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## Building Student-Athlete Resilience On and Off the Field

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Building Student-Athlete Resilience On and Off the Field  
by  
Hannah Beatus  
April 2023

Master's Project  
Submitted to the College of Education  
and Community Innovation  
At Grand Valley State University  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Degree of Master of Education



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Hannah Beatus in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. in Higher Education, College Student Affairs Leadership.

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April 26, 2023

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April 26, 2023

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Hannah Beatus

Abstract

Literature continues to demonstrate that student-athletes have a difficult time understanding how the skills they acquire as a student-athlete are transferrable to a non-sport environment. Student-athletes are exposed to messages about resilience early on in their athletic careers yet lack the understanding of how these skills are applicable to life outside of athletics. This project examines the aforementioned problem through an ecological systems theory lens. A workshop series designed to bring together student-athletes and coaches addresses this knowledge gap. It is hoped that by bringing together student-athletes and coaches that the development of resilience can be understood through a more holistic lens, thus enabling student-athletes to have more successful experiences in post-athletics retirement.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

Less than 1% of student-athletes will play professionally upon the conclusion of their college athletics careers (NCAA, 2020). Being a student-athlete takes up a considerable amount of time compared to that of their nonathletic peers. While participating in athletics can open the opportunity to experiences, they would not otherwise have been exposed to, student-athletes are unable to devote adequate time to internships or other experiences that prepare them for life after college. Similarly, student-athletes have a difficult time conceptualizing the transferable skills they acquire throughout their time as student-athletes and how it is applicable to their lives in athletics retirement (Van Raalte et al., 2017). One of those transferable skills is resilience. College student-athletes are frequently exposed to messages about resilience in their athletic careers (Sakar and Fletcher, 2014; Sakar and Fletcher 2016; Saxe et al., 2022). There is little messaging about developing resilience and understanding transferable skills outside of an athletics context (Galli & Vealey, 2008; Fletcher & Sakar, 2013). These messages about resilience are specific to sport playing and do not address how they are transferrable to life after college. Therefore, more resources and programming should be available to college student-athletes to help them develop resilience in other areas of their life, in college and after, outside of athletics.

### **Importance and Rationale of Project**

College athletes often feel underprepared to transition to an environment beyond athletics (Stokowski et al., 2019). The NCAA has several proposed guidelines and workshops that institutions can utilize for student-athletes pertaining to their leadership development and academic success. However, the NCAA has neither adopted nor proposed programming and



guidelines on being prepared for athletics retirement. Institutions are left to their own devices to address the needs of their student-athletes readiness for post-athletics life, and often, the needs of student-athletes are only addressed through a sport-playing lens (Draw and Matthews, 2019; R.J. Den Hartigh et al., 2022; Sullivan et al., 2023).

Student-athletes acquire resilience through sport playing in several ways. Whether it be through injury, interactions with coaches and teammates, or through competition, they are exposed to messages about resilience very early on in their athletics careers. Associating resilience with some sort of physical attribute becomes ingrained in athletes early on, so it is no surprise that student-athletes have a difficult time relating their transferable skills outside of an athletic environment. Understanding resilience as it pertains to life outside of athletics is essential in the development of a student-athletes self-efficacy and self-concept (Wiedenman et al., 2023).

### **Background of Project**

The creation of this project was in an effort to address the education gap in student-athletes understanding of how their resiliency skills translate into life after college athletics. There are several stakeholders involved in a student-athletes sport playing journey. Whether it be a parent, a coach, a teammate, or athletic administrators, their knowledge and understanding of how they can aid in the post-athletics transition process is crucial as well.

The issue of resilience building and its application to other environments besides athletics is a new concept. While research on resilience and how it is acquired dates back years and years, its application to the student-athlete in a non-sport context remains relatively new. Most recent studies on resilience and its application outside of sport playing have evolved from current events and hot topics like athlete activism and COVID-19 (Scheidler et al., 2021; Saxe et al.,

2022; Watts et al., 2022). Similarly, previous studies have often conflated resilience with other buzz words like grit and grind and analyze resilience through a mental health lens.

