

4-2019

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### ScholarWorks Citation

VanDenBerg, Haydn, "Club Athletics and Academic Success" (2019). *Honors Projects*. 740.  
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# Club Athletics and Academic Success

Haydn VanDenBerg

Grand Valley State University



## INTRODUCTION

The goal of this research is to examine the relationship between gender specific club athletics and academic success, focusing specifically on what factors are the greatest predictors of good scholarship and also how scholarship of club athletes can be improved at Grand Valley.

I was inspired to do this research because during the Fall 2018 semester I had the privilege of interning as a coach with the Club Men's Lacrosse team at Grand Valley. It became obvious to me during this time that there is a gap between club sports and academic support for those athletes. Although there are special academic resources for our varsity athletes, those same resources are not available to club athletes, even though the similar amounts of time are dedicated to their sports.

In the world of academia and athletics it is always said that participants are "STUDENT-athletes", implying that academics come first. I believe that my research will challenge this claim when applied to club sports; but when used as a guide, the findings will be very useful in creating an environment that will foster the academic success of club athletes.

## METHODS and MATERIALS

A 16 question online survey was created and used to gather information about club athletes and their academic endeavors. Samples of questions asked include:

- What is your major?
- What is your GPA?
- Do you plan on attending graduate school?
- How many hours per week do you spend on academics?
- How many hours per week do you spend on your sport?
- Do you believe participation in club athletics has helped you to improve as a student?
- Do you believe GV offers adequate academic support to club athletes?

Coaches and captains from all 29 single-gender athletic clubs were contacted with information about the research, as well as a link to the survey. They were asked to share the survey with their teams. Participation was voluntary, and all data was self-reported.

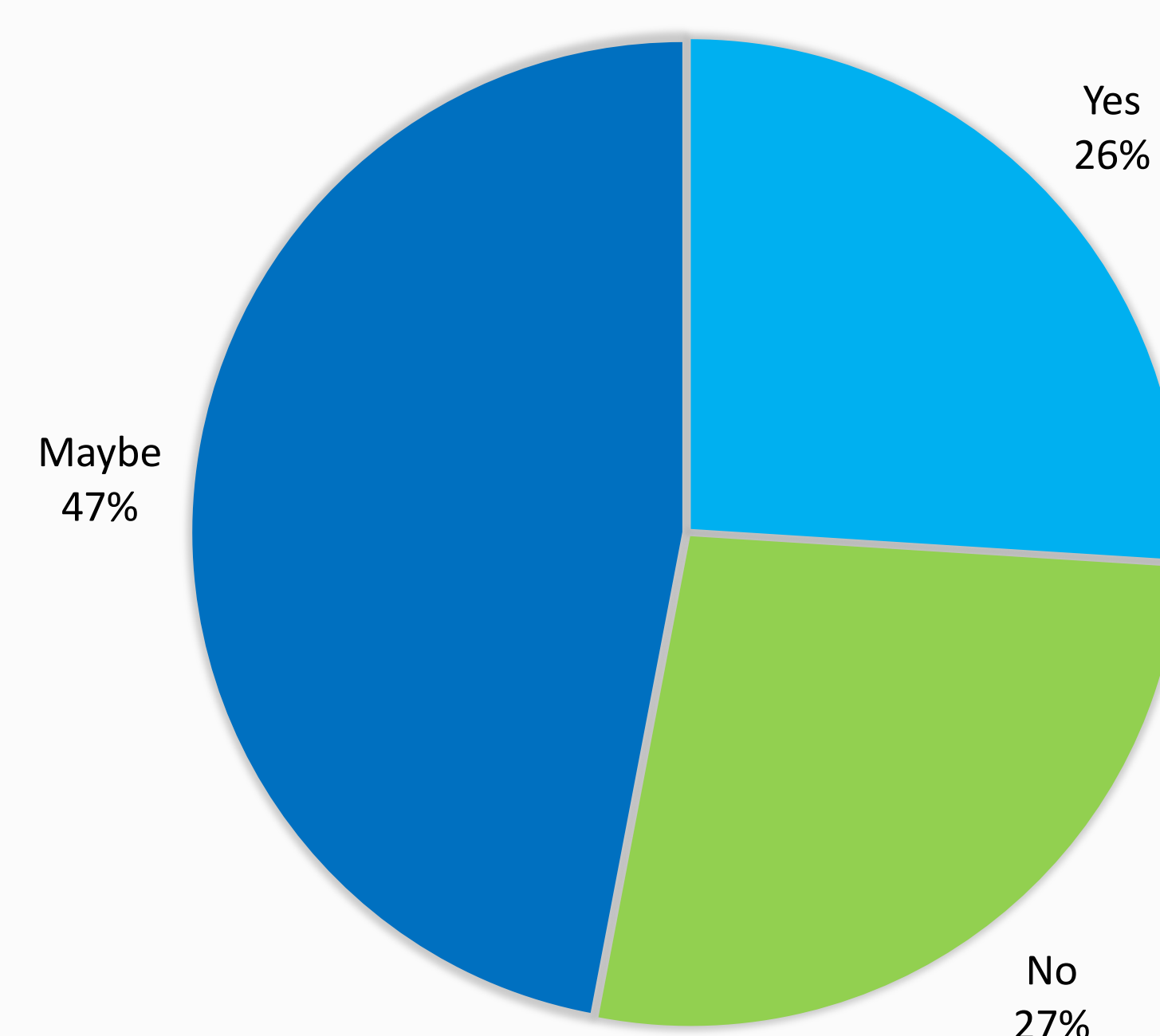
Eight teams (5 women's) participated in the research. 77 surveys (33% female) were used in the analysis.

