Attitudes of Male Athletes in Their Last Year of Eligibility in Division II College Athletics and the Relation to Their Academic Success

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ATTITUDES OF MALE ATHLETES IN THEIR LAST YEAR OF ELIGIBILITY IN DIVISION II COLLEGE ATHLETICS AND THE RELATION TO THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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August, 2001

MASTERS PROJECT
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Brian Paul Bauer
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ABSTRACT

This study examined male college student athletes in their final year of eligibility and the relation to their academic success. The purpose was to find out if student athletes who plan on participating in professional athletics are relinquishing their academic responsibilities in college. Three male student athletes, who were finished with their last year of eligibility at a Division II institution, were interviewed. The cumulative grade point averages of each of the participants were viewed and compared to the statements given during the interviews. Results of the study were compared to the literature found.
CHAPTER I. PROPOSAL

Do college student athletes in their final year of competition have academic success problems? Apparently, according to the Associated Press (2000), the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) revoked several student athletes' eligibility to participate in post-season bowl games due to unsuccessful academic results from the previous semester. This study examined collegiate student athletes in their final year of competition and how well they performed in academics. The NCAA has determined guidelines for student athletes to follow in order to participate in intercollegiate athletics. The individual student athlete must be enrolled full-time (at least 12 credit hours) and receive a passing grade in at least 12 credit hours.

A student athlete is a person who is enrolled in a college or university for the purpose of receiving a higher education degree and participates in athletics for that college or university (Mallette, 1992). These individuals may not be ensuing their academic performance on account of the inability for admonishment by the NCAA. In other words, it is difficult for the NCAA to reprimand or punish individuals who are graduating or who are finished with their athletic eligibility. This is simply because the athlete is no longer participating in collegiate athletics after their final season. This leads one to question, why are student athletes failing classes in their final year of athletic eligibility? Is it because the individual was confident in becoming a professional athlete? Or was it because the individual had no intention of receiving a higher education degree and just wanted to be involved in athletics? It is interesting to ponder why any athlete, who was so close to graduating, would
surrender his or her hard work of the previous semesters in order to have more time to focus on competing in athletics. The athletes from the Associated Press (2000) article could have competed in athletics and finished up their degree within the end of the academic year, but instead will have to enroll again to finish up their degree and suffered the consequences of missing post-season competition. “Athletes with dreams of professional or Olympic careers are tempted to ignore the task of being students in favor of the immediate pursuit of fame and fortune” (Brown, Cunningham, Gruber, & McGuire, 1995).

The level to which this problem exists, if it exists, is currently unknown. There is potential of this problem existing in other Division I, II, and III schools around the nation. If in fact this is a problem, the NCAA needs to recognize the problem and install guidelines. Currently, in order for an athlete to be eligible for post-season play, that individual has to successfully pass six credit hours in the current or previous academic semester. Individuals not fulfilling the responsibility of passing 12 credit hours, will be on probation for the next semester but will be able to participate in the post-season.

This topic comes with very little information available. The conceivable reason for this is that this potential problem presumably has not been occurring very long. As salaries have risen in professional sports in the last ten years, so has the interest to participate in professional sports. Athletes’ intentions seem to be focused on getting to the professional level as quickly as possible and benefit from the large pay rates. If this route requires going through college, then the athlete enrolls with the
mind-set of only doing what is necessary in academics to stay eligible in athletics.
The whole focus of athletics in any setting, including amateur, high school, and college, has seemingly lost sight of the importance of an education. This is apparent through collegiate athletes leaving college early to sign contracts in professional sports. Are college athletics being used to a certain extent as preparation for professional sports?

The intention of this study is to determine if there is a problem with male college student athletes and their academic success in relation to their sport participation. In addition, is there a reason for which this potential problem is taking place? During this study, three male student athletes from a large Division II institution were asked to participate in a ½ hour interview. The interview was conducted to identify whether or not the student athlete entertained a thought of proceeding to the professional level and how that thought affected their academic performance. The athletes chosen were also questioned on academic issues during competition, attitudes of athletes towards academics, and specifically their performance in the classroom.

The answers to the questions in the interview will be compared to grade point averages obtained from every semester the athletes have been involved in higher education. Results will be made from the comparisons to finalize the concern for this problem occurring in Division II athletics. Female student athletes will not be included in this study because the lack of opportunity in professional sports for females does not create an environment like the one created with male athletics at this
point in time. In addition, because of time restraints, the feasibility of interviewing a large number of student athletes or student athletes from different institutions was not possible.