Although research on this topic is still in the beginning stages, Galli and Vealey (2008) research on bouncing back and student-athletes experiences of resilience helped guide the review of literature for this project. Their study was the pioneer for recognizing how internal and external experiences influence the acquisition of resilient like qualities in student-athletes. It refuted the “popular notion of resilience as a trait (i.e., athletes or teams that *have* resilience)” and called to action the need for more qualitative studies to understand student-athletes experiences with resilience (Galli & Vealey, 2008, p. 328).

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to develop a workshop that supplies student-athletes and the most influential stakeholders in their environment with the tools to understand how resilient qualities transferable outside of a sport-playing context are. Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological systems theory, this project will utilize the influential role of the coach in this process. Student-athletes and coaches often engage in programming separately, and this project will bring both parties together to collaborate and uncover how they can each play a role in conceptualizing resilience through a non-sport environment lens. Topics of importance and intervention strategies to facilitate this session will be drawn from the reviewed literature. This workshop will help alleviate the knowledge gap for both student-athletes and coaches with the goal in mind of student-athletes feeling more confident in their understanding of resilience and its application beyond sports as they head into post-athletics life.

## **Objectives of Project**

While student-athletes have a plethora of sport playing experiences that have led to their acquisition of resiliency skills, student-athletes are rarely exposed to programming that address resilience outside of a sport context. The objectives of this project have been created to help address this educational gap and are catered to creating relevant and impactful programming that combines both the student-athlete and the coach's role in this process. This project also looks to increase student-athletes confidence in understanding how the skills they've acquired in relation to resilience are applicable to life in athletics retirement.

- Identify how various stakeholders define resilience and how these definitions are applicable to a non-sport context.
- Recognize the cross-connection between resilience in a sport environment and resilience in a non-sport environment.
- Address the role of various environments pertaining to a student-athlete that play a role in their development of resiliency skills.
- Equip coaches with the tools to help their players be successful in post-athletics life.
- Equip student-athletes with the tools to help them be more confident in their resiliency skills upon athletics retirement.
- Create a workshop that athletic departments can implement that address both the student-athletes and a coach's role in applying resiliency skills outside of sport playing.

## **Definition of Terms**

There are several key terms that were used in the creation of this project. They are defined, in alphabetical order, as the following:

- Athletics Retirement: the action of a student-athlete ceasing their participation in collegiate athletics.
- NCAA: An acronym that is used in reference to the National Collegiate Athletic Association.
- Resilience: definitions of resilience vary across the literature and have been a point of controversy for many researchers. For the sake of this project, resilience is defined as the response elicited by different adversities (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).
- Student-Athlete: a student who engages in collegiate athletics as a result of being recruited by a member of athletics staff within the athletic department of an institution. They are also in compliance with NCAA eligibility guidelines.
- Transferable skills: the use of a variety of skills in several contexts or environments

### **Scope of Project**

This project will examine the components of a student-athletes environment that contributes to their development of resiliency skills. This project will also address the role that coaches play on student-athletes formation and understanding of resilience. Further, it will address the need for programming that applies resilience to other environments besides athletics. The workshop focuses on collegiate student-athletes and does not address the role of resilience in other athlete populations. The literature review predominantly draws conclusions about the impact various environments have on a student-athletes resiliency through a collegiate athletics lens.

The implementation of this project relies heavily on the buy-in of coaches, student-athletes, and athletic administrators. The workshop was designed to accommodate the time demands of each of these individuals. Student-athletes and coaches must make the most of the

time they are allowed to dedicate towards playing activities, and this workshop provides the opportunity for these two groups to engage in content that does not go beyond the constraints of NCAA practice guidelines. Not all institutions and athletic departments have structures in place that home in on student-athletes' transferable skills outside of a sport environment. The available resources, design of previous structures that are or are not in place, the culture of the athletics program, and the effort of coaches and student-athletes are all factors that could hinder the successful implementation of this project. This project was structured from a theoretical framework, and the coach's attitude, relationship with their student-athletes, and the student-athletes' perceptions of their coach could all impact the effectiveness of this project as well.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

College student-athletes are frequently exposed to messages about resilience in their athletic careers (Sakar and Fletcher, 2014; Sakar and Fletcher 2016; Saxe et al., 2022). There is little messaging about developing resilience and understanding transferable skills outside of an athletics context (Galli & Vealey, 2008; Fletcher & Sakar, 2013). These messages about resilience are specific to sport playing and do not address how they are transferrable to life after college. Therefore, more resources and programming should be available to college student-athletes to help them develop resilience in other areas of their life, in college and after, outside of athletics.