This population was chosen since it most closely resembles the varsity athletics population to which these athletes are being compared.

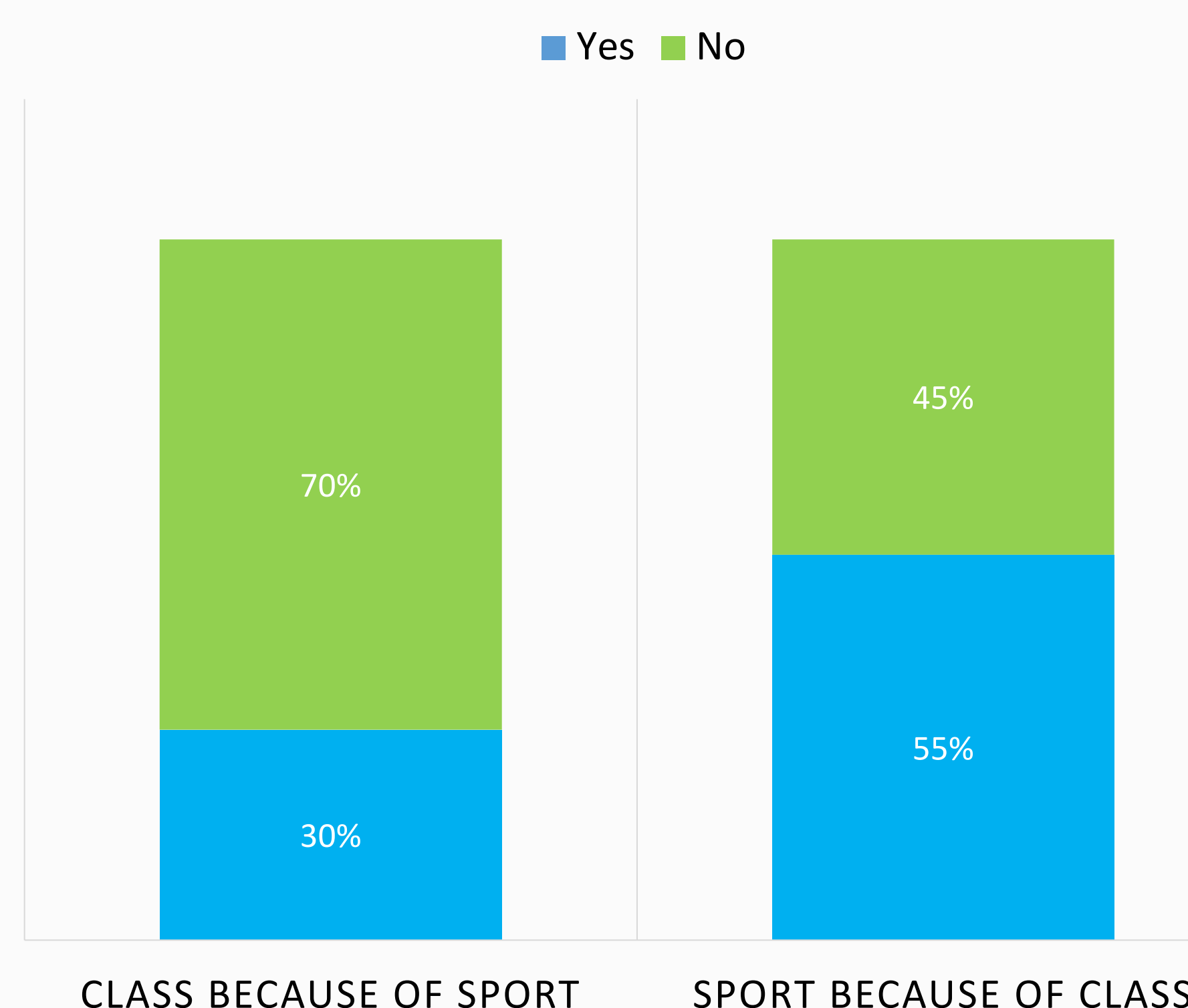
## RESULTS

- Average credits being taken: **14**
- Average GPA: **3.295** (compared to 3.14 GV undergraduate average)
- Top reason for choosing to attend GV: **academics**
- Average hours spent on class work per week: **26**
- Average hours spent on athletics per week: **12**
- **67.5%** aware of academic requirements to participate in their sport

