 2, 6, 10, 21, and 22 addressed the first research question. Interview questions #1-6, 10, 11, 14, 17, and 21 addressed the second research question, while the responses to interview questions #1, 6, 7, 10-12, 15, 18, 20 and 22 were utilized to address research question #3. Research question #4 was addressed utilizing interview responses to questions #1, 3, 5-11, and 18-21. The fifth and final research question was addressed via responses to interview questions #3-17 and 19.

Responses to survey instrument items #4, 8, and 10 were combined to address research question #1. Research question two was answered through the combined responses to survey items #12-14 and 29. Student-athlete responses to questionnaire items 23-27 were combined to address components of research question #3. Research question four was addressed using survey questions #32, 34, 35, and 49, while the responses to survey items #45-52 and 57 were combined to address components of the fifth research question.

Comparison and Contrasts

Research Question #1: How does an athlete ultimately decide which school to attend in pursuit of both a college degree and athletic experience?

While the majority of the participants via both methods of data collection for the present study were very positive in their responses, a few were unhappy regarding their overall role as dual athletes and students at Eastern Illinois University. Those who were negative described financial support as a detriment to their continued participation in their sport of choice and regretted having a few social experiences that would hold them back from choosing Eastern once again as their institution of choice. Nevertheless, the majority of the student-athletes who participated in the current study described positive experiences which would make a difference in their selection of E.I.U. as a worthy institution for an education and athletic experiences. Their positive experiences included relationships with coaches, faculty members for academic support, and other campus community members (e.g., collegiate peers, campus support personnel) as having been instrumental in creating positive and reassuring experiences for student-athletes to continue their education and participation in athletics at the selected university.

Retrospectively, many student-athletes were unequivocal in feeling positive about their experiences and choosing E.I.U. as the institution of choice for both academic and athletic pursuits. When thinking back to their decisions regarding which school was the best fit for them, their recruitment experience was the primary factor in their decision to select Eastern over all other universities. The size of the institution and Charleston community, in general, were two of the reoccurring deciding factors. Additional contributing factors in their decisions regarding which institution represented the best fit for them consisted of their perceptions of the relationships between athletes and coaches, the coaches' interactions with their parents and significant others, and their campus visit experiences. Student athletes took into consideration not only their lives and feelings regarding the university's atmosphere, but how the combinations would affect their relationship with parents and significant others. In general, student-athletes in the present study believed that their parents, in favoring the university and its personnel, were looking out for their best interests.

Academics were a reoccurring topic of concern as well, in that students-athletes chose Eastern Illinois University as their institution of choice due to its having the degree program of their liking. Students talked about their degree programs and how their reputations were valuable in the overall selection process. In congruence to degree program, others spoke about their involvement with the Honors College and receiving Presidential Scholarships as deciding factors when considering attending E.I.U.

With everything in perspective and four years of collegiate experiences, senior student-athletes consistently have largely enjoyed their experiences. An overwhelming number of student-athletes in the study spoke about continuing to have E.I.U. as a top

institution on their list if they were to have to decide once again on which institution to select for their academic and athletic experiences post high school.

Research Question #2: What do relationships between coaches and athletics look like from the view of the athletes?

“Positivity,” “rewarding” and “great experiences with coaches” were descriptors used by the student-athletes when describing which components of their lives at the institution caused them to continue their education and athletic experiences in order to become successful individuals after receiving degrees. When discussing highlights and least enjoyable moments athletically, student-athletes focused most on specific moments in which the outcome of the match or game was a win or loss. Although the interviews began with a number of decisional questions, student-athletes spoke highly of the coaching staff in creating an environment that was best fitting for an education and supporting their passions for athletics.

While a few identified making first contact with the coaching staff, others were sought out by university recruiters and non-university associates in the recruiting process. One student described how her mentor on campus has been the coach of the sport in which she participated. As the survey results suggest, several student-athletes were still a bit positive in their regard for members of the coaching staffs and their athletic experiences. However, one student-athlete described having been very positively influenced by the coaching staff when it came to achieving academic goals. Whereas the student-athletes surveyed almost unanimously agreed their participation in athletics has contributed to their overall preparation for life after graduation, there were a few student-athletes who felt a bit misled or not so positive regarding the emphasis coaches placed on

their academic success. One student talked about how the playing style and approach to game situations were different than what was expected while being recruited, this same student also spoke well of the efforts coaches made in providing playing time. On the survey, students were asked about personal contact help in getting a job or desired career post-graduation. A few of the responses suggested their contact would not be much help or of no help at all in obtaining a career of their choice.

Coaches played a key role in the decision process of the student wanting to attend a given institution and whether or not the student-athlete decided to continue participating in athletics as well. As the student-athletes continued to discuss throughout the process, one of the reasons for attending E.I.U. was the relationships built with the coaching staff. Coaches created a positive and friendly environment in which student-athletes were able to succeed.

The overall time period of the recruitment process is what students talked more openly about in regards to how coaches connected with them while still in high school. Most recalled being a junior or senior in high school when contact was made and how they instantly felt some sort of connection with the coaching staff and how the specific connects at E.I.U was different from the conversations had with other institutions. Student-athletes discussed Eastern coaches to have been more approachable and honest in the overall recruiting than other coaches at other institutions.