The following review of literature analyzes the development of resilience in student-athletes through an ecological systems theory lens. Conceptualized by Bronfenbrenner (1994), ecological systems theory uses various methods for understanding how a variety of influences within an individual's environment shape their experiences.

### **Theoretical Lens**

#### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Systems Theory provides a layered structure for how to view the complexities of the student-athlete experience and their development of resilience. Using the visual of a circle surrounded by layers of other circles, Ecological Systems theory is comprised of five main layers: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

**Microsystem:** The microsystem represents the student-athletes most inner layer. It is comprised of influences that have a direct impact on the student-athlete, such as parents, coaches, or teammates.

**Mesosystem:** The mesosystem makes connections between the interactions in the student-athletes various microsystems. For example, a coach will oftentimes have to interact with a player's parents.

**Exosystem:** The exosystem comprises the surrounding indirect environment that influences the student-athlete. For example, the NCAA would be considered part of the student-athlete's exosystem. The student-athlete plays for a particular institution, but the NCAA governs that institution.

**Macrosystem:** The macrosystem is comprised of the culture that influences a student-athlete. A primary cultural influence in athletics would be sexism in sports.

**Chronosystem:** The chronosystem encompasses a variety of developmental stages in the student-athletes life.

## **Research**

### **Resilience**

Resilience literally means the elasticity of something (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It measures an object or thing's ability to spring back into shape. When considering definitions of resilience and how it relates to the human experience, however, many definitions exist and often vary across populations and literature. In athletics, the terms "resilient, resilience, and resiliency are often used by coaches and media to describe favorable responses of athletes or teams to incidents such as catastrophic injuries, prolonged slumps, or the dreaded occurrence of 'choking'" (Galli & Vealey, 2008, p. 316). Resilience can describe an athlete's ability to bounce

back from adversity, their successful adaptation to challenging situations, and has even been recognized as a personality trait (Martin et. al., 2021; Chandler et. al., 2020; Tano et al., 2014; Galli & Gonzalez, 2014).

## **Resilience and the Microsystem**

### **Teammates**

One of the most apparent relationships in a student-athletes microsystem is their relationship with teammates. Support from individuals in the student-athlete's immediate circle plays an integral role in the process of acquiring resilient qualities (Galli and Vealy, 2008). Individuals who make up the team are responsible for not only carrying out the responsibilities of competing in whatever sport they are part of but for also shaping the kind of environment the team has. The intricacies in these relationships form team cultures, and team dynamics, and inform how student-athletes think about and acquire resilience.

Martin and colleagues (2021) found that “higher resilience [in athletes] is associated with improved self-esteem, positive coping strategies, optimism, and interconnectedness with social support systems” (p. 926). Within those social support systems, athletes learn skills like communication, leadership, trust, and a “sense of family” (Watson et al., 2021, p. 40). These messages about resilience and the skills student-athletes develop from being on teams are all specific to sport playing. Because of this, it can be difficult for athletes to separate the skills acquired on their teams from skills acquired outside of their athletics identity, or how those skills coincide (Watson et al., 2021).

### **Coaches**

Because of their busy schedules, one stressor and adversity student-athletes may encounter during their athletic careers is burnout. A study by Lu and colleagues (2016) analyzed



how burnout and the relationship between the student-athlete and coach contributes to an athlete's development of resiliency. The findings revealed that student-athletes with high social support from a coach were more likely to "be high in resilience" and "less susceptible to burnout" (Lu et al., 2016, p. 206). Their findings suggest the importance of the coach and student-athlete relationship as it pertains to resilience development.

A coach's perceived level of resilience is also an important factor in the student-athletes own development of resilience (Tano, Abraham, & Sitorus, 2014). Coaches play a large part in the encouragement and the discouragement of certain behaviors. Whether through positive reinforcement, punishment, or emulating the kind of behavior they would like out of their athletes themselves, "student-athletes learn about resilience from the coach's resilience" (Tano, Abraham, and Sitorus, 2014, p. 409). A coach's resilience factors embody their "belief system, organizational pattern, and communication process" which all play a "role in nurturing and mentoring student-athletes resilience, as well as act as a buffer for the negative impact of risk factors that are experienced by student-athletes" (p. 409).

