CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION FOR DIVISION I BASKETBALL PLAYERS AT A LARGE, NON-REVENUE GENERATING UNIVERSITY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father for always providing support, guidance and unconditional love throughout my life. Your encouragement has always meant the world to me and your belief in my abilities to be better today than yesterday has been the driving force behind the person that I have become. I am so grateful to have the privilege of your love, support, and influence in my life for so long. To my wife, Karen, who always believed in my abilities and lovingly supported my pursuit to better myself in many capacities and saved me from myself many times over. Your confidence in me has meant more to me than you will ever know and I am eternally grateful for your unconditional love. Thank you for believing in us and reminding me about the importance of family. To my daughter, Karissa, who has shown me the importance of diligence, persistence, and the rewards of following your dreams. You have become a role model to many and have earned my respect and made me so proud. Thank you for being patient and understanding with me. To my son, Justin, for inspiring me every day to be thankful for all of the blessings in my life and to be present and live in the moment. You have truly shown me what life is about and I am very proud to call you my son. A special thank you to Dwayne Cantrell, my brother from the Bay! You made this journey more than I could have ever imagined and I appreciate your continued friendship. Heidi Hintz, who provided so much support for me down the stretch, I can’t thank you enough. Thank you to all my friends and family for everything!
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ABSTRACT

PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION FOR DIVISION I BASKETBALL PLAYERS AT A LARGE, NON-REVENUE GENERATING UNIVERSITY

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This research focused on the challenges and obstacles presented to men’s basketball players attending a large, 4-year, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university concerning attaining academic success and persistence to graduation. This study identified patterns and common experiences of current men’s basketball players, coaches and administrators at a large, 4-year, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and observations, this study potentially revealed a better understanding of the perspectives and circumstances that influence academic success and persistence to graduation.
Chapter One

Introduction

There has been much documented work on graduation rates of student-athletes and the reasons why particular sports programs at colleges and universities fail to provide the support and tools necessary to succeed academically, and not just athletically (Corlett, 2013).

The academic goals, objectives and priorities were examined in this study to determine what perspectives, circumstances and actions had an effect on academic success and persistence to graduation for a group of men’s basketball players attending a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating program.

Division I athletic programs are identified as having large numbers of students, managing large budgets and offering more athletic scholarships than Division II and III schools. Division I programs also have reputations for promoting a healthy balance between high academic standards and exceptional athletic performance and commitment (NCAA.org).

According to the NCAA, revenue generating athletic programs are further defined by the amount of revenue they bring in from ticket and apparel sales, television, radio and marketing contracts, as well as, alumni contributions and revenue sharing opportunities through individual conferences, all of which must exceed the total amount of expenditure costs to sustain the program. In contrast, non-revenue programs function in the same capacity, but their generated revenue does not exceed the amount of their expenditure costs to sustain the program (NCAA.org).
To situate this study with what is already known, literature reviews on academic success and graduation rates for revenue generating, major, Division I college athletics, particularly men’s basketball, showed that despite stringent monitoring and regulations by universities and the NCAA, problems continue to increase. Comparing college choice, student services and monetary circumstances, the goals and ambitions of revenue vs. non-revenue universities may be significantly different.

Factors Having Significant Impact on Student-Athlete Graduation Rates

In major college sports programs, where there is so much to gain through exposure, notoriety, and monetary benefits for a university and its administration, it may be easier to understand why certain athletes are treated like a commodity rather than a student athlete (Engstrom, McEwen and William, 2005). For some student-athletes, the lure of turning professional in their sport of choice before their senior year may provide explanations as to why some may not persist to graduation (Gaston-Gayles, Joy, 2004). This factor may have a significant impact on student-athlete graduation rates, which the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) monitors for compliance through a calculated Academic Progress Rate (APR).

The APR calculation is an indicator of persistence to graduation through academic success based on 4 years of academic performance. The minimum acceptable criteria score for student-athlete graduation rates without penalty is 925 out of a maximum possible 1,000, which equates to approximately an expected 50% graduation rate. The APR is calculated through an assigned point system, earning 1 point for persisting and 1 point for remaining academically eligible per athlete, per term. The team’s total points are divided by the total points possible and then multiplied by 1,000.
While a 50% expected graduation rate for a team per term may seem low, the number reflects an above average rate for students at a given Division I university (NCAA.org).