The final outcomes of this study were to compare the attitudes of the male college student athletes interviewed with their grade point averages. These results were compared with the responses given to the literature. This evaluation not only compared what is being reported to the responses given by the student athletes but also determined if there were any similarities. As stated earlier, the intention of this study was to investigate a large Division II institution and evaluate the student athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics to see if there is a problem with academic success while competing in sports, and to what extent it is occurring, if at all. Permission from the institution has been granted for an interview of three male student athletes and to compare their responses to their grade point averages earned. Along with the comparison to the literature, the evaluation with the grade point averages gave substantial data to examine the potential problem of student athletes failing to meet academic standards.

Key Terms

Academic Achievement- successful in fulfilling requirements set forth by institution in acquiring a degree.

Academic Standards- requirements set forth by institution for student to fulfill to be worthy of receiving a degree.

Divisions of Athletics- separating colleges into different categories depending on how much money an institution has in the athletic department. Division I schools have the most money and offer the most scholarships for student athletes. Division II schools have less
money and offer a few scholarships. Division III schools have least money and offer no scholarships.

Higher Education- educational opportunity beyond the high school level (i.e. college or university).

Intercollegiate Athletics- exercises and games requiring physical skill, strength, and endurance. Compete against other colleges or universities.

Eligibility- qualified to participate or to be chosen.

Post-Season Competition- tournaments or games after the regular season is over. Usually for a championship.

Student Athlete- a person who is participating in athletics at an institution and is also attending classes to receive an education.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the following: only three athletes were interviewed, only male athletes were interviewed, only one institution was investigated, one-half hour interviews were performed, and the study was completed in a short time frame. Ideally, a wide range of participants including both genders and from different institutions in all of the division categories would make this study more complete. A longer interview process would have enabled the examiner to look more in-depth on the athlete’s viewpoints about education and athletics. These are some recommendations for another study on this topic.

Conclusion

Do college student athletes in their final year of competition have academic success problems? The intention of this study is to determine this situation. Chapter two will research the literature to provide background information for Chapter three.
Chapter three will then explain the study and report the results. A discussion and recommendations for future study will follow at the end of Chapter three.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

There have been surprisingly few attempts to analyze determinants of academic performance of college and university athletes. “College athletics has been the object of considerable scrutiny as administrators seek to balance the often conflicting academic mission of colleges and universities against the financial rewards that come with athletic success” (Amato, Gandar, Tucker, & Zuber, 1996, p. 188). Promoters and fans praise college sports for their community building and revenue generating capacities, their entertainment value, and their role in developing teamwork and leadership skills among athletes. However, detractors point to frequent scandals, the high net cost of most programs, and the poor academic records of many players (Briggs, 1996, p. 5).

Persons participating in intercollegiate athletics are among an elite group of athletes. These student athletes receive an education in return for their representation of the school on athletic playing fields. Intercollegiate student athletes are scrutinized because a few individuals either have no intent on receiving an education and are just competing at the next level of athletics or are potentially using collegiate athletics as a stepping stone into professional sports and not for an education. The last sixty-three years have seen an increase in frequency of abuses, particularly on campuses engaged in “big-time” college sports, according to Moore (1992).

The three aspects of an athletics program at a division I institution that generate the most public scrutiny are the following: the recruitment and admission of
the student athletes, the performance of student athletes in the classroom, and the
conduct of the student athletes and coaches both on and off the playing field (Knapp,
1992). According to Newman, Miller, and Bartee (2000), recent, historical, and
continued abuses by institutions concerning student athlete integrity has forced a
growing oversight by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The
purpose of the NCAA is to insure a level playing field (test scores, dormitory
requirements, color print in programs, etc.) for schools which compete in “big-time”
collegiate athletics (Butler, 1995). The NCAA is the governing body that regulates
college athletics and maintains eligibility standards for the student athletes. Eligibility
rules ensure that athletes be students and keep on track towards graduation. Also,
eligibility rules ensure student athletes retain their amateur status, no matter how
good they may be or how valuable they are (Figler & Figler, 1984). The eligibility
rules are for those university student athletes who present an apparent motivational
contradiction. Most athletes are highly motivated to succeed in the athletic domain,
having been selected to participate in intercollegiate athletics because of their proven
abilities and desire to succeed. However, many of the most visible student athletes
seem to lack such motivation in the classroom (Simons, VanRheenan, & Covington,
1999).

"The evidence continues to pile up that these people are simply lower-level
professional athletes being passed off as university students," stated Naughton (1997,
p. A43). This is the same viewpoint that many individuals are beginning to take on
college athletics and student athletes. This issue is currently a problem with mostly
male student athletes, for the reason that there are more opportunities in professional sports, therefore, the interest level is high in most individual male athletes to succeed and pursue a career in the popular world of professional athletics. According to Simons, VanRheenan, & Covington (1999, p. A43), “Female athletes are less likely to come to a university primarily to play sports because of the lack of extrinsic rewards and the limited possibility of a professional athletic career.”