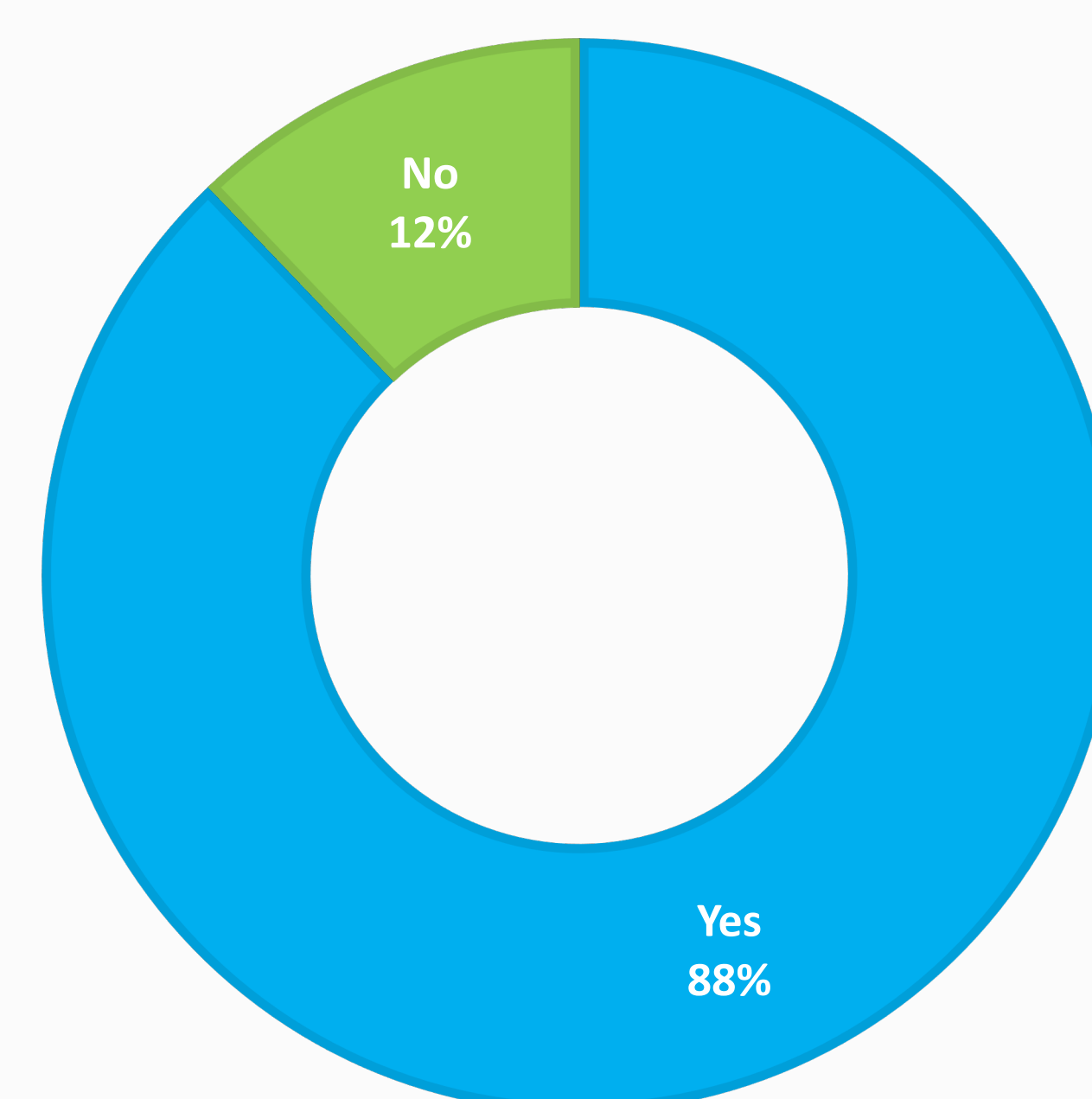
### DO YOU PLAN ON ATTENDING GRADUATE SCHOOL?