The current literature and rationale concerning academic success and persistence to graduation for student-athletes does not include schools that are not on the national stage and does not include the universities that do not generate revenue. Therefore, since the percentages of athletes turning professional early are substantially lower for schools that do not house big time athletic programs (Mangold, Bean, & Adams, 2003), the question of why do some non-revenue generating Division I athletes not complete a degree is one worthy of exploration.

The Graduation Success Rate (GSR) set and enforced by the NCAA, benchmarks the graduation success rate for student-athletes. GSR is calculated by including student athletes transferring from one institution to another. As opposed to the federal level, the government’s outcomes do not factor in movement of student-athletes from one school to another or community college transfer. If the student-athlete transfers out of the university, this counts as a graduation failure for the university, even if the student-athlete graduates from another institution. The GSR tracks cohorts of students for a six year period, tracking the actual graduation of student-athletes, without penalty for transfers out of a particular university and includes the academic progress of community college transfers into a university as well (NCAA.org).

The reasons why the system is seeing low academic success and persistence to graduation rates, may be due to student-athletes not being provided with adequate support, time and opportunities to learn how to compete athletically and attend to their academic responsibilities simultaneously (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Or perhaps students
are not focusing on academics. There are instances of athletes playing sports until they have exhausted their athletic eligibility and then discontinue taking classes critical towards them finishing their degree. However, these factors cannot be known without further investigation involving in-depth interviews with current participants at non-revenue generating Division I schools, and conducting analysis on the data gathered.

**Purpose and Intent of Higher Education**

For revenue and non-revenue generating student-athletes, the purpose and intent of higher education for students in the United States pursuing a degree is having the opportunity to better themselves intellectually and potentially increase the total amount of money they may earn in a lifetime (Ryan, Groves & Schneider, 2007). There are many different paths that students take in order to eventually obtain a degree; some may be more difficult than others. The community college system provides a lower cost option to complete the first two years of undergraduate education, with an additional incentive to transfer to a 4-year college or university to finish the final two years of coursework (NCAA.org). Another alternative for some students is to enroll into a 4-year college or university directly from high school and enlist in the armed services, complete their military commitment, and have part or all of their college education paid for by the government.

Although field research supplies an indicator as to what is primarily occurring with big-time, revenue generating athletics, many of the same circumstances exist for non-revenue generating student-athletes. According to NCAA.org, for most scholarship student-athletes, the cost of a 4-year education is paid for and covered by their university of choice through an agreement that states if the student maintains an overall grade point
average of 2.3 in their core courses while successfully earning 6 credit hours each term, they are eligible to participate in athletic related activities the following term, while completing 40 percent of the required coursework by the end of year two, 60 percent by year three and 80 percent by year four (NCAA.org). Athletic related financial scholarship money can be distributed up to five years, allowing student-athletes adequate time to persist to graduation (NCAA.org).

Up until a few years ago, high school basketball players had the option to forgo their college eligibility and declare themselves eligible for the National Basketball Association (NBA) draft. This professional league had no restrictions on age or the amount of years a student-athlete attended higher education (NBPA.org). Athletes including Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett, Tracey McGrady and Lebron James skipped college and entered the NBA directly after graduating high school. Recently, the NBA restricted eligibility requiring the athlete be either the age of 19 years old or have completed one full year of college credit.

Whether a student-athlete competes for a revenue or non-revenue generating institution, the objectives are for students to succeed academically and persist to graduation. Such programs are monitored by universities and the NCAA through regulations, academic support programs and scheduling to allow students sufficient time to achieve their academic goals (Franklin, 2005). Ultimately, it is up to the student-athlete to set realistic and attainable priorities and goals and to utilize the support programs available to succeed academically.

Despite potential exploitative practices by parties without consideration for what is in the best interest of the student-athlete, and stigmatic labels and perceptions of the
public, ethical decisions should be contemplated and implemented carefully by the student-athlete to maintain a high level of integrity in order to succeed academically and persist to graduation, especially in non-revenue generating programs where there is potentially more to lose without degree attainment (Horton, 2011).

Social Capital

The concept of social capital in relation to student-athletes (Clopton & Finch, 2010), identifies the social relations between the participants of athletic teams and how this has an effect on their identity, self-worth and connectedness to the overall academic mission of a university. The relationships built through social networks can have either a positive or negative impact on academics and achievement, depending on how these particular networks function and if they are in line with a moral conduct code or deviate from ethical standards (Martin, 2009).