On any given team there are athletes that will leave and athletes that will be added on from year to year and Eastern is no different. Student-athletes conversed about having teammates leave their sport while others were recruited in as transfers and how that contributed to the overall dynamics of the team. When athletes decided to leave the

institution, students in the study believe they were asked to leave mainly due to lack of academic performance. Others talked about lack of playing time as a reason for a former teammate leaving or the fact that being a college athlete is not for everyone. On the opposite end of the spectrum, student-athletes were also able to describe teammates being recruited in as transfers; all but a couple athletes spoke about having a teammate who was a transfer from another institution. The consensus is the transfer athletes fit in well with the program and the overall grand scheme of being successful athletically.

Coach, parent, and recruiter are a few hats or titles a coach holds in the hearts of his or her student athletes and during the study, a few of the athletes described their coaches as their mentors. When asked about a mentor on campus that has continued to be a pushing force in being successful student-athletes talked about their coaching staffs as being positive and helpful throughout the college experience.

Research Question #3: How does one go about choosing a major that fits both the schedule of the sport and the interests of the athlete?

The responses to questions in the survey were split as students talked about academic degrees of choice in comparison to athletic competition requirements. When asked about the primary reason for choosing a major, most stated the reason to be unrelated to athletics, while a few talked about trying to stay eligible or avoiding majors that would result in scheduling conflicts with team practices and competitions. A quarter of the students surveyed believe their athletic participation prevented them from majoring in what they really wanted, yet almost 70% of the surveyed participants viewed themselves as more of an athlete than a student.

There was also a split in what it takes to be a good student versus a good athlete, although the majority described not perceiving a difference. The interviews garnered similar responses to the questionnaire regarding what makes for a good student versus a good athlete, suggesting that, in general, it depends on to which student athlete one is talking to. Students interviewed talked about academic awards and being recognized for their academic success as highlights of their roles as students. Several, however, spoke about their athletic accomplishments as highlights of success. The question of being viewed as a student or athlete first is vital to the current study in that student-athletes' perceptions are based on their upbringing and, while a few talked about their academic success or the major they wanted at Eastern being the strongest variable regarding their choice of continuing their education here, many students honed in on the athletic realm and wanting to succeed athletically with academics being an added bonus.

In regard to the academic success of student-athletes and their overall choice of Eastern to continue academic greatness, students talked about Eastern being the choice to continue because of the preferred degree program being available during the collegiate stay. Not only was athletics a factor in picking E.I.U. but the degree program of choice being available was one of the deciding factors in the decision making process.

When choosing a major, student-athletes in the study described some influential people that were helpful along the process in making academics and athletics mesh. Professors and academic advisors were among the groups that were consistently referred to the most in being helpful and assisting in making it all possible. Some of the more academically focused student athletes talked about the Honors College being of great help to fit both worlds into one tightly and strategically placed schedule.

As the students were able to reflect on their college career thus far, some were able to talk about time management and how different instances of being a student and an athlete help contribute to being ready for the real world due to learning about time management in their experiences. Some focused on obtaining a job and having their collegiate experiences to thank for such preparation, while others offered advice to future student-athletes of not waiting until the last minute to complete assignments because catching up while on the road is no easy task.

Research Question #4: What sort of support are athletes feeling from those around them to continue to succeed?

As the athletes were able to reflect on their experiences thus far, support from the surrounding community and people around them on a daily basis (e.g., roommates, classmates, peers) means a lot to the student-athletes in the present study. Survey results lead one to conclude positive findings regarding the influences of professors, advisors, and coaches; other questions allowed students to focus on what they perceived as being issues worth considerable attention. Whereas a few felt being discriminated against by professors due to their being an athlete, several also believed they were being favored by professors because of their athletic titles. The interviews produced more descriptive findings in which student athletes expressed feeling support academically from professors and athletically from coaches; however, some athletes felt frustrated in the support from peers that not were recognized as athletes, while peers that were athletes were believed to be very supportive. One student-athlete described frustration in being a member of three separate groupings (e.g., athletes, Greeks, and an undergraduate student like everyone else). Participants interviewed talked about professors as being helpful in the academic

arena overall. What sticks out the most was when one student athlete was asked about recruiting future athletes to E.I.U. and what would be the selling point. This student athlete was extremely sure of how to sell the university and its athletic programs. The interviewee described wanting to see more support from peers at sporting events and more support, in general, about student- athlete concerns. Another student athlete had a different take of not being treated the same in the classroom by a peer, but when at a social gathering that same peer was talkative and approachable.

There is no doubt about the influence of parents in the lives of their children who are soon to become adults all on their very own. In the decision-making process of continuing an education at the collegiate level and continuing an athletic career, many student-athletes spoke about talking with parents or gathering the advice of parents before making the choice. The support from family members continued as the students stayed on campus. Outside of immediate family, once on campus the new family kicks in and teammates become new attachments for each other. Student-athletes interviewed spoke about the support from those individuals that transferred away from E.I.U. and other individuals that transferred into Eastern as a great support system. Not only are teammates looked at for support, but many individuals commented on how other athletes at the institution served as support in helping each other succeed.