Another role that coaches play in an athlete's development of resiliency is teaching their players how to deal and respond to adversity. There are several strategies that can promote building resilience in student-athletes. Keaglaers and Wylleman (2018) study categorized these strategies into 3 parts: interpersonal skills, preventive strategies, and reactive strategies. Proactive strategies, or strategies engrained by the coach before the occurrence of a stressor, were such as "fostering motivation, mental preparation, and promoting life balance" (Keaglaers and Wylleman, 2018, p. 244). Goal setting played a large part in this, as one participant expressed that their coach's presentation of clear goals and a clear vision encouraged their own goal setting process as well as their "personal choice... [in] setting their own path" (Keaglaers

and Wylleman, 2018, p. 245). Coaches who deliberately exposed their athletes to stressful situations - whether in practice or through what if scenarios - was a successful strategy for student-athletes building resilience and preparing themselves “to deal with possible future setbacks” (Keaglaers and Wylleman, 2018, p. 245). One way to cope with setbacks is through promoting a positive mindset, which was highlighted in the reactive strategies category of this study. Fletcher and Sakar (2012) reinforce this notion, as they, too, concluded that a student-athletes belief in that they have the tools and skillset to deal with challenging events is central to the resilience process. Lastly, Keaglaer and Wylleman (2018) established that the “coaches’ ability to foster resilience depended on [their] ability to form a genuine connection” with their athletes and help them to create their own individualized approach to dealing with adversity (p. 250).

### **Other Social Supports**

Freeman, Coffee & Rees (2011), as cited in Sarkar and Fletcher (2014), define support as the “recipient’s subjective judgment that friends, teammates, and coaches would provide assistance if needed” (p. 1428). When athletes perceive that “high-quality social support [is] available to them, including support from family, coaches, teammates, and support staff”, the resilience-stress-performance relationship is underpinned (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014, p. 1428). One type of support system that people within a student-athletes microsystem can provide is esteem support. Sarkar and Fletcher (2014) describe esteem support as how others support makes a student-athlete feel competent or increases their self-esteem. In the context of building resilience, “individuals with high levels of available esteem support appraised competitive situations as more of a challenge and less of a threat” (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014, p. 1429). Various social supports within a student-athletes microsystem play a part in when exposure to

challenge and stressors arise, that “encouraging them to actively engage” with these situations can increase their resilience and raise their overall performance (p. 1429).

## **Injuries**

Student-athletes experience with an injury often forced them to develop resilient-like qualities. Podlog & Eklund (2006) as cited in Galli and Vealey (2008) found that athletes who returned from a serious injury found that although they experienced “a variety of negative emotions and encounters with adversity in connection with their return, they also perceived positive consequences such as renewed perspective, increased motivation, and enhanced mental toughness” (p. 320). Galli and Gonzalez (2015) note sport as being “integral” to the process of acquiring “positive qualities following [an] injury” like “coping... and the motivation to adapt” (p. 248). Further, student-athletes expressed that their sport provided them the opportunity to “experience achievement, build confidence, and express emotions” (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015, p. 248).

## **Resilience and the Mesosystem**

### **Student-Athlete Satisfaction and Resilience**

The intersection between sport playing and academics are two parts of an athlete’s microsystem that suggest how resilience is developed in the mesosystem. Through the lens of engagement, defined as the “activities that students partake in, which broadly reflect both academic and less formal mechanisms that contribute to student-athlete educational development”, Kim et al. (2020) explain how a student-athletes satisfaction leads to resilience building behaviors (p. 379). Their findings suggest that “engaging in school activities... is needed to promote student-athletes’ psychological wellbeing” (Kim et al., 2020, p. 386). Hartley’s (2011) study on the relationship between academic persistence and an athlete’s

resilience also suggest that building “resilience factors” contribute to how “students negotiate an increasingly stressful college environment” (p. 601). The student-athletes in the study who demonstrated resiliency traits and were “committed to the challenges of academics” also had higher cumulative GPA (Hartley, 2011, p. 601). The relationship between athletics and engaging in other academic activities outside of athletics, when done in a way that promotes student-athlete wellbeing and balance, can lead to student-athletes developing more holistic resiliency behaviors (Kim et al., 2020; Hartley, 2011).