The involvement of participation in collegiate athletics and the social connectedness to the community can be a reciprocal relationship (Adler & Adler, 1985). The advantages gained by being an athlete through educational opportunities, as well as, participating in an inclusive team experience, is a shared experience of all members of the team (Adler & Adler, 1985).

The current literature suggests that non-revenue generating institutions clearly have similar academic and athletic schedule structures as revenue generating ones with differences occurring in the pressure-to-perform dynamic possibly intensified in revenue generating programs (Adler & Adler, 1985). Theories concerning pay for play type scenarios and aspirations of a professional career in athletics may or may not be prevalent in non-revenue generating institutions. There does not seem to be a defined distinction of
understanding of perspectives and aspirations of student-athletes participating in non-revenue generating athletics.

Revenue-generating programs in Division I college athletics have a history of corruption and exploitation of student-athletes, especially in men’s basketball (Benford, 2007). For universities, the priority of building a high profile athletic program has advantages that not only increase revenue through alumni giving, television contracts, marketing, branding, merchandising and other incentives, but they increase enrollment through notoriety and school popularity (Pope & Pope, 2008).

Penalties for corruptive practices ranging from paying players and their families, sexual favors, illegal recruiting, test taking and grade changing, have been handed down by the NCAA for programs that are investigated and are found at fault (NCAA.org). It seems the benefit of revenue generated through big time college athletics for successful programs significantly outweighs the risk and penalty of getting caught for these types of transgressions from the NCAA (Tucker, 2004).

Social Implications

There are also many social implications for student athletes that may have a significant influence on academic success and persistence to graduation (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita & Jensen, 2007). For both revenue and non-revenue generating student-athletes, often, due to the manner in which student-athletes schedules are constructed in terms of classes, study hours, practices, work outs, film sessions, traveling, and various other commitments, social activities may be limited. This lack of socializing may be cause for student-athletes to feel isolated and separated from the non-athlete student population (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).
Stevens & Scholefield (2009) indicate that first generation male college student-athletes (FGCS) may also have significant additional pressures placed upon them through financial and social responsibilities of family members. These added responsibilities and lack of passed-on, college experience familiarity with anyone in their immediate family, may result in student-athlete anxiety, trepidation and confusion (Sellers & Damas, 1996).

Higher education athletic programs have a long tradition of practices that potentially endanger the student-athlete through corruptive acts, exploitation and manipulation. In 1906, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was originally formed to provide protection to the student-athlete, who, at that time, was subject to many forms of abuse that went unmonitored, creating an environment of corruption and potential physical and emotional harm to student-athletes. As more students participated in athletics, the need for a governing body to set regulations, restrictions, protections and authority over the guidelines of what was in the best interest of the student-athlete became a necessity (NCAA.org).

Over time, due to the growing oversight needed for collegiate athletics, the NCAA has primarily become an organization that enforces penalties of non-compliance on colleges and universities and sets forth policies on student-athletes’ academic success parameters.

**Problem Statement**

If the goal and mission of an institution of higher education is academic success and persistence to graduation, then student-athletes in men’s basketball should also have high instances of graduation rates (Bonifiglio, 2009). This study will attempt to determine the challenges and obstacles preventing men’s basketball players attending a
large, 4-year, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university from attaining academic success and persistence to graduation, particularly if the university does not have a large number of players leaving school early to play professional basketball.

Student-athletes, who compete at a high level and are expected to excel simultaneously in the classroom and on the field, may experience significant signs of anxiety, resulting in difficulty maintaining a duality necessary to be a successful student and a successful athlete (Benson, 2000). Feelings of exploitation are common among student-athletes, especially when revenue amounts generated from high profile programs can be exorbitant (Miller, 2003).

According to Simmons & Van Rheenen (2000), for both revenue generating and non-generating student-athletes, there is a significant correlation between high levels of anxiety for student athletes who participate in multiple roles as a student and an athlete, which may be cause for failure in one or both areas of this duality. Furthermore, the culture of male student-athletes who are also first generation college students, according to Stevens & Scholefield (2009), have significantly different perspectives and characteristics than non-student-athletes. These viewpoints can include high expectations to succeed academically and can create additional pressures on the student-athlete to balance time, progress developmentally at an accelerated rate and address financial responsibilities (Stevens & Scholefield, 2009).