The Challenges of Student Athletes

Richards and Aries (1999) were quoted as saying, “The demands of collegiate sport exceed by far that of other extracurricular activities” (p. 211). Because the time demands of athletics as well as academics in college, athletes do not have much time left over for themselves. According to Astin’s “Theory of Student Involvement,” the strength of effect that particular aspects of the college environment have on students is a function of the quality of effort students devote to those particular college activities (Briggs, 1996). “College varsity student athletes encounter considerably more obstacles than their non-athlete peers as they strive toward academic achievement” (Smith & Herman, 1996, p. 3). Several obstacles student athletes in NCAA member institutions encounter in their academic achievement that their non-athlete peers typically do not confront are required physical training, and demands placed upon them by their coaches, their institutions, and the NCAA (e.g. time requirements for training, travel, and games) (Smith & Herman, 1996). All of these stresses can apply an extremely large amount of stress on an individual, which can lead to role strain.
Role strain develops due to the considerable demands athletes' face in their role as students and as athletes (Richards & Aries, 1999). Simons, VanRheenan, and Covington (1999) stated, student athletes are expected to fill two roles, that of an athlete and a student. They vary in the degree of commitment to these roles and are often in conflict. According to Figler and Figler (1991), it is not unusual for an athlete to feel as though they are two different people in one day, student half of the day and athlete the other half. This is because of the time commitment to both athletics and academics. Student athletes have a fair amount of time devoted to their training and competition in athletics as well as being registered full-time as a student at the university or college.

Mallette (1992) explained that student athletes, as a general rule, must be registered as full-time students if they are participating in organized practices or competition. Because athletic participation is physically strenuous, there exists the problem of fatigue that makes concentration during studying more difficult. In addition to the pain and physical discomfort that may interfere with full concentration while studying or attending class, extra time is required for the rehabilitation of both minor and major injuries (Simons et al., 1999). "Not only may athletes be forced to sacrifice attention to academics but to social and leisure needs as well," according to Richards and Aries (1999, p. 212). A great example of the intensity and focus athletes' display on their participation in athletics would be from a quote from a tennis coach at a small college in the New England area. This individual stated that "she does not stress the NCAA national tournament, but with the way her tennis team
has come so close reaching it the last couple of years, it is hard for the kids to think about anything else. The kids probably would have hung themselves if they did not get to participate” (Suggs, 1999, p. A45).

Figler and Figler (1991) stated that managing time efficiently might be the hardest task an athlete will face in college. Student athletes are required to put a great deal of time and effort into their sport, which brings prestige to the university, revenues from athletic events, and donations to the university by alumni. Student athletes are required to devote upwards of twenty-five hours per week when their sport is in-season, miss numerous classes for university sanctioned athletic competitions, and deal with fatigue and injuries as a result of their athletic participation (Simons, VanRheenan, & Covington, 1999). In sports that have seasons that span the entire academic year, there is no “off-season” in which the student athlete can take a heavier course load (Figler & Figler, 1991). This also applies to student athletes who maintain year-round training schedules. A study performed by Amato et. al (1996), found an adverse impact from post-season bowl appearances by college football teams on the academic progress of the players involved. The reason for this is the time commitment involved in preparing for this game. All season long the team competes for a win-loss record that will allow them to be accepted to a post-season bowl appearance, which will gain the university millions of dollars and a large amount of recognition. The regular season ends for college football around the middle of November and the bowl games do not take place until the middle of December upwards to the beginning of January. In the meantime, the team is practicing,
training, and preparing themselves for this game so as to win and not be humiliated in front of a national audience. The study found that if the NCAA would change the post-season play for division I-A college football from a bowl playoff system to a single elimination playoff system beginning at the completion of the regular season, the college athletes would have more time for attention to academics before the end of the semester and finals. However, Figler and Figler (1991) stated that "it is often-times the individuals who are extremely busy that get the majority of their work done and done well. Motivation is higher in these individuals" (p. 47).

Student athletes oftentimes do not weigh the chances of success in academics versus athletics. This may be occurring because the motivation to succeed academically is weakened by well-publicized accounts of athletes leaving school early to launch lucrative professional careers (Simons et. al, 1999). For these few athletes, receiving a degree has been eliminated as a prerequisite for economic success and security (Simons et. al, 1999). According to Bennion (1992), because of these extremely lucrative but very limited financial opportunities in professional athletics, it is vital that coaches and administrators not only expect academic performance, but also conduct some reality therapy in making clear the small number of athletes who ever participate professionally.