### **Resilience and the Exosystem**

#### **The NCAA**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) role in student-athletes development of resilience can be analyzed through a career readiness lens, and what the NCAA has to do, or does not have to do, with certain rules pertaining to the student-athlete experience. The NCAA has rules around Title IX education and sexual violence prevention they mandate NCAA affiliate institutions must provide to student-athletes. However, “the NCAA does not outline a standard procedure requiring or encouraging athletic departments to better prepare athletes for the multifaceted experience of athletic retirement” (Miller & Buttell, 2018). According to NCAA data, of the 149,371 total athletes competing in revenue generating sports like men’s and women’s basketball, football, baseball, and men’s ice hockey, only 0.8% will go pro (NCAA, 2020). The statistics of the number of student-athletes who will go pro “begs the question of whether the NCAA and athletic departments should be more responsible for preparing college senior student-athletes for end of athletic career transition” and what role resilience development plays in that (Miller & Buttell, 2018, p. 53).

Understanding how resiliency skills translate to life after college were associated with more positive post-athlete's transition outcomes for student-athletes (Miller & Buttell, 2018; August, 2020). The numerous hours student-athletes dedicate to the physical aspects of their sport "rarely translate into post college employment, unlike the hours other students may spend in part-time employment or internships" (August, 2020, p. 178). This puts the student-athlete population in particular at "risk of not allowing time or energy to ready themselves for the transition into a nonsports career" (August, 2020, p. 178). In August's (2020) qualitative study, "resilience was a common characteristic in the group of athletes who were career ready" (p. 185). Interviewed athletes connected resilience skills they had built with being better prepared for the future, mental toughness, and learning to deal with frustration (August, 2020). Seeing as resiliency is a trait associated with positive post-college athletics transitions amongst student-athletes, it is important for them to understand how resiliency skills learned within their sport are transferable to life after athletics. The NCAA should analyze the relationship between student-athletes post-college readiness and how resiliency building can lead to more positive outcomes and provide institutions with the resources they need to create thoughtful programming and trainings.

### **Resilience and the Macrosystem**

#### **Athletics Culture**

Pressure-related events reveal how student-athletes perceive resilience. Fletcher and Sarkar (2016) attribute resilience development to the culture that student-athletes are surrounded by. Fletcher and Sakar's (2016) study analyzed how a student-athlete's participation in sports encourages a challenge culture or a threatening culture and how those cultures influenced their development of resilience. A challenge culture is one in which student-athletes "view pressure as

an opportunity to perform” whereas a threatening culture is one “where pressure evokes a fear of failure” (p. 149). How language is framed surrounding pressure-inducing events is vital in the development of resilience and how individuals perceive resilience.

### **Team Culture**

Team cultures speak to the kind of mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors that are fostered within a group. In a study by Saxe et al (2022) the development of resiliency was analyzed through a mental health lens. Team climate and team culture are terms that were used interchangeably. Team climate refers to the “day-to-day manifestations of the culture such as communication, decision making processes, and leader follower behavior” while culture refers to the “values and beliefs that underpin behavior” (Saxe et al., 2022, p. 562). Group norms and expectations are also established via the team culture. They found that the team culture “either served as a mechanism that de-stigmatized mental health or it further stigmatized mental health” and ultimately, either had positive or negative implications on how student athletes coped with challenge (Saxe et al., 2022, p. 572). Ultimately, the development of resilience is highly dependent on team cultures because of the influence culture has on reinforcing or deconstructing certain behaviors.

## **Resilience and the Chronosystem**

### **Student-Athletes and COVID-19**

An area of emerging research on student-athletes development of resilience and factors that contribute to resiliency building are the effects of COVID-19. “One of the immediate consequences of the COVID-19 related lockdowns were cancellations of sport seasons” (Watts et al., 2022, p. 2). Previous literature suggests the importance of social groups in the resiliency building process, and the pandemic in some cases fully removed or heavily limited teammate

interactions. Findings from Watts et al. (2022) study demonstrated that resilience was a “buffer [in the] relationship between COVID-19 worries and mental wellbeing” (p. 6). Similar to the findings in Fletcher and Sakar’s (2016) study, student-athletes who adopted a challenge mindset show traits of resilience, so the findings from Watts et. al. (2022), could suggest that athletes in their study “perceived pandemic related stressors and worries as challenges to overcome” (p. 6).