For student athletes across the country, there are stigmatisms associated with the perceived preferential treatment that they may or may not receive. Although these privileged students may have separate academic advisement, priority registration, peer tutoring, study hall, and regimented specialized schedules, they are expected to succeed
academically, as well as athletically (Dumond, Lynch & Platania, 2008). Full scholarship student-athletes also receive free tuition, room and board, and additional money for books and other supplies. For walk-ons, or non-scholarship athletes, it is at the discretion of the individual university whether they have the same type of access to the academic support that scholarship athletes receive. In exchange for financial aid assistance that a full scholarship athlete receives, the student-athlete is expected to be a full time academic student, completing a minimum of 16 core course requirements in 8 semesters while maintaining a minimum grade point average of 2.3 in their core classes, all while fully participating in the scheduled athletic practices, games and other campus related commitments (NCAA.org).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify patterns and common experiences of current men’s basketball players, coaches and administrators at a large, 4-year, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and observations, this study aspires to potentially reveal a better understanding of the perspectives and circumstances that influence academic success and persistence to graduation.

The goal is to contribute to the field of study and make strong recommendations for systemic change to provide better resources to student-athletes so they can achieve greater academic success and persistence to graduation.
**Significance of Research**

This study is significant due to the literature concerning academic success and persistence to graduation, which currently does not specifically include non-revenue generating, men’s Division I basketball players.

Interviews were conducted to ascertain whether specific university student-athletes’ support systems designed for academic success were provided and utilized to their fullest capacity. In addition, the information derived from conversations with students will also attempt to determine what the attitudes and perspectives were in regard to academic success and persistence to graduation. Finally, this study explored whether a non-revenue generating program changed the prioritization of students’ post athletic eligibility career choices and how academic and degree attainment influenced students’ decisions prior and during athletic eligibility.

By interviewing and observing current players, coaches and administrators, this case study hoped to identify solutions and capture innovative approaches to assist universities with similar circumstances supporting academic success and persistence to graduation for student-athletes.

**Research Questions**

The primary research questions for this study were:

1) How do large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs monitor academic success for their men’s basketball team?

2) What are the factors contributing to academic success and graduation rates at large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs?
3) What are the attitudes of non-revenue generating Division I athletes towards the completion of a degree?

4) Are the self-expectations of student-athletes concerning academics different from school administrators and the coaching staff?
Overview of Methodology

A stratified purposeful, criterion sampling, ethnographic case study was utilized to ensure the best possible detailed outcome of perspectives, thoughts, motivations and beliefs.

According to Johnson & Christensen (2004), these methods are appropriate because a mixed sampling strategy consists of comparisons between current men’s basketball players, with a subgroup consisting of coaches and administrators, which satisfies the criteria for a stratified purposeful strategy. A criterion sampling strategy was used due to the players belonging to a specific group, meeting the criteria of being a student athlete at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. Finally, ethnography examines a cultural phenomenon which is present in this particular culture of student athletes with a shared experience.

In an attempt to discover potential patterns of consistent behaviors, perspectives and attitudes concerning academic success and persistence to graduation, in-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted with current men’s basketball players, administrators and coaches.

Observations of the specialized student services programs provided for student athletes were also captured in order to gain a better perspective on how, if any, the academic assistance available influences the players and allows for prioritizing academic opportunities.

Using participants’ shared experiences and circumstances, a particular phenomenon for this specific group of student athletes was examined to understand what the perspectives are for these student-athletes concerning academic success and
persistence to graduation. Ethnographic case tools were utilized to record and analyze meaningful and descriptive first-hand data gathered from interviews and observations of academic services provided to the student-athletes. The academic support services available were compared and scrutinized to assist in determining if the academic assistance did positively affect students’ academic successes.

Merriam (2009) describes a case study as an in-depth analysis of a particular person or group resulting in patterns and behaviors distinctive to the participants. For this study, the goal was to discover if the qualitative findings suggest a significant correlation between the lure of a professional career in athletics, social circumstances, student services and persistence to graduation.