Outside of family and athletes helping the succession, student-athletes displayed a great amount of satisfaction for professors and the surrounding environment in aiding successful behaviors. Coaches, professors, and teammates were mentioned as mentors by a number of participants as well in striving for excellence. Other than a number of individuals playing positive influences for student-athletes and creating a welcoming

environment, student-athletes talked about the mixture of people in general as well as diverse customs and experiences as a form of support. A few of the participants relayed the message of absolutely being ready for the real world due to the experiences on campus.

Research Question #5: How do athletes balance their academic, athletic, and social lives?

Nearly all of the responses to the above interview protocol were extensive regarding balancing life as both a student and athlete, time commitment was most often mentioned as a component of university life taken into consideration to help answer this question. In general, student-athletes remembered moments of falling behind and having to catch up academically due to being on the road or just not being very focused on academics. There were several, however, who talked about being Presidential Scholars and having great academic relationships with professors. According to the survey, achieving balance between athletics and everything else was a challenge for all students. One student described practice time taking away from social and academic success, while others enjoyed the time being spent with their teammates which resulted in their staying motivated academically and being social. Socially, the majority of the student-athletes interviewed described enjoyment when being recognized and having great social experiences on campus; not really looking for a social life because their expectation was for the university to provide what they were looking for socially. Survey responses that examined time commitment to one's sport and whether student-athletes were truly getting all that they wanted out of their sport of choice suggest that while the majority of student-athletes spend 10 hours or more on their sport either practicing or participating in

competitive events, all but one student athlete responded that having spent as much time on athletics participation as they wanted to spend had not happened. Their social lives and having positive interactions with people from different races, ethnicities and genders were believed by most athletes to have been unaffected by partaking in athletics, while some believe these experiences would have been more negative if they had not been athletes. A few also stated that their interactions would have been more positive if athlete was not a title that was not possessed.

Balancing a life was an issue that arose on multiple instances via conversations held within the interviews and from responses in the survey. An overarching theme present in the study was the balancing and adjusting to teammates that have left either due to academics, overwhelming nature of athletics, or personal/ family issues and to new teammates coming onto campus. The adjustment creates situations in which student-athletes have to not only focus on a friend that has just left, but also building in time to get to know the new member of the squad. Along with creating a welcoming environment, student-athletes discussed the social life and how this aspect of life has to be planned out as well. In conducting the interviews there were obviously students that loved the social life and those that were more reserved and enjoyed a comfortable night away from the noise and lights. Both sets of individuals were very knowledgeable of the fact that no matter what party lifestyle one decides to choose, the Charleston community provides a healthy dose of each experience.

One of the aspects of being a college student-athlete that is not focused in on is the transition from high school to college. Student-athletes expressed the step from high school to Eastern to be a bit difficult academically and athletically. The individuals that

expressed the concerns described having a challenging time at the beginning of the collegiate career, but eventually everything worked out for the best. Students talked about low grade point averages, a lack of social life, and a struggle within the sport due to all three worlds crashing together, but over the course of a few semesters time management kicked in and each student-athlete became more aware of when to fit certain things into a his or her personal schedules. Some of the difficult times of adjusting and finding time to complete given tasks became more difficult for student-athletes during a losing period in their athletic experiences. Individuals spoke about a losing streak taking a toll on balancing life due to the psychological thoughts that come into play; wanting to perform better takes away from focusing on academic and social lives. On the opposite end of the spectrum student-athletes also commented on having a stellar performance athletically and being acknowledged by peers at a social gathering. The positive recognition is great on the surface and plays into positive thoughts, but the seeking for more positive feedback contributes to eagerly wanting to be recognized on a daily basis.

The majority of the student-athletes described time management as the overall learned task of being a college athlete. When defining their organization of time many talked about what they would eventually miss about being a college student-athlete. Leaving the college life was one of the repeated epiphanies the students had during the interviews. In getting into further detail, some individuals described not having a set group of individuals to consistently be around as a notion they struggle to grasp. The greater number of participants though were elated to find a job, even though a number agreed that would be a struggle, or continue with their education, a graduate program, and even in one case a doctoral program.

Chapter VI Summary

The interviews and survey findings seemed to be consistent among student-athletes on the campus of Eastern Illinois University with regard to having a positive outlook on life after graduation. The experiences and interactions student-athletes experienced while on campus has prepared most of the participants for life after college. As for starting over and picking Eastern Illinois University as the choice for educational, athletic, and social experience, student-athletes overwhelmingly indicated choosing this institution once again. Findings from both the interviews and surveys confirm that the perceptions of the student-athletes with regard to adapting to what has been presented to them and the overall choosing of one institution over another.

In chapter VII of the present study, comparison of prior research to the findings of the current study will be made along with recommendations for future researchers and members of the institution who have primary responsibility for the recruitment, athletic performances, academic experiences and social lives of student-athletes in attendance at Eastern Illinois University.

Chapter VII

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the lives of student-athletes' experiences while at the collegiate level. The study focused briefly on the recruitment experience and the reasoning behind choosing Eastern Illinois University to continue educational growth and athletic development. Contained within the present chapter is a comparison of prior research to the findings in the present study from both the survey component and one-on-one interviews. Along with the discussion of research and current findings will be recommendations for institutional leaders and future researchers on this given topic. The chapter will end with a conclusion section containing a few final thoughts and analyses.

Discussion

Research Question #1: How does an athlete ultimately decide which school to attend in pursuit of both a college degree and athletic experience?