### **Summary**

A student-athlete’s environment plays a large role in how resilience is understood and applied to environments outside of a sport-playing context. The biggest influence comes from within a student-athletes more immediate environment, otherwise known as the microsystem, which is the student-athletes relationship with their coach (Fletcher & Sakar, 2012; Tano et al., 2014; Lu et al., 2016; Keaglaer and Wylleman, 2018). Culture also plays an important role in a student-athletes resiliency building process (Fletcher & Sakar, 2016; Saxe et al., 2022). The culture within teams or athletics programs can both encourage a student-athletes challenge mindset or discourage them from pursuing adversity that grows their resiliency muscle. Ultimately, there are a variety of environments that foster and promote the application of resiliency both on and off the field.

### **Conclusion**

Through a sport-playing context, building resilience is inevitable in a student-athlete’s college journey. There are several components that influence the development of resilience, and ecological systems theory helps to make sense of these components. The literature reviewed all analyzed resilience through a sport-playing lens, suggesting that there is a gap in resiliency training for student-athletes that translates these skills into life after sports.

## **Chapter Three: Project Description**

### **Introduction**

College student-athletes are frequently exposed to messages about resilience in their athletic careers (Sakar and Fletcher, 2014; Sakar and Fletcher 2016; Saxe et al., 2022). There is little messaging about developing resilience and understanding transferable skills outside of an athletics context (Galli & Vealey, 2008; Fletcher & Sakar, 2013). These messages about resilience are specific to sport playing and do not address how they are transferrable to life after college. Therefore, more resources and programming should be available to college student-athletes to help them develop resilience in other areas of their life, in college and after, outside of athletics.

Pursuing professional athletics will not be an option for an overwhelming majority of student-athletes. Many will be forced to face the realities of athletic retirement upon the conclusion of their college athletics careers. Understanding transferable skills and how resiliency is applicable in a non-sport context is imperative to successful athletic retirement transitions (Miller and Buttell 2018; August, 2020). This project was intentionally created to address the student-athlete and coaches' role in preparing for this transition.

This chapter examines the various components of the project. The components include a workshop, a word cloud activity, and a survey student-athletes and coaches will partake in to encourage dialogue around resiliency building off the field. Adopting this workshop as a part of the athletics culture and means for student-athletes to work on their preparedness for athletic retirement will take time and buy-in of student-athletes, coaches, and other athletics staff. Included in this section is an evaluation process that will be used to determine how effective this workshop is as well.



## Setting

My project drew inspiration from Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Athletics Laker Impact Series. The literature supports the need for athletic departments to develop programming to address building resilience in sport, but there is a gap in providing programming that is *not* sport specific. While the Laker Impact Series does a good job of providing student-athletes an opportunity to engage with content beyond athletics, there are some areas of improvement that could be made to address transferable skills - specifically resilience - and student-athlete preparedness for life after college athletics.

I provide a unique perspective in the creation of my project because of the many hats I wear on GVSU's campus. I am a graduate student, a 6th-year student-athlete, a member of the athletics inclusion team, served as the student-athlete advisory president, and am also an intern in the athletic department. I recognize that my experience as a student-athlete on Grand Valley's campus is unique and not a direct reflection of the experience other student-athletes will have. With that, I have had the opportunity to experience the Laker Impact Series as both a student-athlete and as someone who has sat at the table for planning meetings, debriefing, etc.

There are a variety of topics covered in the Laker Impact Series such as transitioning as a freshman, employment skills strategies, final exam study strategies, and sessions on planning for class registration. The goal of The Laker Impact Series (2023) is as follows:

The Laker Impact Series is aimed at helping our student athletes achieve success academically, athletically, and socially. The series will education and provide valuable knowledge and resources on a variety of topics for all academic levels. Topics are relevant to this generation of student athlete and will bridge the gap between life skills, mental well-being and transitional development from athlete to professional. In

collaboration with the University Counseling center, the Laker Impact Series will bring in campus and community speakers with a passion for engaging with our athletics community. This will be done in an effort to provide the best student-athlete experience.

