

Preparing Student-Athletes for Success after College

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the efficacy of collegiate coaches providing university career center information in assisting the overall preparation of the student-athlete after college. Subjects ($n = 12$) were from a Division III women's basketball team. Student-athletes completed a test that examined their knowledge of resume building, cover letter building, and interviewing techniques before and after studying materials from the university Career Education Office. There was no significant difference between the mean pre-test scores (Mean = 6, SD = 1.13) and mean post-test scores (Mean = 7, SD = 1.65) [$t(11) = 1.34$, $p = .21$]. Research in the area of student athletes' preparation for life after college should continue, particularly since there is often an unequal balance between academics and sport demands.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Overview

Student-athletes are often overlooked in terms of their academic and career potential and only considered in terms of their athletic abilities. According to Shurts and Shoffner (2004), “Student-Athletes have less time to devote to career development and life preparation activities, may develop career dependency or identity foreclosure more often than their peers, and often have the additional complicating factor of athletic identity to consider in their future planning” (p. 99). Student-athletes should have an equal chance of being successful after college as traditional students. In this study, the focus is on preparing student-athletes for success after college.

Student-athletes often face many challenges within their sport, but also after their sport career ends. As a former collegiate player, the researcher was not provided the opportunity for career development due to limited resources. After completing my first master’s degree and now as an assistant coach at the collegiate level, I have grown an interest in the topic of career development and life after college. Identifying opportunities to help prepare student-athletes for success in their careers and after college is a must. Understanding the student-athlete holistically is the first step in solving this problem.

The obstacles that student-athletes face are not equivalent to traditional students. Student-athletes face time constraints and often cannot be as involved as non-athletes in academics, student research, leadership experiences, and other extracurricular activities due to the demands of their respective sports. Student-athletes also have less time for career preparation. Identifying

a balance in a student-athlete's lifestyle will be key to their success and career preparation after and during college.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of the study is to assess the efficacy of collegiate coaches providing university career center information in assisting the overall preparation of the student-athlete after college.

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there will be no significant difference in Career Preparedness Knowledge Test scores of Division-III female basketball players before and after reviewing university Career Education Office materials provided by coaching staff.

Operational Definitions

Career Preparedness Knowledge Test: This instrument was developed by research based on career preparation materials provided by the university career center.

Career preparation materials: These materials are available to the entire school population from the university Career Education Office, which provides information on preparing resumes and cover letters and completing interviews. The material includes helpful tips, tools, and formatting.

Division III College Athletes: Division III is a level of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Division III athletes are supposed to be students first and are expected to have less sports time commitment and travel than either Division I or II players.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this literature review, the focus will be on defining the student athlete. The literature will provide a better understanding of the student-athlete and articulate the career development of the student athlete.

Defining Student-Athlete Success in Intercollegiate Athletics

Autry (2010) described how student-athlete success has been a longtime concern to higher education leaders and the NCAA. The goal for institution is to pursue academic achievement and development of the student-athlete. Understanding the student-athlete holistically is the first step in fully providing assistance to student-athletes to become successful in their academic career and professional development. According to Zhao (2013), “To elucidate the relationship between student-athletes’ college experiences, specifically their engagement in educationally purposeful activities and desired college outcomes, requires an understanding of the development and culture of intercollegiate athletics” (p.12). Higher education professionals that have a better understanding of the student-athlete experience will be more equipped to assist the student-athlete in their experience.

Having an understanding of the differences between sports and athletics will better assist researchers and readers to be informed of the influences that athletics participation has on student-athletes’ experiences. There are similarities between athletics and sports; however, there are fundamental differences between the two terms (Zhao, 2013). Sports are more focused on the excitement of the participation of the sport. Sports are less competitive and unruly, more for the pleasure and anticipation of engagement. As Autry (2010) explains, “Sport is generally interpreted as spontaneous, moderate and generous” (p.13). Sport participation does not

necessarily need participation or training; sport is moderate rather than intense since the purpose of sport is not to excel; players are generous to each other, especially opponents.

Although it is “fun” for student-athletes to participate in their respective sport within athletics, the agenda is to win and perform highly to achieve a greater goal in athletics. While athletics have the same general outline as sports, the idea is more uniform and competitive. Zhao (2013) specifies the nature of athletics as competitive activities that involve an extraordinary amount of effort in training, some level of personal sacrifice, and commitment in pursuing the goal of victory or winning a desired prize by demonstrating superiority over others. Understanding those key factors between sports and athletics will help student-athletes, professionals, and bystanders by defining the student-athlete and their experience.