Ethnography is defined as research conducted in the field which identifies more emerging data (Merriam, 2009). This case study utilized these characteristics to gain insight into the reasons why particular athletes at a specified institution of higher education view themselves as students who participate in athletics at a very high level and how their collective circumstances may affect how academically successful they may become. The time commitment to the pursuit of excellence on the basketball court requires a high level of discipline and motivation. The same can be said for the pursuit of academic success on an equally excruciating time committed schedule. This ethnographic case study attempted to bridge the gap between academics, athletics, support services, expectations and possible exploitations of a particular group of student-athletes at a particular non-revenue generating university.
Keywords and Definitions

The following definitions, per the NCAA, will assist in the understanding of specific terms.

**Academic success**: Academic success refers to the criterion which determines if student-athletes are meeting the requirements to be eligible for participation in intercollegiate athletics and receiving financial aid for their specific talents (NCAA.org).

**Revenue generating**: For this study, revenue generating is defined as an athletic program that generates more revenue than the expenditures the program creates.

**Non-revenue generating**: Non-revenue generating is defined as the revenue generated associated with the specific program, does not exceed the overall expense to sustain the program.

**Federal Graduation Rate** (FGR): The Federal Graduation Rate measures percentages of academic success for student athletes who are first-time, full-time freshmen who graduate within a six year window from the time they enter a four-year university. The FGR does not factor in transfer students who are in good academic standing in or out of the university.

**Graduation Success Rate** (GSR): The Graduation Success Rate is calculated for incoming freshmen through graduation over a six year period with no penalty for transfer students in or out of the university who are in good academic standing.

**Academic Progress Rate** (APR): The Academic Progress Rate is designed to measure academic success by term for players that are receiving financial aid scholarships. Separate points are given for student athletes who remain academically eligible and also remain enrolled at the university. The points are totaled and divided by
the total number of points available and multiplied by 1,000 to calculate the APR. A team must have a minimum average over a two year period of 930 to avoid penalties.

**National Collegiate Athletic Association** (NCAA): Organization dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of student-athletes and equipping them with the skills to succeed in the classroom, on the playing field and throughout life.

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study exists because the selected university had a recent history of NCAA academic violations and penalties, but at the time of this study, corrections had been made to increase the number of instances of academic success and persistence to graduation. This factor does bring about a different perspective, but may keep with the intent of the study which strives to examine how academic and athletic participation affects student-athlete academic successes at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university.

**Delimitations**

A major delimitation is that this study was conducted at only one institution that met the criteria. The study was also conducted in a Pacific Standard Time, West Coast state which may have had an impact when the student-athletes chose their school. Unfortunately, this factor as to whether students would have a different perspective on the criterion for this study if conducted in another region of the country could not be ascertained.

The choice to not segregate by race or socio-economic status in this study may provide a non-specific response to the research questions. The interviewees’ experiences were examined from a team experience perspective and not based upon race or
socioeconomic status of the individual participants. This choice was made due to the specific nature of the team as a whole in the hope that shared experiences and other insights would emerge.

**Organization of Dissertation**

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the topic with background information and explains the statement of the problem. This chapter is intended to summarize the dissertation as a whole, with brief explanations of the critical nature of the topic and provide a rationale of importance associated with the subject matter.

Chapter two reviews the relevant literature regarding academic success and persistence to graduation for student-athletes including exploitative practices by universities, student services for student-athletes, social implications concerning academic success and the conditions surrounding college choice for student athletes.

Chapter three explains the methodology utilized in the study. A qualitative case study was chosen to conduct an in-depth descriptive investigation into the subject of academic success and persistence to graduation.

Chapter four reveals the findings from transcribed interviews and observations through a narrative format of this qualitative study.

Chapter five presents a detailed analysis of the findings with additional discussion and recommendations for future research. Conclusions of this research as well as recommendations for future researchers are also included in this chapter.
Chapter Two

Introduction

Persistence to graduation is generally accepted as the goal of every student in higher education; however, there are many stresses and distractions that cause students to follow a different path (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Due to the demands that their particular discipline places upon them, student-athletes may have one of the most difficult roads to graduation (Benson, 2000). Yet, they also have many designated support programs readily available to ensure they are successful at both academics and athletics (Powell, 2009).