(para. 1)

### **Project Components**

As demonstrated by the review of the literature and through an ecological lens, one of the biggest pieces of influence on a student-athletes development of resilience is the coach. This workshop is designed to bring both the student-athlete and coach together, something that the Laker Impact Series does not currently do. By engaging with this session, both student-athletes and coaches will be able to...

- Identify how various stakeholders define resilience and how these definitions are applicable to a non-sport context.
- Recognize the cross-connection between resilience in a sport environment and resilience in a non-sport environment.
- Address the role of various environments pertaining to a student-athlete that play a role in their development of resiliency skills.

The first step of this workshop is for coaches and student-athletes to brainstorm definitions of resilience through a word cloud (Appendix A). What are the first things they think of when they hear “resilience”? There are numerous definitions of resilience, so it is important to begin the workshop with a solid foundation and common understanding of resilience and what it means. Along with thinking about how resilience is defined, this also allows both student-athletes and coaches to gain a base-level understanding of how each interprets resilience. In my experience as a student-athlete, I have found that most cases of conflict with a coach happen

because there is a communication gap or a gap in understanding. In Gonzalez et al (2016) analysis of developing resilience, each intervention used involved direct communication between coaches and student-athletes around resilience. This was imperative to the implementation of resiliency-building interventions and their success and will be imperative to set the tone of the workshop as well.

Student-athletes and coaches are only allowed so many hours per week to engage in Countable Athletically Related Activities (CARA) per NCAA guidelines. Because of this, coaches will often address the needs of student-athletes outside of a playing context during non-CARA hours through one-on-one meetings, or other means. The creation of this workshop aids coaches and student-athletes in getting to engage in these conversations in a way that considers their busy schedules and time demands. It also allows coaches to engage with many of their student-athletes at one time in one space. This workshop was created to fill a gap in Laker Impact Series programming but can be adjusted to fit the needs of an institution's athletic department. The Associate Director of Student-Athlete Welfare and Development should be the facilitator of this workshop, however, recognizing that not all athletic departments have the same resources, any athletics administrator would be qualified to facilitate this session. A visual presentation (Appendix B) would accompany this workshop, highlighting key components of the literature.

The final activity in this workshop will follow the presentation. Student-athletes and coaches will engage in conversations about resiliency and its application on and off the field, guided by the following discussion questions:

- For coaches: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being low, 5 being high), how would you rate your own level of resilience?

- For student-athletes: On a scale of 1-5 (1 being low, 5 being high), how would you rate your own level of resilience?
- What role do you think a coach or student-athlete plays in developing resilience?
- How can coaches and student-athletes work together to better acquire transferable resiliency skills?
- What does this look like? What does it not look like?
- Can you think of examples of a coach or student-athlete that represents resilience? What traits do they have in common?
- What does developing and understanding resiliency on and off the field look like on your teams? What do you want it to look like?

As demonstrated by the literature (Tano et al., 2014; Lu et. al, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2016; Kegelaers & Wylleman, 2019) student-athletes found that direct conversations with their coaches led to a mutual understanding of building resilience. The questions above should act simply as a guide for conversation, and facilitators are encouraged to let student-athlete and coach insights flow freely. This workshop will create space for student-athletes to interact with and learn from each other about their needs as it relates to resilience development.

Through providing a space for student-athletes and coaches to engage in conversations that are not about their sport, it is my hope that all involved players on a team will be able to better understand their own development of how resilience is applicable to their lives outside of their sport. All components of this project are meant to educate and encourage dialogue amongst coaches and student-athletes. It is my hope that student-athletes and coaches are able to come to a mutual understanding of how they can both be of benefit and detriment to one another's

development of resilience and encourage goal setting and positive conversations around resilience going forward.

### **Project Evaluation**

To evaluate the immediate effectiveness of this workshop, a post-workshop survey (Appendix C) will be implemented. The survey asks questions pertaining to the objectives of the workshop. It allows reflective space for attendees to address their understanding of resilience on and off the field, any knowledge gaps they still might have, and plans for how they are going to apply what they learned in the future. The completion of a survey provides crucial feedback to facilitators on where content area stuck, and which content area(s) might need further adjusting. An important element of a post-workshop survey is to provide space for attendees to express whether their needs and expectations were met or not, which is another element incorporated in this survey.