Research conducted by Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, and Palmer (2003) suggested five influential factors for student-athletes when choosing an institution: degree program, head coach, academic support, location of institution, and school spirit. According to the findings in the present research, these five factors were most influential for student-athletes in deciding to attend E.I.U. Student-athletes in the present study specifically noted how they felt during the decision making process and their ultimate decision resting on the head coach at certain institutions and their feeling that the head coach at Eastern Illinois University was the best possible fit for them. A number of students discussed academics as top priority and choosing E.I.U. for its degree programs and then its athletic programs. Along with content area, students spoke about the great

mentorship received from professors and academic advisors during their tenure at Eastern.

Of the two remaining factors, current E.I.U. athletes positively discussed their enjoyment of living in a metropolis triangle comprised of easy access to the cities of Chicago, St. Louis, and Indianapolis. Along with being close to major cities, student-athletes talked about the proximity of home playing heavily into their overall decisions for selecting E.I.U.; some individuals did not mention closeness to home due to being thousands of miles away, but still choosing Eastern as the institution of their choice. The last of the five factors was not one that was talked about in the decision process but more of the after being at E.I.U. for a number of years. School spirit was not mentioned at all by student-athletes in terms of wanting to attend Eastern for the pride, and after having spent a number of years on campus, the senior student-athletes in the present study would like to see more cohesion amongst athletes and non-athletes, a campus-wide unity.

Along with making a decision involving significant aspects of life for student-athletes, participants reported taking into consideration what was being said during the recruitment process. Wolverton (2011) discussed coaches spreading the truth when recruiting athletes to attend their institution, students in the current study seldom discussed being wrongly steered by coaches. Only one individual admitted to having a substantially different experience as a collegiate athletic from what he anticipated based on coaches' remarks during the recruitment process. All other participants affirmed that everything said during on-campus visits and recruitment trips was fairly accurate to how they have experience being college athletes.

Research Question #2: What do relationships between coaches and athletics look like from the view of the athletes?

Previous research talked about the difference in treatment among the variety of performance levels of college athletes, such as the star players getting treated better than role players on a given team. Martin, Rocca, Cayanus, and Weber (2009) discussed motivational tactics in which coaches deem it necessary to motivate using punishments and rewards. When discussing their perceptions of treatment received by student-athletes from coaches in all sports programs at Eastern Illinois University, many used terms such as “mentor” and “father-like.” A number talked about the motivation of coaches in giving academics top priority and helping with their overall development in becoming successful individuals. Student-athletes also praised their coaching staff for providing a welcoming environment during recruitment and through subsequent experiences on campus.

Corbillon, Crossman, and Jamieson (2008) provided information on students being injured and experiencing different social roles and treatment from their coaches. When discussing difficult times, injuries were a popular topic. Whereas when injured, student-athletes did not necessarily feel isolated by the coaching staff, they believed that their being part of the team was stripped away. Athletes felt as if their contributions to the team were not significant during their recovery from injury. Other than injuries, students discussed feeling disappointment when coaches left their names off the line-up for a contest. The experiences of being benched or not needed for a competition were heartbreaking to several of the student-athletes.

Research Question #3: How does one go about choosing a major that fits both the schedule of the sport and the interests of the athlete?

The present study focused on the perceptions and feelings of student-athletes regarding their current position as a student and the challenges inherent in adhering to athletic practices and competition schedules while pursuing their degrees of choice. Research reveals that colleges are usually insistent on putting the term student before the word athlete as if to verify these individuals are students first. However, during the course of the present study, there were mixed views on which title should be presented first.

Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) presented the lack of a true admissions department or recruitment office that disallowed less than qualified student-athletes to attend a specific institution due to their athletic ability and not their academic abilities. What previous authors have stated truly depends on which student-athlete one is talking to or about. During the one-on-one interviews for the present study, there was an almost equal split between students who felt passionate about their academics and those who simply discussed not being able to attend college if it were not for their athletic abilities. The survey responses revealed a bit more one-sided general perception in which the majority felt they were athletes before students. There seemed to be a variety of perceptions but what was commonly revealed was the demands of the respective sport each individual was currently participating in. Some teams were more time demanding than others yet the responses of student-athletes reflected their gratitude for being able to obtain an education and continue using their athletic talents.

The most uplifting component of the findings in the present study involved student-athletes discussing their academic woes and successes while attending the institution. One individual specifically brightened up and talked about achieving a grade point average higher than a B during most semesters. This same individual talked about the environment in which he/ she was brought up and how the degree they anticipated receiving in the month of May marked them as having far greater formal education than the majority of the community at home. Students such as this individual understood the importance of being academically focused as well as athletically successful during their collegiate tenure.

Suggs (2003) persuasively talked about the degree programs in which student-athletes decide to major as being the simplest and most likely to produce eligibility. A number of the survey participants echoed the same reasoning as to why they chose their degree programs and how influential their athletic lives were in making this decision. On the other hand, several students interviewed specifically stated they chose Eastern for its academic programs first and its athletic program second. Surprising to the researcher was that several would have been concerned if others knew of their passion for scholarship. Several interviewees happened to be Presidential Scholars or part of the Honors College in which “jock majors” were not necessarily existent. To even cement the notion for some student-athletes, when asked about future career plans, a few discussed their options as returning to this institution or another for master’s degree programs and, in one case, a doctoral program immediately out of undergraduate studies. Some student-athletes at Eastern were passionate about their academic pursuits, while others saw their education as a bonus to their athletic experiences.