The question of what factors may contribute to men’s basketball players’ persistence or non-persistence to graduation at a large, public, non-revenue generating Division I university will be reviewed, compared and examined in this review of the literature. In addition, this review will explore and attempt to ascertain whether players feel that they are given enough time in their schedules and support from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the university, including monetary scholarship compensation, to be academically successful (Le Crom, Warren, Clark, Marolla & Gerber, 2009).

Other issues, such as, whether these student-athletes are taking full advantage of the provided opportunities during, and post athletic eligibility, will also be examined. Attitudes of players’ own futures may be an important aspect of persistence to graduation, as well as, perceptions and beliefs related to academics and career goals which may have an impactful role in discovering why persistence to graduation should be more prevalent (Karpinski & Earle, 1999).
Non-Revenue Sports Programs

Non-revenue generating sports programs, defined as a sport that does not provide a higher education academic institution with a financial income above and beyond the cost to sustain the specified athletic program, at the Division I level, are not considered major college athletics and are less prestigious than revenue-generating sports, such as, men’s Division I inter-collegiate football and basketball (Horton, 2009). The percentage of non-revenue generating college athletes going on to professional careers in athletics is significantly lower compared to major, revenue generating programs (NCAA.org).

Student-athlete perceptions concerning academic success and persistence to graduation while being one hundred percent committed to athletic success can be a difficult task to accomplish (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). Aspirations may be high for a professional career in athletics, but the percentages indicate that an education in exchange for athletic commitment may be a more viable alternative for these student-athletes at these non-revenue generating schools (Gaston-Gayles, 2009).

Revenue Sports Programs

When there are large amounts of revenue to gain from successful programs, the question concerning whom benefits most is raised (Benford, 2007). A major college athletic program at a college or university that can sustain success for an extended period of time has the opportunity to create a tradition of winning and can market itself for future success, financial gain, prestige and possibly attract more qualified applicants to enroll in the school (Pope & Pope, 2008). These fiscal factors loom large when a multi-billion dollar industry has control over the futures of potential student-athletes who are buying into the “pay for play” mentality that, in many cases, has transformed amateur
college athletics into a big business that has little regard for morals, ethics and the notion of fair play, often leaving many unassuming student-athletes disillusioned and abandoned when their playing days are over (Benford, 2007).

Who is the predator and who is the prey in these scenarios? It seems logical to assume that all of the entities involved in the business end of college athletics, specifically, Men’s Division I basketball, would be the ones taking advantage of the vulnerability of the athletes who would seemingly need the sport more than the sport needs them (Yost, 2010). But in reality, many times, the student-athlete is the party who has come to leverage the most lucrative deal. At times bidding one school against another school in order to acquire the best offer possible (Dumond, Lynch & Platania, 2008).

**Regulations**

Categorically, topics related to student athletics and academic success and persistence to graduation will include regulations, exploitation, institutional experiences, culture and socialization, and support services. This literature review attempts to link the data in the literature to the topic of academic success and persistence to graduation for student-athletes by analyzing theoretical frameworks of ideas to identify new and emerging unexplored themes from the current literature.

The regulations that are administered by the governing body over collegiate athletics were originally created to protect the student-athlete in a time when there were no protections or oversight of activities (NCAA.org). The irony is that the NCAA was formed more than 100 years ago to explicitly protect student-athletes from exploitation, but some would argue the exploitation of the modern student-athlete with all of the
stereotypes and accusations of improprieties, preferential treatment and seemingly unmonitored behavior is as prevalent as ever with the involvement of large sources of revenue for athletic success for the universities (Benford, 2007).

**Research Question 1**

The question of what instruments are in place to monitor academics and the successful navigation of the student-athlete experience for men’s basketball players at the Division I Level began with the regulations which are set forth and monitored by the NCAA. Each individual university has the responsibility to uphold the standards by providing student-athletes with the necessary tools to succeed and to intervene when appropriate to ensure that no improprieties occur (NCAA.org).

Therefore question number 1 for this study asked: How do large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs monitor academic success for their men’s basketball teams?

**Proposition 48.** Two propositions have been put in place by the NCAA to regulate university programs designed to help students remain successful in their academic endeavors while participating in collegiate athletics (Waller, 2003).