Institution’s Control Measures

Education and athletic leaders face the challenge of controlling costs, restraining recruitment, limiting time demands, and restoring credibility and dignity to the term “student athlete” (The Knight Foundation, 1993). The need for academic
accountability with student athletes is essential, just as it is for all students. It is also a reminder to the student athletes of why they are in school and the importance of academic preparation in their future life. Only a small minority of student athletes pursue a career in athletics (Bennion, 1992).

According to Lederman (1992), an institution would be able to help control the academic issues if they involved the media. A tremendous amount of information is withheld from reporters and the public. However, if it was available, then holding student athletes accountable might be easier for the simple fact that the media could report their problems in academics. The student athlete would then be in the spotlight for not achieving instead of success in competition. Along with involving the media, systematic reports on the academic qualifications and performance of student athletes should be compiled each semester for use by the president, senior academic administrators, and athletics department personnel (Moore, 1992). The report would aid the administration at the university on the decisions that are to be made on student athletes who are not compliant with academic regulations.

In contradiction to the statements above, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 protects the student athletes from such actions. FERPA and its implementing regulations apply to all public and private educational agencies or institutions that receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education or whose students receive such funds and pay them to the agency or institution. The act regulates the access to a student's academic records by the student themselves, the student's parents, the institution, and outsiders (Kaplin & Lee, 1995).
The average athlete on a top college football or men's basketball team enters college in the bottom quarter of his class (Naughton, 1997). These student athletes are accepted because the admission policies vary from campus to campus. Some institutions are very strict and apply every qualification to athletes that they have applied to other students. Others consider athletes a separate category and treat them differently (Naughton, 1997). Recruiting and admissions are a definite way of controlling academic success issues because institutions are in control of the type of student they enroll, which results in them having chosen a student athlete that they think will not fail in their academic system. Faculty and academic staff should be more involved in the athletic recruiting process so the athletes feel the institution values the student as well as the athlete (Simmons, VanRheenan, & Covington, 1999). The involvement of the faculty and academic staff would not only set the standard for the institution, but could potentially help with the admissions process into the institution through recommendations.

According to Naughton (1997), “Universities have nothing to be ashamed of in admitting athletes with below average academic qualifications, as long as the university works to make sure the individuals get an education” (p. A44). Most division I institutions have hired counselors and tutors to work with their athletes. By doing so, the institutions are providing professional assistance to student athletes so they have guidance through their academic career, which potentially can increase the rate of academic success.
Some institutions have a program implemented to provide support to their student athletes. This program is called the Student Athlete Academic Support Program (SAASP), which is based on one goal that all student athletes graduate prepared (Smith & Herman, 1996). However, student athletes have consistently reported either being unaware that career-planning and study-skills workshops even existed in the SAASP, or were greatly under-utilizing them. Overall, institutions need to get better in educating their student athletes on the programs the institutions have to offer them. In addition to the SAASP, the NCAA has recognized the importance of faculty involvement in athletic oversight, and has decreed the appointment of a faculty athletic representative (FAR) at each member institution (Newman, Miller, & Bartee, 2000). The FAR has the responsibility for conveying academic integrity in college sports from the faculty’s perspective.

The time and stress student athletes encounter in athletics is well documented at the NCAA division I level, where such institutions provide general academic counseling service to all of their student athletes (Smith & Herman, 1996). Most institutions that choose to support high profile athletic programs have established a separate academic support service program. Institutions with more modest athletics operations consider athletics another extra-curricular option and will not single out student athletes for special treatment or support programs (Browne, Cunnigham, Gruber, & McGuire, 1995).

Academic tutoring and other support services for student athletes are typically part of athletics departments, which makes them potentially susceptible to the
pressure to put athletics first. These services should be separated from the athletics departments and administratively part of academic support. This will allow them to have some independence from the athletic department and be able to represent the academic interests of the student athletes when the inevitable conflicts arise between athletic commitments and academic ones (Simons, VanRheenan, & Covington, 1999, p. 161).

The most important factors in a successful support program are an appropriate environment and established procedures (Browne, Cunningham, Gruber, & McGuire, 1995). The athletic director and coaching staff must have an impact on their student athletes as well. Their full support and cooperation is essential if the academic support program is to succeed (Smith & Herman, 1996).