Research Question #4: What sort of support are athletes feeling from those around them to continue to succeed?

A sense of strong sense of faculty and coaching staff support system are what student-athletes discussed in all facets of the present study. The greatest degrees of support mentioned by athletes were evident in comments about professors, coaches, academic support staff, and peers. Parental figures and family members were mentioned when discussing their recruitment experiences. Benedict (2010) discussed the influences of others on social experiences and how certain teammates may be some of the worst supporters due to run-ins with the law. None of the student-athletes in the present study mentioned any detrimental past or current teammate relationships consuming their time and energies other than a few “drama” related issues. The support from teammates was among the most dominant theme presented throughout the current research project.

Additional significant support for current student-athletes was perceived as existing within relationships with coaching staff and academic support staff members. The survey results identified an overwhelming number of participants enjoying the assistance from advisors who pushed and urged academic success despite the competitive nature of athletic contests. Coaches repeatedly were presented as stressing academics as well as athletic excellence. Of all the support systems and individuals mentioned via both components of data collection of the present study, a majority of the student-athletes spoke about the support provided by professors throughout their collegiate careers. A few felt favored and stereotyped due to their athletic titles, but a majority talked about the partnering efforts of professors to help them with scholastic challenges; ultimately resulting in the student-athletes learning a great deal in one-on-one settings with

professors. Something as minimal as being available during office hours was mentioned quite a few times in opportunities during which professor gave advice and guidance to student-athletes about a specific concern was considered very important to their success.

The support of professionals around campus was widely felt by student-athletes that were currently living on campus. Uncomfortable moments during the interviews were when student athletes discussed the support from peers other than other athletes. Although the majority felt Eastern provided very diversity within the general student body, more so than not, student-athletes did not feel supported by their non-student-athlete peers around campus. A few talked about their perceptions of a divide between athletes and non-athletes, and one specifically painted the image of having to motivate him or herself for a match due to the lack of fan support stadium. Student-athletes consistently wanted to not only feel the support from others, but also wanted to show their support for other organizations that were non-athletic.

Research Question #5: How do athletes balance their academic, athletic, and social lives?

The balancing of life is difficult for any college student, let alone a student-athlete on a university campus and playing at the Division I level. Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) focused on the levels of stress of traditional students and student-athletes and how the levels rise when more titles are added onto any given individual. In the present research study, student-athletes discussed having to balance their lives and how certain activities got in the way of other obligations which in return created more stress. One example was provided by an individual who spoke about the time change in practice and how having to get up early affected their academic and social experiences.

Others talked about their academic struggles at the beginning of their careers which took away from being able to enjoy both athletics and social lives. It seems as if their athletics, academics, and social lives were harmonious in that student-athletes, in order to experience less stress and more success somehow found a way to achieve a healthy balance of each.

While a healthy dose of each was not always possible, a few student-athletes were okay with not having much of a social life due to their commitments to academics and athletics being their main reasons for attend the institution under study. On the NCAA website “Life Balance” (2011), the association talks about the importance of balancing academic and social lives as a student-athlete and how important a dose of each is vital to becoming successful in all phases of life. Individuals in the present study who did not necessarily partake in a great number of social activities mentioned spending time with teammates and friends outside of an athletic setting in a non-party way as their preferred mode of socializing.

The survey produced numbers in which athletes were able to talk about time commitment to athletics and academics. Student-athletes discussed their time spent away from home during institutional breaks in which their sport required them to stay remain on campus for practice or contest reasons. Each component played a role in influencing the other and the student-athletes were very well aware of this expectation prior to their arrival on campus. A number of the participants agreed that they were currently ready for the next phase in life, obtaining a job, due to developing exceptional time management skills while being a student-athlete. Their collegiate experiences have prepared them mentally and diversely for what has yet to come.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

Future researchers in the field of studying student-athletes and their overall experiences on a university campus should give serious consideration to obtaining coaches' perceptions of their student athletes from recruitment through the end of their playing days and post-graduation. Just as some student-athletes may feel their experience is different from their recruitment expectations, coaches may feel the exact same way from watching a teenager on film or in a high-school setting and contemplating developing the student-athlete once enrolled at the institution. Another component to take into consideration is the coaches' reasoning behind specific recruitment tactics and player development approaches. A student-athlete's development is unique, requiring the help of coaches in balancing their academic life while experiencing academic success and being ready to perform athletically. Studying coaches' intentionality would be significant to understanding their reasoning behind what specific methods and approaches are taken into consideration when deciding approaches to take to individual student-athletes..

As has consistently been mentioned, not only do student-athletes have a tough time with the adjustment and transition into collegiate settings, parents and family members who are back at home struggle as well. It would be beneficial to inquire about what family members go through while their sons and daughters are being wooed by college coaches. Components to be taken into consideration include time expectations and commitments, distances away from home and how family members truly feel about not seeing their child for extended periods of time. Future researchers should consider how a family also feels if their son or daughter were to fall behind academically as a result of being too engulfed in his or her athletic life.