The differences between sports and athletics are essential in defining the student-athlete experience. Some individuals should educate themselves with the aspects of each term. Zhao (2013) specified the distinction between these two terms as not being as clear, especially when they referred to as college sports and intercollegiate athletics, which leads to interchangeable use or misuse between the two terms.

Description of a Student-Athlete's Roles

In defining the student-athlete's role, there are many aspects that must be taken in consideration, creating a full description. At times many choose to only focus on the athlete instead of the student. Holistic development of students' intellectual, emotional, and social development, which are interchangeable with cognitive, affective, and interpersonal development in some literature (Zhao, 2013). The term "holistic" also can be broadened by addressing career, physical, and personal development. According to Mahoney (2011), role conflict manifests when the demands of a particular role produce challenges that make it difficult for an individual to

meet the demands of another role. Mahoney states, “The pressures associated with athletic participation were beginning to supersede the enjoyment of participation and therefore participants focused more on their academic major and graduation” (p. 19). In addition, student athletes experience more demands in athletics, which leads to difficulties in academics. The demands of participating in their sport leads to the student neglecting their academics, which could lead to stress and a sense of failure.

Student athletes attend universities and colleges for many reasons, some good but some not so good. Research shows that they connect with the coach, are drawn to the facilities, are attracted by the number of times they will appear on television; these are all very important to a Division I athlete, especially one who is thinking about a possible professional career (Hamilton, 2004). Student athletes experience many different phases throughout their college career. The student-athlete will change and learn throughout their college experience. Hamilton specified that changing, learning, and growing is what college is all about. Educators should not unnecessarily restrict the type of learning in a student athlete’s experience. Change is inevitable in the student athlete’s experience. The student athlete must remain opened minded and prepared for change.

There are many aspects to consider when addressing the role of the student-athlete, and as a result, these roles conflict. Navarro & McCormick (2017) explained that the concept of role conflict intensifies the debate as to whether undergraduate students benefit from or are hindered by specialized academic and student affairs support services. The multiple roles that student athletes possess requires a strong balance between academics and competing. Mahoney (2011) explained that by examining the student athletes from a scarcity view, student athletes are predisposed to encounter role strain, as their athletic and academic roles will produce conflict.

The scarcity of time student-athletes have between athletics and academics often leads to role conflict, which tends to emphasize more the athletic role over the academic one. Athletics requires a large amount of time and energy, but academics do as well. If the student-athlete does not find a balance, either academics or athletics will receive more attention than the other. Mahoney explains, "Student-athletes' academic and athletic roles both require commitment, time, energy, and effort. Managing and balancing these multiple roles not only impacts student-athletes' use of time, but also their overall college experience" (p. 1). In response, the student athlete will be left feeling defeated and drained. While the conflict is real, researchers found that individuals have adequate time and energy for any and all roles to which they were highly committed. According to Mahoney, "The pressures associated with athletic participation were beginning to supersede the enjoyment of participation and therefore participants focused more on their academic major and graduation" (p. 19).

Student athletes are different compared to non-student athletes. Symonds' (2009) study revealed concerns that athletes, particularly revenue athletes, are significantly different than their non-athlete contemporaries. The time commitment that student-athletes have due to their commitment to their particular sport is a significant hurdle non-athletes do not face. Student-athletes struggle more than their non-athlete contemporaries due to their respective sports. Symonds demonstrated that though academic support services are available to all students, revenue sport athletes perceived less environmental support than non-revenue athletes. Higher education professionals must consider the idea of the student athlete not receiving the equivalent support of non-student athletes.