Proposition 48, enacted in 1986, stipulates that an incoming student-athlete must maintain a 2.0 grade point average, complete 11 core courses in high school, and score a minimum combined score of 700 on the SAT (NCAA.org). In 1995, the NCAA enacted additional stringent criteria on student-athletes before they could be deemed eligible for athletic competition. When the NCAA introduced Proposition 16 to update and reinforce Proposition 48, its stipulations required incoming freshman to have a minimum grade
point average of 2.0 in 13 core courses and an SAT score of at least 1010 or ACT score of 86.

**Preferential Treatment.** According to Engstrom, McEwen and William (1995), major college athletics, defined as revenue generating sports, have long been scrutinized for providing collegiate athletes with privileges and special treatment that may not be available to the rest of the student body. Various forms of preferential treatments are inspected and monitored by the NCAA, which has the authority to sanction and penalize college programs that do not adhere to the rules and regulations that the NCAA has developed in an attempt to keep sports programs fair and equal (NCAA.org). The NCAA was conceived, created, and developed in 1906 to oversee college and university athletic programs, which may have been exploiting student-athletes.

**NCAA oversight.** Due to numerous American football players becoming injured while playing football, the NCAA began its reign as the sole governing body over rules formation and compliance for college athletics (NCAA.org). When college sports programs refused to comply with NCAA rules, and large amounts of money became a central factor, the NCAA became more vigilant by imposing penalties against colleges that stepped outside the rules. Additionally, the NCAA implemented a higher academic standard before student-athletes were deemed eligible to participate in college athletics.

Although Proposition 48 mandates that student-athletes must maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.0, the literature shows that the NCAA cannot directly oversee grades. Additionally, the NCAA has been questioned on how ethically and with what consistency they regulate schools suspected of altering reported grades of student-athletes (Stiebler, 1991). The standards implemented by the NCAA have created an overall
compliance structure in college athletics, but they fail to address how effective university support systems are to student-athletes concerning their overall satisfaction with systemic academic mandated programs.

**Student-Right-to-Know-Act.** According to LaForge and Hodge (2011), in 1990 the federal government passed the Student-Right-to-Know-Act which required universities receiving federal aid to report the graduation rates of their students and a separate report documenting student-athlete graduation rates. In an effort to address growing concerns surrounding non-persistence to graduation, the Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) report was administered by the federal government to address student academic integrity, and separately, student-athlete academic integrity. The NCAA soon followed suit by implementing their own policies and procedures to monitor Graduation Success Rates (GSR) and Academic Progress Rates (APR). These reporting mechanisms were designed to hold universities accountable for their student-athletes academic success.

**Gaps between academic success and athletic success.** Sharp and Sheilley (2008), note the gap between sports and academics in college athletics has widened despite the NCAA’s efforts to call attention to prioritizing academics among college athletic programs. The NCAA has recently increased the Academic Progress Rate (APR) standard, which may have a detrimental effect on student success. This increased standard places additional strain on athletic participants to choose majors that they may not necessarily be interested in, but that have the most manageable academic criteria. In addition, the authors believe that the increased commercialization of college athletics is inevitable and the time constraints placed upon student-athletes grows more
unmanageable. This apparent discrepancy has the NCAA examining overall practices and regulations to address recent criticisms concerning the quality of the educational experience for student-athletes (Gaston Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Men’s Major Division I basketball teams generate large revenue streams from television contracts, ticket sales, and booster contributions. These large profits entice program administrators to often overlook low academic performances at the risk of being reprimanded and sanctioned by the NCAA. The high monetary rewards that are generated from these types of unethical activities create a win at all cost mentality that sweeps through the university to its highest rungs (Clark & Bautista, 2009).

**Protection from exploitation.** There are also many restrictions surrounding student-athlete recruitment set forth by the NCAA intended to protect students from being exploited. The NCAA Board of Directors has recently announced a restructuring and overhauling of the rules and enforcement structure for those institutions that violate policies. These rules are intended to reduce the amount of infractions. By expediting levies against violators, and by issuing penalties that have more serious consequences for athletic programs, the NCAA is attempting to make the risk outweigh the reward (NCAA.org).

Another area which has come under NCAA scrutiny is the recruiting process for high profile college athletes. College choice for many high school student-athletes has become a highly competitive business practice that has significant financial implications for colleges and universities. Athletic programs with sustainable success aspirations must be able to recruit the top scholarship athletes in the country, at times, making the college
choice decision for high school student-athletes an ethical dilemma (Judson, James & Aurand, 2004).