Other than parents and coaches, future researchers should also consider using a different division of athletes. Seeing that the present study involved D-I mid-major student-athletes, future researches should consider comparing the responses presented from student-athletes representing other institutions within different divisions by state.

Hearing that professors were very influential to the student-athletes in the study, it would be very beneficial for future researchers to consider including the perceptions of faculty members who educate or have educated student-athletes in and out of the classroom. Seeing that the student-athletes in the study have a true appreciation for their faculty, it would be great to see if the feeling is mutual by the faculty towards the athletes.

All of the student-athletes in the study are currently enrolled at the institution, and it would be interesting for a future researcher to consider obtaining the perceptions of student athletes that have graduated from the institution. At times it is important to give alumni an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings after their time at a given institution is complete. With time having elapsed from enrollment to where these individuals currently are in life, it would be great insight to have their perceptions after the fact.

The final recommendation for future researchers is to consider transfer student-athletes. The individuals who participated in the present study were student-athletes who spent their entire collegiate career on the E.I.U. campus. Gathering information from transferring student-athletes may result in a multitude of responses not expressed in the overall recruitment and experiences of students in the present study. Time of recruitment and development in terms of age may produce different responses from student-athletes

transferring in from different institutions as opposed to a student-athlete arriving at a Division I program immediately out of high school.

Recommendations for the Institution

Though the majority of the feedback from the student-athletes was positive, a few recommendations for the institution to better itself in recruiting and producing successful student-athletes are important. First, the greater number of student athletes focused on the support from individuals such as academic advisors and professors in helping create a welcoming and educational atmosphere. A good number of participants talked about first choosing Eastern for its academic reputation and second its athletic programs. Second, it would be beneficial to tap into the academic success of the student-athletes and promote their positive feedback to future student-athletes contemplating attending other institutions. An example of a promotional idea would be to take Presidential Scholars and Honors College student-athletes and create advertisements that project images of being more than just an athlete.

Along with creating a more positive image for student-athletes is the necessity of gathering support from individuals who are not associated with the athletic department. In order to provide fan filled stadiums and other athletic venues for the student-athletes to compete in, a number of the students felt that eliminating the divide between athletes and non-athletes was the institution's responsibility and that effort to create a more supportive environment for student-athletes should be undertaken. One conclusion that can be drawn from this particular finding is that school spirit and overt showings of support do not meet the needs and expectations of student-athletes.

Specific ideas arise when thinking about the eliminating the barrier between athletes and non-athletes as well as the improvement of the school spirit of the institution in general. One of the recommendations is to be more intentional with different outreach programs to help put faces of individuals within the Athletic Department to the rest of campus. The institution should consider creating different opportunities for personal connections to be made between coaches, athletes, and athletic administrators to connect with the general student population. To help create such a friendly environment, the institution can create luncheons or gatherings a few times a semester in which athletes and non-athletes come together to share ideas and thoughts about being a college student.

In addition to financial and moral support, findings from the current research suggests the importance of five influential factors upon which student-athletes chose E.I.U. over several other schools. The only factor student-athletes did not mention was school pride. From their perspectives, the university seemed to lack student identification with the athletic teams and bonding in which both student-athletes and non-athletes share support for teams other than their very own or favorite sport. To coincide with creating a supportive environment, student-athletes and their non-athlete peers need to be able to bond with the institution and thus be more likely to support each other in ways that student-athletes in the present study desire.

To assist with the cohesiveness of building school spirit and pride amongst all of those attending or working at the institution, different hands on activities may help close the gap. Ideas of organized service projects for athletes and non-athletes to come together for the cause of helping out in the community would be very beneficial. Along with getting out in the public and helping out, the institution could consider handing out or

giving away school shirts on a regular basis instead of just at the beginning of the year to incoming students. The effort behind passing out shirts will allow for students to own something with the institution's name on it.

Other larger scale ideas that come to mind in order to help with school spirit is getting more of the institution's primary color, blue, on campus. When walking around campus, the institution should consider displaying more banners on light poles that represent the institution. More than just banners, the institution has little paw prints on certain sidewalks around campus and over the number of years those prints were painted they seem to be fading, repainting the already existing prints and painting new prints all over campus would present more color and provide more spirit on campus.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to take a deeper look at the lives of college student-athletes from the time they are recruited to the near completion of their athletic, academic, and social experiences on campus. The researcher was specifically interested in assessing societal expectations and how student-athletes truly perceived their overall experiences socially, academically and athletically. Results from the present study indicated that student-athletes were far more engaged in their academics than most believed and even though some thought they were more athlete than student, it can therefore be concluded that student-athletes in the present study understood that academics played a key role in their success on and off playing surfaces. It is also reasonable to conclude that the relationships and experiences shared with others (peers, faculty, and coaches) while at the institution played a crucial role in what student-athletes felt about their overall time spent at the university. When asked if they would pick

Eastern Illinois University or if they could begin college again would Eastern be on their list, all survey participants and interviewees but one provided affirmative responses.

Eastern may not be the biggest or most well-known institution in the nation, but findings from the present research lend credence to the conclusion that student-athletes at Eastern Illinois University enjoy personal connections and experiences while in attendance.

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Appendix A

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study related to the recruitment of athletes and the academic, social, and athletic experiences once one has stepped foot on campus for a graduate student thesis in the College Student Affairs program. As the principal researcher, I hope to gain an understanding of your perceptions and thoughts of your overall athletic experience while searching and attending college. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you fit the general criteria for students I am evaluating (age, gender, student-athlete status, etc.).