Academic Support for Student-Athletes

As mentioned above student athletes do not receive the same equivalent support that non-student athletes receive. Addressing this issue will support the student athlete in many facets. Hollis (2001) suggested that since athletic skill is the primary factor for granting the scholarship, some academically under-prepared student athletes “will have neither the motivation nor the aptitude to perform college work” (p. 266). Sometimes athletic responsibilities clash with academic demands, and student athletes are often pressured to meet “the demands of coaches who make key decisions about scholarship renewals (p. 266). At times, student athletes feel the pressure and stress to perform athletically but also excel in academics. If a student athlete fails to perform academically, they are at risk of losing their scholarship. The same happens athletically, if the student athletes performs poorly. The chances of the coach taking their scholarship is high. There is no fine line of balance in this scenario. Hollis explained that when these factors and pressure from coaches are considered together, it can be concluded that the activities required of student athletes to keep their scholarships and the pressurized environment in which they function might interfere with the student athletes’ equal opportunity in education. According to Hollis (2001), “Some colleges and universities have not always been concerned with their student-athletes graduation rates. Therefore, some of the best college athletes were often recruited without regard for their successful education” (p. 268). Colleges and universities have often only considered the athlete instead of the student. Additionally, some colleges and universities choose to commit unlawful actions on the behalf of certain student athletes so they can participate in sports. Hollis specified that instead of providing services to help student-athletes earn their education, some institutions permitted fraudulent services that resulted in unethical academic practices such as transcript tampering.

In relation to academic services, Hollis (2001) showed this is also true for student-athletes. Student athletes must be especially careful in planning their academic career as they must consider conflicts with athletic competitions and NCAA eligibility requirements when they select classes. Each student athlete will need guidance throughout their career.

Career Planning for Student-Athletes

In preparing student athletes for career planning, there are many aspects to consider. According to Lally & Kerr (2005), career development is one of many challenges facing older adolescents. In college, career development is a topic that is not often looked at. Commonly, student athletes have a strong desire to pursue professional sports after college in early career plans. In Lally & Kerr's study, the participants described having aspirations of pursuing professional and amateur athletic careers in their respective sports when they arrived at the university. Understanding this aspect indicates that student athletes define themselves as athletes rather than students. Student athletes have low chances of experiencing outside careers due to the time restraints in their sports. Lally & Kerr's study revealed that students recalled having little time to explore activities such as campus clubs, community projects, or volunteering, experiences that may have increased their awareness of alternative vocational choices.

Late career plans suggest that by their senior years, the participants indicated they were no longer serious about pursuing amateur or professional athletic careers, (Lally & Kerr, 2005). The study suggested that although they had surrendered their hopes of pursuing athletic careers beyond the university, the participants recognized that their athletic experiences influenced their non-sport career choices. They explained that their athletic experiences had been positive and helped shape their interests and desires, with some developing interests in professions related to sport and physical activity. Further, the research revealed that the participants' growing

investments in the student role allowed them to explore intellectual interests and consider professions related to their programs of study.

According to Shurts & Shoffner (2004), “Collegiate student-athletes present unique issues regarding career development” (p.107). The time constraints between athletics and academics is the leading issue in career development for a student-athlete. According to Bullock-Yowell et al. (2011), it is important not only to identify low career decision making self-efficacy in student-athletes, but also to understand how to address career decision-making self-efficacy in career counseling. Martens & Lee (1998) stated that commitment toward a chosen sport may also inhibit an athlete’s career development. In student athletes, most do not think of career development until later in the college career. Bullock-Yowell et al. (2011) specified that in addition to neuroticism being linked to dysfunctional career thoughts, these thoughts can largely influence an individual’s career behavior. Student-athletes become neurotic about their ability to have a career. An athlete who defines him or herself as an athlete may not think they can pursue a career outside of athletics. Student-athletes also tend to believe that they cannot manage a career due to time constraints.

The research indicates that it is important to start the career development early on in one’s college career. Navarro & McCormick (2017) stated that one of the inherent functions of colleges and universities is to prepare students to graduate with a degree that allows them to embark on their career journey. Folsom et al. (2005) specified that the rising cost of obtaining a college education, student academic performance, time taken to graduate, and student graduation rates continue to concern college administrators, state legislators, and governors. First Year Experience (FYE) courses have become a well-known program addressing these concerns at campuses across the country. These courses familiarize students with the basics of college life,

assist them in selecting majors and career goals, and equip them to proceed effectively toward degree attainment. These courses not only prepare the student for the college experience, but it also entails a guide to navigate through different scenarios. Providing these principles that are learned in this course or similar courses will showcase if students are ready for college or not.

Conclusion

This review attempted to provide a better understanding of the student athlete's development holistically and in terms of their careers. Student athletes are a unique group of students in higher education. Student athletes struggle with many issues throughout their college careers. For instance, time constraints, role conflict, scholarship concerns, and balance are significant issues.