**Stereotype of “Dumb” Student Athletes**

College athletes are believed to be less academically able (Richards & Aries, 1999). There are stereotypes of student athletes nationwide in many public and private schools and institutions of higher education stating that they are unable to do the work of regular students or that they are inferior students (Jones, 1998). The image of athletes as “dumb jocks” is held by some teachers, some students, and worst of all- by some athletes (Figler & Figler, 1991). Negative stereotypes about student athletes’ lack of academic ability only add to motivational difficulties for academic success (Simons, VanRheenan, & Covington, 1999). Athletes were found to rate themselves lower on academic attributes (smart, studious, grade-conscious, intellectual, academically focused) than non-athletes (Richards & Aries, 1999).
According to other available research, student athletes' grade point averages are lower than the overall student body (Jones, 1998). Are these stereotypes really true? Are athletes incapable of doing the work of non-athletes?

**Faculty and Staff Involvement**

Faculty involvement plays an important role related to the success of the student athlete (Suggs, 1999). Several institutions in the New England Small College Athletics Conference participate in one of the most restrictive conferences in terms of rules and regulations concerning length of season, out-of-season practice, and recruiting. The participating institutions’ presidents and faculty have set these rules and regulations so that academia is maintained in these institutions. Self-regulation over athletic programs, under NCAA criteria, would place the accountability and responsibility of the programs under the jurisdiction of academically qualified and interested campus personnel (Newman & Miller, 1994).

The faculty at institutions can also effect positively or negatively the athletic department and its operations. According to Moore (1992), “In a passionate plea for football, a member of the history faculty exhorted: ‘Where I come from (Texas) there is no such thing of a real university without a football team’” (p. 29). If faculty support athletics, then the student athletes will benefit from both academics and athletics. If there is no support for athletics, then the student athletes will have a difficult time balancing time between both.

The message that coaches, athletic directors, and college administrators need to communicate to student athletes is that if you do not perform academically, you do
not participate athletically, nor do you win the game of life (Bennion, 1992). A campus administration that understands how to manage intercollegiate athletics, provide quality education, and be truthful in the sharing of academic performance data is imperative if the integrity of academia is to be maintained (Mallette, 1992).

At the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater, the athletic directors were concerned about protecting the academic integrity of the institution when they took over (Jones, 1998). One way they thought would help keep the academic integrity would be by involving faculty directly with athletics. By involving faculty in athletics, the faculty understand and realize that there is teaching that goes on outside of the classroom. In addition, this helps bridge the gap between athletics and academics. Furthermore, accountability for intercollegiate athletics begins with the institution’s president (Moore, 1992). “Presidential control clearly places the ultimate responsibility for program management with the institution’s chief executive and reinforces the commitment to maintaining intercollegiate athletics within the institution’s normal channels of authority” (Lombardi, 1992, p. 17). With the support of his or her governing board, administrative and faculty colleagues, the athletic department, and the student athletes themselves, a conscientious president can make a difference with the relationship between athletics and academics (Moore, 1992). Finally, if presidents have control of athletic programs, then they also have the fundamental responsibility to see that the programs operate as required (Lombardi, 1992).
Student Athletes’ Interests

Because many student athletes over-estimate their professional prospects and underestimate the importance of graduation, colleges and universities have a responsibility to provide an environment that facilitates the academic success of their athletes (Amato, Gander, Tucker, & Zuber, 1996). Because of the spotlight and the lucrative contract deals professional sports have, many student athletes acquire a false sense that the professional level of athletics is easily attainable and an education is not needed.

A study conducted by Briggs (1996) between 1986 to 1990 followed football players, basketball players, and non-athlete students comparing their degree aspirations in 1986 to 1990 even after all other group differences were accounted for such as pre-collegiate preparation, gender, etc. The results of this study found that degree aspirations for all other groups than football and basketball players had significantly improved in 1990, while those for intercollegiate football and basketball players had significantly dropped. Further examination revealed that football and basketball players typically had earned significantly lower degrees, and had significantly lower degree aspirations in 1990 than athletes in other intercollegiate sports.

Athletes with dreams of professional or Olympic careers are tempted to ignore the task of being students in favor of the immediate pursuit of fame and fortune (Browne, Cunningham, Gruber, & McGuire, 1995). A review of research on athletics and career preparation indicated that college athletes, especially football and
basketball players, tended to be lower in measures of career maturity. Career maturity was defined as the extent to which a person has accomplished career development tasks, the ability to formulate career plans, and the accuracy of knowledge and degree certainty about one's intended career (Briggs, 1996). In addition to lower measures in career maturity, the removal from faculty purview has subsequently been a factor in the decrease in academic attention of the student athletes. This has made these individuals, particularly in high-profile sports, athletes first and students second (Newman, Miller, & Bartee, 2000).