If you decide to participate, I will be conducting a 30- 45 minute interview session and/ or a questionnaire to gather your perceptions and thoughts of your experiences as a college student athlete. During a one-on-one interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions in which responses will be audio recorded, and will be encouraged to give your honest answers to all situations. The risks associated with this study are no greater than those associated with daily life.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be viewed only by the principal researcher and thesis advisor for the study.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have any additional questions later, please contact Moe Samad mysamad@E.I.U..edu who will be happy to answer them.

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write: Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave., Charleston, IL 61920, Telephone: (217) 581-8576, E-mail: E.I.U.irb@E.I.U..edu

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the above information provided and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be entitled after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Student-Athlete Signature

Date

Primary Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix B

Appendix B

Research Questions for the Senior Athletes

1. What about Eastern made you decide this was the correct place for you to continue your education and participation in athletics?
2. In the overall recruiting process, when would you say you were first recruited / contacted by Eastern Illinois University coaches?
3. Have you had teammates that have decided to leave the program, and why do you feel that is?
4. Have you had teammates get recruited as transfers to the program, and how do you feel they are treated in comparison to a four-year recruit?
5. If you were put in charge of recruiting future athletes at Eastern Illinois University, what would be your selling point to prospective athletes?
6. What about the University has contributed to your staying here (as opposed to transferring)?
7. What would you say about your overall educational experience?
8. How would you describe the social atmosphere outside classroom settings?
9. What would you say about your overall athletic experience(s) at E.I.U.?
10. If you were a senior in high school again and were being recruited, would Eastern be on your list? If so, why or why not?
11. Can you describe one of your E.I.U. mentors and what they have taught you?
12. What has been the academic highlight of your time here at Eastern?
13. What has been the social highlight of your time here at Eastern?
14. What has been the athletic highlight of your time here at Eastern?
15. What has been the least enjoyable aspect of your stay here at Eastern academically?
16. What has been the least enjoyable aspect of your stay here at Eastern socially?
17. What has been the least enjoyable aspect of your stay here at Eastern athletically?
18. Seeing that you are wrapping up your career here, what are you most excited about next?
19. What are you most apprehensive about regarding your future?
20. Do you feel you are ready for the real world? Why or why not?
21. How has E.I.U. prepared you for dealing with diverse individuals other than your teammates?
22. If you had one bit of advice to give to future Eastern Illinois University student-athletes, what would your advice be?

Appendix C

Appendix C

Survey for E.I.U. Athletes

Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey about your experiences of being a collegiate athlete on the campus of Eastern Illinois University. The researcher welcomes your feedback and assures your answers will remain confidential. Thank you very much for your time and patience.

General Information

Please select one of the following that best describes you:

- Male Female
 Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate

Which Division I sport(s) do you participate in at E.I.U.?

Overall College Experience

"If I could start all over again, I still would attend this university"

- Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

How satisfied are you with your educational experiences?

- Completely Satisfied Satisfied Somewhat Satisfied Somewhat Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Strongly Dissatisfied

Reflecting on your college education thus far, how do you feel about the overall education you have received?

- Very Positive
 Positive
 Somewhat Positive
 Somewhat Negative
 Negative
 Very Negative

Do you believe that you are having a well-rounded educational experience?

- Yes
 No

"My overall education has prepared me well for life after graduation."

- Completely Satisfied
 Satisfied
 Somewhat Satisfied
 Somewhat Dissatisfied
 Dissatisfied
 Strongly Dissatisfied

Commitment to College Education

"Even if I had not played a varsity sport, I would have attended a four-year institution."

- Strongly Agree
 Agree
 Somewhat Agree
 Somewhat Disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly Disagree

"If I could start over again in a D1A institution and financially did not need an athletic scholarship I would still play a varsity sport."

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Contribution of Athletics to Student Development

To what extent, if any, has your athletics participation contributed to your educational and/or personal development?

 Very Much Quite A Bit Somewhat Very Little Not at all Don't Know

"My athletics participation has contributed to my overall university experience in preparing me for life after graduation."

 Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

How much help do you believe that the skills and/or values you have learned through your participation in intercollegiate athletics will help you in getting the job or career you desire?

 A great deal of help Some help A little help Not much help No help at all Don't Know

How much do you believe that the personal contacts you have developed through your participation in intercollegiate athletics will help you in getting the job or career you desire?

- A great deal of help
 Some help
 A little help
 Not much help
 No help at all
 Don't Know

Academic Behaviors

Participated Actively in Class?

- Some of the time or more often
 Not much of the time or less often

Met with faculty member not associated with athletics?

- Some of the time or more often
 Not much of the time or less often

Read a non-assigned book?

- Some of the time or more often
 Not much of the time or less often

Engaged in doing 'extras' that showed a commitment to being a good student (e.g., spending extra time on homework)?

- Some of the time or more often
 Not much of the time or less often

Come to class without completing readings or assignments?

Some of the time or more often

Not much of the time or less often

Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with faculty members outside of class?

Some of the time or more often

Not much of the time or less often

Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others outside of class (e.g. students, family members, co-workers)?