Addressing these issues for student athletes will allow them to focus on other important aspects of college like career development, joining clubs, and building relationships with students and professors. Often times, the student athlete is looked at as an investment instead of an opportunity: the opportunity to better their lives and creates meaningful memories.

Chapter III

Methods

The purpose of this study was to assess the efficacy of collegiate coaches providing university career center information in assisting the overall preparation of the student-athlete after college.

Design

This study had a pre-experimental, one-group pretest-posttest design that involved a pre and post-questionnaire developed and completed by the researcher to determine if there was an increase in career preparation knowledge of student-athletes after reviewing university Career Education Office materials provided by coaching staff. The independent variable in this study was whether student-athletes had exposure to the informational materials. The dependent variable was the Career Preparedness Knowledge Test score. This study used a convenience sample consisting of the women's basketball team at for whom the researcher was a graduate student assistant coach.

Participates

Participants in this study were twelve student-athletes who attended a small liberal arts college of approximately 1,500 students in a mid-Atlantic state. These twelve-female student-athletes were members of the NCAA Division-III women's basketball team. All participants ranged from the age of 18-22.

Instruments

The instrument used for the study was the Career Preparedness Knowledge Test (Appendix A), a questionnaire which was designed by the researcher and based on the reviewing of the resources she provided the athletes, which came from the university Career Education Office. These included documents related to resume building and cover letter tips, and a YouTube video about

interviewing skills. The questionnaire consisted of a total of ten multiple choice questions to which the participants had to select one of the three or four possible answers.

The resume building section asked about basic fundamentals and techniques that would create a strong resume. There were four questions created for this section on the questionnaire. An example of a question is as follows: “What phrase should you not include in the style of a resume?” The student-athlete would then select the one correct answer from four examples.

Answer choices for this question were as follows: a. “Reference List,” b. “International Experience,” c. “Writing Style,” d. “References Available Upon Request.”

The cover letter tip section tapped more into the mechanics and writing. There were four questions from this section on the questionnaire. An example of a question is as follows: “What do employers need to know when reading a cover letter?” Answer choices for this question were as follows: a. Your resume, b. Exact phrases, c. You want their job.

The interview skills section tapped knowledge about the steps at the ending of a career search. There were two questions from this section on the questionnaire. This section tapped in on the types of interview and how long they may last. An example of a question is as follows: “What is the main purpose of an interview?” Answer choices for this question were as follows: a. Determine your fit with the position and organization b. To persuade the interviewer that you are the right fit c. To provide false information about your qualification.

Students received a point of 1 for each correct response, with a total possible score of 10 points.

The Career Preparedness Knowledge Test score was a combination of scores from the resume building, cover letter tips, and interview skills items. Since the researcher created the questionnaire, there are no validity or reliability data available.

Procedure

Permission to proceed was sought and granted by the Head Coach of the women's basketball program. The participants had weekly meetings with the researcher and head coach for approximately 45 minutes.

Prior to the intervention, the researcher explained to the student-athletes that they had access to resources for success after college on campus. Although, it was not required that they use the resources by the university. Before the intervention, the student-athletes were presented with the Career Preparedness Knowledge Test through a link presented by Google. The student-athletes were asked to complete the test at their own pace independently without reviewing any resources.

The student-athletes were informed that the interventions conducted provided more information about success in life after college and career preparation. Following the completion of the pre-test, the researcher provided them with documents from the university Career Education Office on resumes, cover-letters, and interviews. Students were asked to review the materials on their own time but were asked to have completed the review within a week. The student-athletes were informed they were going to get post-tested. Then the researcher administered the post-test to measure the student-athletes' understanding of career development. The Career Preparedness Knowledge Test pre-intervention and post-intervention scores were compared by a non-independent samples t-test.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this case study was to examine the preparation of student-athletes for success after college. Student-athletes completed a test that examined their knowledge of resume building, cover letter building, and interviewing techniques before and after studying materials from the university Career Education Office.