The students that are unmotivated to succeed academically are interested in playing their sport, which provided a strong if not primary motivation for coming to the community (Simmons, VanRheenan, & Covington, 1999). These student athletes and most student athletes, in general, have often favored athletics when conflict exists between the demands of athletics and academics. In addition, revenue athletes, such as those playing football or basketball, seem even less willing to have made a transfer of qualities and characteristics which result in athletic success to academic success. These athletes definitely show an apparent lack of motivation as well.

According to Briggs (1996), claims made about differences in educational outcomes between football or basketball players and other intercollegiate athletes are due to their differing expectations for careers as professional athletes rather than to any particular influence of the program itself. Research by Dr. Wilbert M. Leonard II found that the success rates were different for student athletes depending on which NCAA division (I, II, or III) they compete (Oriard, 1995). The success rates were
different because the time commitment and commitment level of athletes was incomparable between each division. According to Oriard (1995), comparison studies have consistently shown that female student athletes are academically superior to male student athletes. Studies conducted on grades of student athletes around the United States have shown that non-revenue student athletes are superior to revenue (football and basketball) student athletes in both high school grade point averages as well as college grade point averages (Simons, VanRheenan, & Covington, 1999).

In defense of student athletes and their grades is documentation collected at the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater which indicated that college and major selection of student athletes were similar to those selections of the general student body. Also, graduation rates were higher with student athletes than the overall student body at this particular institution (Jones, 1998). This research is in agreement with the theory that a person who is extremely busy often gets more work done because they are much more highly motivated to succeed.

**Academics versus Athletics**

Are athletes spending less time in class and less time studying than the general student population? A study on a division II institution found that athletes and non-athletes did not differ in the number of hours they studied or went to class in a typical week. The study also found that student athletes actually devoted more time in extracurricular activities in addition to academic responsibilities than did the non-athletes. Results of a study by Richards and Aries (1999) found the time management
of student athletes at twenty or more hours a week for athletics versus ten or more hours a week for extracurricular activities.

“In our society, intercollegiate sports and academic life are inseparable in the minds of most people outside of the academy, and for many of us who spend our lives on college campuses” (Moore, 1992, p. 31). There is no question that there are difficulties associated with “big-time” college athletics: academic integrity, equity among genders in sport offerings, a student’s academic progress toward the degree, and among others, eligibility of the student athlete (Newman, Miller, & Bartee, 2000). Athletes involved in programs that produce a large revenue and grant athletic scholarships have been found to show lower academic achievement and choose less rigorous academic majors (Richards & Aries, 1999), which off-sets the statement made earlier by Jones (1998). Revenue athletes are the most highly recruited and receive more extrinsic rewards, recognition, and social support than the non-revenue athletes. For many, this can lead to more time and effort devoted to athletics and less to academics (Simons, VanRheenan, & Covington, 1999). “An opportunity cost argument suggests that football players at successful football programs may have increased opportunities for lucrative professional careers and therefore less incentive to complete a college degree” (Amato, Gandar, Tucker, & Zuber, 1996, p. 193). In other words, football players at highly recognized football programs are more likely to proceed to the professional level someday, which results in the athletes not having an interest in completing their degree.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature clearly states that there is turmoil in college athletics, specifically in regards to athletics and classroom success. Some research clearly identifies athletes as low academic achievers because of their interest in competing in athletics. Others state that student athletes participate in academics as much as, if not more than, non-athletes do. The literature seems to link division I athletes or athletes of more prolific athletic programs to the results of low academic achievement. Although there have been no studies on this topic at the division II level of college athletics, the reason for this study is to determine if the same low academic achievement is occurring at the division II level.

Chapter three will introduce and analyze a study performed at a division II institution. The study examined division II college student athletes in their final year of competition and their academic success that year as well as throughout their collegiate career. The athletes gave personal answers to an interview in which they participated upon completion of their eligibility. The answers provided will help determine whether this problem with athletics and academics is also occurring at the division II level of college athletics.
CHAPTER III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The following study examined the relationship between male college student athletes and their academic performance during their final year of competition. This study also attempted to determine if there was a problem with the relationship between collegiate athletics and academics and to make that problem visible to the NCAA as well as the public. If there is a problem, then rules and regulations will need to be set forth to address the issue. This chapter includes the methodology, the data, and results of the study. Later in the chapter, the discussion and the plans for dissemination are presented.

Subjects

The study gathered qualitative information from participants in a one-on-one interview setting. There were three male participants chosen to participate with a mean age of 22 years (+/- 1 year). All involved participants had finished their final year of participation in collegiate athletics. Each participant was randomly chosen from the sports of baseball, basketball, and football and was to be finished with competition. For confidential reasons and for reasons of clarity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The athletes are referred to as Steve, Tom, and Jeff, respectively.