Some of the time or more often

Not much of the time or less often

Discussed grades or assignments with a professor?

Some of the time or more often

Not much of the time or less often

What was your primary reason for choosing your major?To stay eligible
to competeScheduling
conflicts
between classes
and athletic
scheduleBecause of
transferOther athletic
related reasonsReason
unrelated to
athletics**Did your athletics participation prevent you from majoring in what you really wanted?**

Yes No

How do you currently feel about your choice of academic major?

Very Positive Positive Somewhat Positive Somewhat Negative Negative

"I view myself as more of an athlete than a student?"

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

"I feel that what it takes to be a good athlete is very different from what it takes to be a good student."

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Agree Somewhat Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree Don't Know

Support Received

Has this university (either through general campus services or through the athletics department) provided you the academic, advising, and other non-financial assistance that you have needed to help you succeed academically?

- Very Much Quite A Bit Somewhat Very Little Not at All

How do you assess the influence of:

Your college coaches on your academic goals

- Positive Negative

The academic advisors in your athletics department

- Positive Negative

The academic advisors in your college or academic department

- Positive Negative

Professors in the courses in your major

- Positive Negative

Your favorite professor

- Positive

 Negative

"I feel that some of my professors discriminate against me because I am an athlete."

- Strongly Agree

 Agree

 Somewhat Agree

 Somewhat Disagree

 Disagree

 Strongly Disagree

"I feel that some of my professors favor me because I am an athlete."

- Strongly Agree

 Agree

 Somewhat Agree

 Somewhat Disagree

 Disagree

 Strongly Disagree

Participation in Campus and Community Educational Opportunities

As a student-athlete, you may have participated in service projects promoted by the Athletics Department (visiting schools, charitable events, fundraising, etc.) Were these activities valuable to you?

- Yes

 No

 Did not participate in such activities

With regard to your participation in service projects promoted by the athletics department, how do you assess the time spent on these projects?

- Yes No Did not
participate in
such activities

With regard to your participation in service projects promoted by the Athletics Department, did you enjoy doing them?

- Yes No Did not
participate in
such activities

Which of the following statements best describes your participation in service projects promoted by the Athletics Department or your team?

- Yes No Did not
participate in
such activities

Are you now or have you been a member of any campus-wide organizations (social or religious, student government, service organizations, etc)?

- Yes No Did not
participate in
such activities

Have there been educational opportunities (internships, research projects, study abroad, etc.) in which you wanted to participate but could not do so because of your athletics participation?

- Yes No Did not participate in such activities

Focusing on the full range of educational opportunities available at this university, how do you assess the time you have spent on them and the number of them that you have pursued?

- Yes No Did not participate in such activities

Have you spent as much time on all aspects of your academic work (including pursuing available educational opportunities) as you have wanted to spend?

- Yes No Did not participate in such activities

Have there been campus events (speakers, plays, concerts, etc.) in which you were interested but that you were unable to attend?

- Yes No Did not participate in such activities

Time Demands of Being a Student-Athlete

During a typical week during your athletics season, on average, how many hours per week do you spend on the following:

Practicing Sports?

- More than 10
 9-10
 7-8
 5-6
 3-4
 2-1
 0

Playing Sports?

- More than 10
 9-10
 7-8
 5-6
 3-4
 2-1
 0

During your off-season, on average, how many hours per week do you spend on the following:

Practicing Sports?

- More than 10
 9-10
 7-8
 5-6
 3-4
 2-1
 0

Playing Sports?

- More than 10
 9-10
 7-8
 5-6
 3-4
 2-1
 0

Have you spent as much time on athletics participation as you wanted to spend?

Yes

No

In the years you have attended this university, how many times each year did you get home for at least 15 days either during summer vacation or in the winter between semesters?

On average, 3 or
more times each
year

On average,
twice each
year

On average, once each
year

On average, fewer than
once each year

Never

In the years you have attended this university, what is the average number of days you have spent at home:

During the summer vacation visit?

At least 15 days

At least 20
days

At least 30 days

At least 40 days

More than 40
days

During the winter vacation visit?

At least 15 days

At least 20
days

At least 30 days

At least 40 days

More than 40
days

Diversity Experiences

To what extent, if any, has your athletics participation contributed to your understanding of people of racial and ethnic backgrounds different from yours?

- Very Much
 Quite a bit
 Somewhat
 Very Little
 Not at all
 Don't Know

Generally, how do you feel about the experiences you have had with people of other racial or ethnic groups?

- Very Good
 Good
 Somewhat Good
 Somewhat Bad
 Bad
 Don't Know or not Applicable

Please indicate how your athletics participation has influenced each of the following:

Your tolerance for people of other races or backgrounds?

- Very Positive
 Positive
 Somewhat Positive
 Somewhat Negative
 Negative
 Very Negative
 Don't Know

Your sensitivity to members of the opposite gender?

- Very Positive
 Positive
 Somewhat Positive
 Somewhat Negative
 Negative
 Very Negative
 Don't Know

Do you believe your athletics participation has had an effect on your interactions and experiences with people from other racial and ethnic groups?

Interactions would have been more positive had I not played

Interactions would have been more negative had I not played

Interactions have been unaffected by participation in varsity sports

Thank you for taking the time to fill out our survey. We rely on your feedback to help us improve our services. Your input is greatly appreciated.