A non-independent samples t-test was conducted with the independent variable was whether student-athletes had exposure to the informational materials and the dependent variable being the Career Preparedness Knowledge Test score. There was no significant difference between the mean pre-test scores (Mean = 6, SD = 1.13) and mean post-test scores (Mean = 7, SD = 1.65) [$t(11) = 1.34, p = .21$]. Table 1. Consequently, the null hypothesis is that there will be no significant difference in Career Preparedness Knowledge Test scores of Division-III female basketball players before and after reviewing university Career Education Office materials provided by coaching staff was retained.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-statistic for the Career Preparedness Knowledge Pre and Post Test

Condition	Mean	SD	t-statistic
Pre-test	6	1.13	1.34(NS)
Post-test	7	1.65	

N = 12

NS= non-significant at $p \leq .05$

Chapter V

Discussion

The study examined the impact of preparation for success after college on the student-athletes of a women's basketball team on the collegiate level. The data collected from the preparing student-athletes for success after college pre-post test revealed a slight increase in mean scores for the players on the women's basketball team between the pre and post intervention; however, the difference was not statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis was retained in that the intervention was not found to be effective in significantly improving performance.

Implications of the Results

The results indicated that there were no significant differences between the pre and post intervention, but the feedback from the student-athletes showed that they gained from the interventions. Student-athletes indicated that they were going to contact the Career Exploring Office for their resumes and cover letters. In addition to student-athletes indicating interest in the CEO, they also had improved answers in the cover letter format questions. For example, the student-athletes answers in the pre-test suggest that the student-athletes were not as knowledgeable in a cover letter format. After reviewing the information sent out, the student-athletes answers reflected that they had gained some knowledge. However, the results were not statistically significant, so the intervention did not make a major impact

Through personal observation, the researcher was able to recognize the subject's change in preparing student-athletes for success after college. During the pre-test, the student-athletes answered questions to the best of their ability. The scores were fairly low, which was expected because the student-athletes did not receive the material to review and answer the questions

efficiently. During the post-test, the student-athletes scored higher than the pre-test. The exception to this was four student-athletes, who either scored the same or lower which indicated they did not understand the material or were not putting effort into the test.

Theoretical Consequences

The results of the study were not able to provide evidence to support the theory of the importance of preparing student-athletes for success after college.

Threats to the Validity

There are a few different possible threats to the validity of the results to the study. Since some subjects faced restraints in reviewing the material, this affected the internal validity of the study. These students were less likely to make improvements on the post-test if they had difficulty accessing the material. A threat to external validity is that there is not clarification if the results applies to all college student-athletes. Also, the researcher could not make a direct comparison between college athletes and non- college athletes based on the results.

There was also another internal threat to the validity of this study related to instrumentation. The instrument used in the study was a researcher made questionnaire, which has no reliability or validity data. It consisted of only knowledge questions and did not require application of skills. It may not have been sensitive to what the students had learned. Another concern is that when the subjects were completing the tests, there is no way to know if they were actually making thoughtful responses or only randomly making selections.

Connections to Previous Studies/ Existing Literature

The researcher felt that it was important to explore noninvasive modern intervention for student-athletes and their success after college because “collegiate student-athletes present unique issues regarding career development” (Shurts & Shoffner, 2004, p.107). Through

exploring research and literature, it was discovered that student-athletes struggle to find balance in their sports, academics, and after college preparation, such as preparation for careers and daily living. Many of the studies that had been reported with student-athletes suggested the balance not being equal between their sports and other activities or responsibilities. Martens & Lee (1998) stated that commitment toward a chosen sport may also inhibit an athlete's career development. In student-athletes, most do not think of career development until later in the college career. The students' low performance on the pre-test is consistent with previous literature showing a lack of career preparation among collegiate athletics.

Implications for Future Research

The intervention was not found to be successful in significantly increasing student career preparation as measured by the post-test. Future research should include more subjects from multiple sports, and the subjects should be randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Another study including non-collegiate athletes could address whether success after college is a student-athlete problem or a general student problem. It may be common for all student to not know that much about success after college. Further research should be conducted to answer a variety of questions. For example, would it be helpful to provide sessions to help navigate beyond the student-athlete experience? Would it be helpful to host a conference with potential employers for only upperclassmen? How should we discuss life after college with student-athletes?

Conclusion

The study selected a group of student-athletes to assess their knowledge of tools to measure how prepared they are for after college. The subjects completed a series of items that measured their knowledge on how to be successful after college. The intervention was found to

not be successful. Student-athletes struggle with balance between the student and athlete portions of their college lives. In order for student-athletes to be success after college, there must be an emphasis on career development to ensure they are prepared.

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