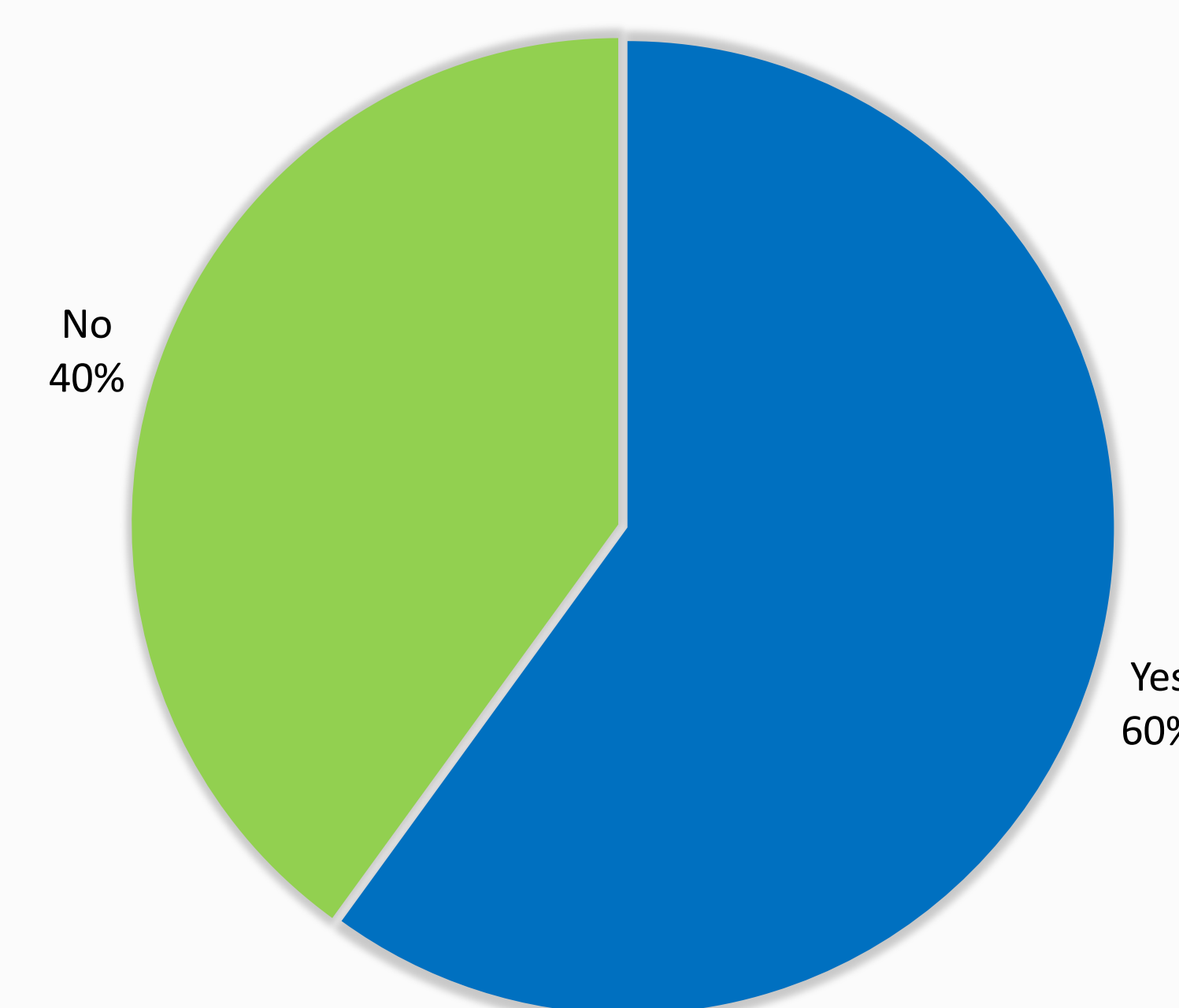
### HAVE YOU EVER MISSED...