Design of Study

Three collegiate male athletes were interviewed in a one-on-one setting to gather information on their experience with collegiate academics and athletics.
Figure 1. The question bank for the interviews.

1. What are your plans upon graduation, if or when you graduate?

2. Upon graduation, how directly related are those plans from question #1 with your education received during college?

3. How many hours do you study per week? Why?

4. Do you think that you get enough time to study while participating in college athletics? Why or why not?

5. Do you plan to pursue a professional athletic career? If so, how will you do that and why?

6. Do plans to participate in professional sports affect the importance you place on academics? If so, how?

7. How often do you attend your scheduled classes each semester? Why?

8. How would you personally prioritize academics vs. athletics? Why?

9. What is your opinion of the prioritization of athletics and academics in collegiate athletes today?

A list of questions was compiled with the intention of inquiring into the student athletes' perspectives of their own career (see Figure 1). In addition to the list of questions for the athletes, their semester and overall grade point averages for every semester enrolled at the Division II institution were acquired to be compared to the answers given during the interview. Each participant was selected randomly from the participant pool to complete the interview. All grade point averages were received at the same time, in random order and without identifying information.

Each athlete who participated in the study had a cumulative grade point average over a 2.0 out of a possible 4.0 in every semester they were involved in athletics (Table 1). The only exception was that one athlete graduated at the end of the fall semester of his last year and needed to enroll in graduate courses to be eligible
Table 1. Grade point averages for participating athletes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athlete #1</th>
<th>Semester g.p.a.</th>
<th>Cumulative g.p.a.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.24</td>
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<td>2.57</td>
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<td>2.11</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>2.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athlete #2</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.98</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>2.92</td>
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<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.57</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>2.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athlete #3</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3.66</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3.75</td>
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</table>

for the spring semester. Athlete #3 enrolled in graduate courses and did not pursue the classes any further resulting in the 0.0 grade point average. The results in Table 1, however, cannot be linked to a certain participant or to the answers given during the interviews due to measures taken to protect the participants’ confidentiality and to respect the guidelines of FERPA. In other words, athlete #1, 2 and 3 in Table 1 cannot be identified with the athletes interviewed.

During the interviews, the student athletes did not reveal much information about themselves that would lead toward the phenomenon of athletes concentrating more on athletics than academics. When asked the question about pursuing a professional athletic career, Steve and Jeff reported no plans on pursuing a
professional athletic career at this point in their lives. On the other hand, Tom stated that “I am going to pursue a professional athletic career before I settle in the career for which I attended college” (Lines 1-4). Steve, Tom, and Jeff all eventually plan to work in the career field in which they were educated according to their statements in the interviews.

For the question pertaining to frequency of studying, Steve replied by stating “I study as much as I need to study. I do not study a lot unless there is a paper or test due in the next week” (Lines 12-13). Tom replied to this question by saying “I probably study less than the average student does because I think I am somewhat smarter than the average student is. On average, I study about 2-3 hours a week. If papers or exams were in the near future, then I studied more. I retain information well when I read or hear it for the first time, so that helps me not have to study as much” (Lines 5-8). Jeff answered the question by explaining that “my major required more time to do the work, so I studied on average of about eight hours a week” (Lines 6-7).

When asked about the time available for athletes to study, Jeff replied “Yes, there is time but the athlete does need to know how to manage their time wisely” (Line 10). Steve responded in a similar fashion. They both explained that with travel, competition, practice, weight training, watching film, and some social time that the schedule gets hectic in a hurry. If an athlete does not make the most of the time outside of all those demands, they will not succeed in school. According to Tom, however, “athletes do not get enough time to study. Depending on which position the
athlete holds on his or her team there is a lot of pressure to prepare so that the end factor will be success in competition” (Lines 9-12).

For the question involving pursuing a professional career and the effects on academics, Steve and Tom agreed that it does affect academics. Steve replied:

When an individual begins thinking of the opportunity to compete in professional sports, athletics rises above academics. That individual, or in this case me, begins to think that if he can get there then they’ll will offer money to return to school later. That thought process begins to get your priorities screwed up and in my case it did. I began to let my grades slide, especially in season. I was not worried about doing well in school, only about being successful in the game. (Lines 23-27).

In retrospect, Jeff replied to the question “No, the thought did not really affect me and my grades. It was always a goal of mine to get to the professional level, but I never really counted on it” (Lines 13-14).