A more long-term way of collecting feedback on the effectiveness of this workshop will be conducted through senior exit interviews between graduating student-athletes and the Athletic Director along with performance review meetings between coaches and the Athletic Director (AD). Meetings between student-athletes and the AD will allow for an understanding of how this workshop impacted their college experience, their post-athletics readiness, and the kind of relationship they were able to establish with their coach(es). Similarly, performance review meetings between coaches and the AD will be able to address if coaches are doing enough to support their student-athletes outside of a playing context, and what supports the coach might need to help holistically develop their players.

### **Project Conclusions**

There is an evident gap in programming for student-athletes understanding of resilience and how it translates to a non-sport context. Additionally, programs typically target student-athletes and coaches separately. This workshop can benefit the athletics culture as a whole by encouraging the collaboration between coaches and student-athletes beyond a playing context. Student-athletes will feel better prepared to enter life after college athletics with a better understanding of how the resiliency skills they've acquired transfer. Similarly, coaches will feel more confident to have conversations about resiliency with their student-athletes and will better understand the important of the holistic development of their student-athletes as well.

### **Plans for Implementation**

It is important to recognize that athletic departments across institutions have evolving needs, serve a multitude of populations, and have varied access to resources. Thus, alternation to this workshop can be done to meet the needs of an institution's coaches and student-athletes.

Coaches and student-athletes may also be reluctant to engage in conversations that do not involve how they perform on the field. This workshop might be the first-time coaches and student-athletes are able to talk about something outside of a sport-context, so buy-in is key to the successful implementation of the workshop. This project will be shared with the director of student-athlete development at along with the director of student-athlete academic success. Both professionals play a key part in the planning and implementation of workshops within the Laker Impact series. Therefore, their understanding of the benefits of this program are key to other staff and members of GVSU athletics buy-in into understanding how resiliency translates beyond just a sport playing context.

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### Appendix A: WordCloud

When poll is active, respond at **Pollev.com/hannahbeatus169**  
Text [REDACTED] to **37607** once to join

## What is resilience?

No responses received yet. They will appear here...

Powered by  **Poll Everywhere**



< 3 / 3 >   | Instructions Responses |  Clear responses

## Appendix B: Contents of the Presentation

- Resilience in the context of college athletics
  - This would follow student-athletes and coaches brainstorming of resilience. Attendees would be able to see how their perceptions of resilience align or do not align with what research and other popular sources say about resilience.
- How resilience shows up in sports
  - The literature discusses several student-athletes experiences like injury and competition that play a role in developing resilience. This part of the workshop examines what student-athletes say about experiences in their sport that have led to their development of resilience.
- Direct influences on a student-athletes development of resilience
  - The direct influences - the microsystem - of a student-athletes development of resilience include teammates, coaches, and other individuals. This portion of the workshop covers how each stakeholder plays a role in a student-athlete acquiring resiliency skills. Student-athletes and coaches would be given the opportunity to reflect on the variety of influences on their own development of resilience.
- Resilience outside of athletics
  - This section of the workshop would take up the most time. Now that student-athletes and coaches have a solid foundation and have begun to further build their understanding of resilience, they will reflect on how these skills transfer beyond a sport playing context. Because the literature does not talk about resilience outside of a sport playing context, this portion of the workshop can be altered to meet the needs of your student-athletes and coaches.

### Appendix C: Post-Workshop Survey

#### Student-Athlete Resilience Workshop Post-Survey

 [redacted] (not shared)   
[Switch account](#)

**\* Required**

**Name \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**Sport \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you define resilience? \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_



**How is your definition of resilience applicable outside of your sport? \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**I feel ready to enter post-athletics retirement. \***

1   2   3   4   5

Hesitant/Not Ready      Prepared/Ready

#### Coach Resilience Workshop Post-Survey

 [redacted] (not shared)   
[Switch account](#)

**\* Required**

**Name \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**Sport \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you define resilience? \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**How is your definition of resilience applicable outside of your sport? \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**I feel equipped with the tools to help my student-athletes understand how the skills they've acquired on the field/court/etc. are applicable to life after college athletics. \***

Yes  
 No

**After attending this session, how do you plan on addressing transferrable skills with your student-athletes? \***  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_