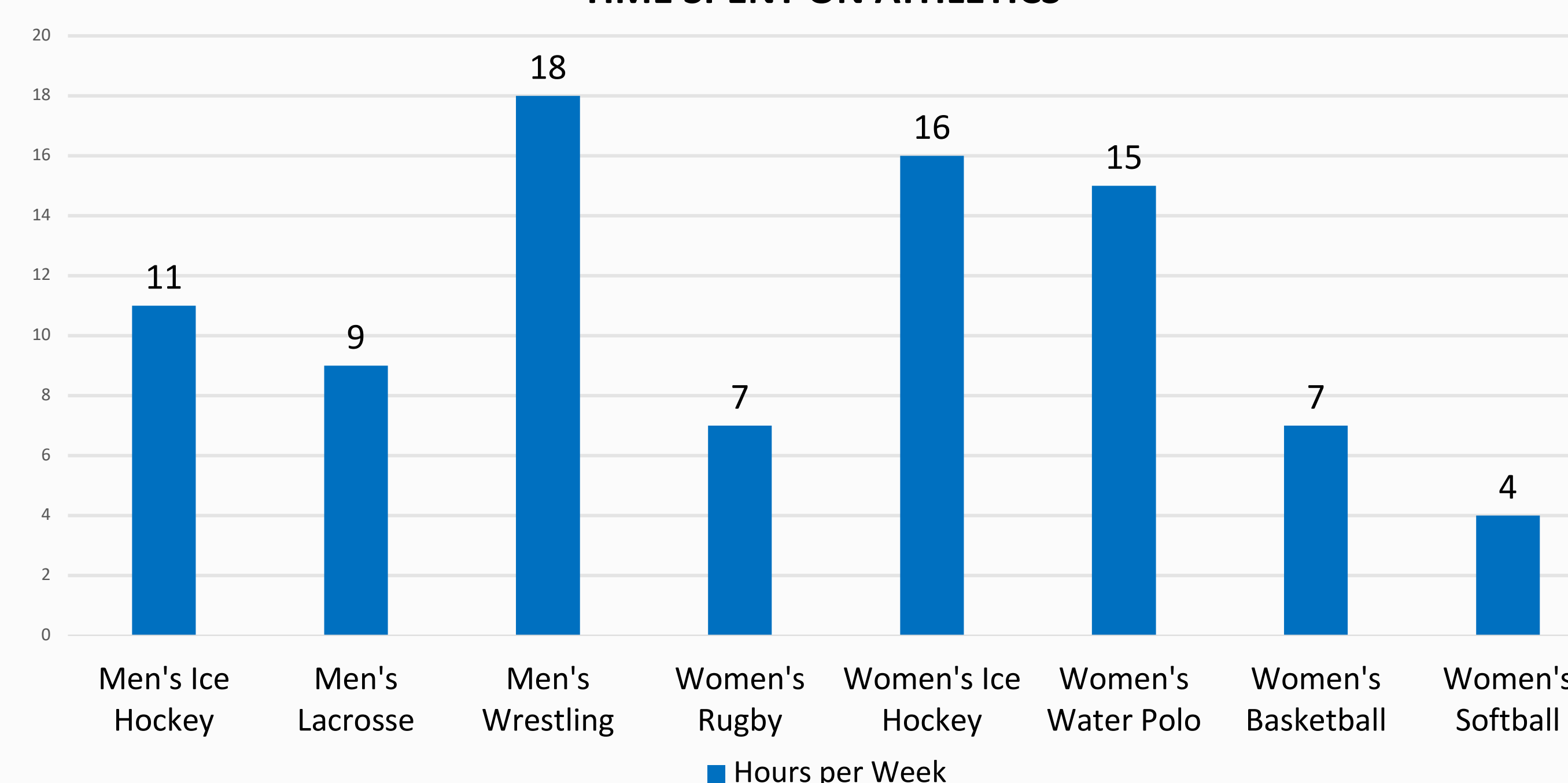
### DO YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE A BETTER STUDENT BECAUSE OF ATHLETICS?



### DOES GV OFFER ADEQUATE ACADEMIC SUPPORT TO CLUB ATHLETES?



### TIME SPENT ON ATHLETICS



## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the data provides much insight into the current academic achievements of club student-athletes at Grand Valley. Although not all student-athletes feel that proper academic support is being offered to them, the majority are high-performing students and athletes who have been able to thrive whilst dividing their time.

Although many student-athletes knew the academic requirements for them to play, they were very minimal. For most clubs, student-athletes are required to be a full-time student (12 credits) and in good standing with the University (2.0 GPA). Currently, the University does not have any sort of requirements for participation in club athletics, so standards are set either by the club itself or the league through which they compete.

Teams that spent more time on their sport each week were more likely to report dissatisfaction with the academic support being offered to them. Many participants felt as though the club programs and varsity programs should be treated in the same manner, with special concessions being made by professors to accommodate athletic schedules. As one student-athlete said, "some of the club sports are competing at the same competitive level as the varsity sports yet I know for a fact being on a varsity sport you get more attention and help."

Multiple participants reporting not knowing what academic support was available to them as a club student-athlete. Grand Valley does not currently offer any extra support to club student-athletes, although many participants expressed a desire for the extra guidance. One participant said that they would like to see the University "help us work our schedules around our sport better", another said that the University should "allow club sports athletes a chance at early class choices so we can have a more stable time management situation".

Other student-athlete suggestions included group study opportunities and more leeway with professors when missing class or assignments due to games. Multiple participants mentioned during the survey that professors were not allowing them to make up exams that they will be missing when their team competes at Nationals. Generally speaking, club student-athletes would like more support from the University on the rare occasion when their athletics begin to interfere with academics.