The question of personal prioritization of athletics and academics and the reason for the answer resulted in all three athletes prioritizing athletics over academics. “Athletics receive more attention than academics and, to the student athlete, are much more interesting” explained Jeff. “I took care of my academics more or less to stay eligible” (Lines 18-20). Tom stated, “I realize the importance of academics though, so I prioritize them at a close second” (Lines 26-27).

During the interviews, the question of how often do you attend scheduled classes aroused some interesting replies. Steve noted “I attended as many as I could
because it helped to show the professor my interest level in the class was high. I think that this helped keep my grades elevated somewhat even though maybe I missed a couple of assignments. As much as the professors do not want to admit it, attendance really does make a difference in the long run because it shows them that you are trying and that you are interested” (Lines 28-33). Jeff stated “I attended all of my classes unless I was sick. With the workloads in my major, I could not afford to miss a class because it would set me back a week to a week and a half” (Lines 15-17). The replies to this question were from two different viewpoints including Tom, who attended all classes because he believed it was an important part of the education process.

Each student athlete interviewed had an opinion about the prioritization of academics and athletics in other student athletes. Jeff believed that “the majority of student athletes, in college, value athletics more than academics” (Line 21). Tom explained “I definitely think it is a priority in most collegiate athletes as well as most collegiate coaches. I think the pressure for teams to win in athletics is so huge that players and coaches sacrifice academics to improve athletics. I think that it is definitely a priority in the high profile sports such as football, basketball, baseball and hockey” (Lines 28-32). According to Steve, “I think the majority of athletes would not be in college if it were not for sports. I know I probably would not have attended college if it were not for sports keeping me in school” (Lines 43-45).

Results

Through the entire interview process, all three participants had approximately
the same viewpoint on each issue. There were several cases that the viewpoints were somewhat different. There were very few incidents where the viewpoints were opposite from each other. This observation leads to the theory that perhaps most athletes share the same opinions on athletics and academics. If that is the case, then maybe there is not a problem with college student athletes totally relinquishing their academic responsibilities to focus only on athletics. Or maybe there is a problem, and the three athletes selected for this study were not among the number of athletes who take academics for granted.

With the exception of the student athlete who enrolled in graduate courses, there was no evidence through the interview and comparison of grade point averages that these collegiate student athletes relinquished their academic responsibilities in their final year of eligibility in order to focus more on athletics. Plans to pursue a professional career were currently absent from two of the three individuals. The third individual; however, did value his education enough to finish his degree before he pursued a professional career.

On the contrary, it was interesting to find that these athletes did prioritize athletics over academics and sometimes to the point of not getting the work done in the classroom. It was also interesting to learn that there are student athletes who attended college for the sole purpose of competing in a higher level of athletics and that those individuals are not interested in receiving an education. Somehow, there needs to be a way of discontinuing this process of students attending college only for sports.
Discussion

What this study has found is brief but interesting and surely needs to be investigated further. It may be that at major Division I athletic programs this problem, with college student athletes disregarding academics to focus on athletics, occurs much more often than at Division II or III programs. The NCAA is beginning to regulate these occurrences more frequently (The Associated Press, 2000). There should be guidelines established by the NCAA for institutions to monitor closely how its student athletes are performing in the classroom throughout the entire semester and not just the end. “Because many student athletes overestimate their professional prospects and underestimate the importance of graduation, colleges and universities have a responsibility to provide an environment that facilitates the academic success of their athletes” (Amato, Gandar, Tucker, & Zuber, 1995).

This study only touched the surface of this issue. The issue of athletes sacrificing academics for athletics may involve a variety sports, genders, and races as well as institutions. The number one priority of every institution should be an education. Higher education should not be taken for granted and should not be available for free to someone not intending to use its benefits.

Plans for Dissemination

This information is for the use of any individual looking to proceed deeper into the world of collegiate athletics. The information noted earlier was compiled to spark interest in regulating student athletes competing in collegiate athletics and to enhance the level in which they are involved in their education. Hopefully someday
there will be specific guidelines for institutions to monitor this problem and keep it to a minimum.
REFERENCES


NAME: Brian Paul Bauer

MAJOR: CSAL

TITLE: Attitudes of Male Athletes in Their Last Year of Eligibility in Division II College Athletics and the Relation to Their Academic Success

PAPER TYPE: Thesis

SEM/YR COMPLETED: Summer 2001

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ABSTRACT: This study examined male college student athletes in their final year of eligibility and the relation to their academic success. The purpose was to find out if student athletes who plan on participating in professional athletics are relinquishing their academic responsibilities in college. Three male student athletes, who were finished with their last year of eligibility at a Division II institution, were interviewed. The cumulative grade point averages of each of the participants were viewed and compared to the statements given during the interviews. Results of the study were compared to the literature found.