**Exploitation.** A student’s expectations regarding their academic goals and objectives may differ from the university, coaches and administration. Often times, the student-athlete cannot anticipate or comprehend what the impact may be when they are confronted with the experiences of being a student and an athlete simultaneously at the collegiate level (Rasmussen, 2009).

While most university systems aim to increase student enrollment, increase graduation rates, sustain financial security and develop productive members of society (Hartley & Morphew, 2006), there has been a trend of building up institutions’ athletic programs reputations by perpetuating a “win at all cost” attitude even while disregarding academic integrity which oftentimes jeopardizes the athletic programs, campus honor and alumni support (Benford, 2007).

The NCAA implemented regulations geared at educating higher education institutions and their student-athletes. This disciplinary tier process incrementally penalizes schools and athletes for any indiscretions and infractions of the rules and regulations when recruiting for athletics (NCAA.org). Many schools across the country abide by the rules and subsequently run respectable, clean athletic programs that thrive within the rules of the game. Then there are other athletic programs which feel the pressure to break the rules so they can have a competitive advantage against the best teams in the country. Rules’ violations range from illegal recruiting practices, to paying for players to attend their university, to providing players with gifts, to altering players
academic records and giving players access to events and persons of influence that would normally not be available to the average student (Dumond, Lynch & Platania, 2008).

It is the above-described indiscretions which gives the entire college athletic participatory process a reputation of corruption that takes no prisoners and instead victimizes its students in the process. While athletic programs appear to provide student-athletes with perks beyond their scholarships including tuition, books, housing and meals, the gains may be short-term and disproportionate (Yost, 2010). For example, often times, college athletes believe that they are using the system to their advantage, and this may be the case in some situations, but overall, it appears that college athletic systems still remain the more aggressive party because they are using the student-athlete for gain beyond the regulations (Dumond, Lynch & Platania, 2008).

**College choice distractions.** Graduation should be the ultimate goal of the student-athlete in the event that a professional career does not materialize (Karpinski & Earle, 1999), and the criteria for college choice should be one based on academics first, rather than exposure and earning potential in athletics (Karpinski & Earle, 1999; Ryan, Groves & Schneider, 2007). However, there is an abundance of distractions keeping the student-athletes from making college choice decisions purely based on their academic and career objects. For example, before and when a student-athlete arrives on a college campus, they are given status and preferential treatment particularly if the student-athlete has the athletic skill level to compete at the highest level on the collegiate athletic field (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita & Jensen, 2007).

This type of preferential treatment can be euphoric in nature for a 17 to 22 year old person who may not have grown up in an affluent environment. Over time, the...
student-athlete may feel pressured to keep performing and improving in order to retain the status that they have achieved. When boosters, agents and other influential entities appear to persuade the student-athlete to persist with behavior that seems acceptable at the time, and individuals in positions of authority support these types of transgressions, the student-athlete can begin to get a sense of entitlement that clouds judgment and blurs the line between morality and responsibility (Yost, 2010).

The NCAA relies on the coaching and support staff to monitor and assist when student-athletes are in need of intervention and assistance navigating negative influences (Miller & Kerr, 2002), yet, athletic programs continue to incur penalties for indiscretions concerning recruiting and unethical practices (NCAA.org). There have been many reported instances of college and university programs violating protocols and then incurring penalties ranging from warnings, scholarship reductions, practice hours reduced, ban from post season play and total suspension of programs (NCAA.org).

The literature suggests that colleges and universities are to blame for implementing and accepting practices that ultimately hurt the student-athletes and athletic programs (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). The harm to students begins with and includes irresponsible recruiting processes that include money, gifts, trips, houses and a plethora of other incentives used to persuade recruits to attend and play sports at particular universities. Then, once a recruit has signed up as a student, athletic departments are accused of manipulating students’ classes and grades. The continuation of giving students more incentives beyond normal scholarships along with other preferential treatments “plagues” the student-athlete until their athletic services are no longer required. Often times, it is then, that the walls of the student-athlete comes crumbling
down as they realize that they were simply a commodity, useful for a short time before being discarded when they were no longer needed (Miller, 2003).

**Institutions’ reputations.** The reputations of higher education organizations and athletic programs become problematic when missions, visions, and values of the institutions are compromised for the sake of athletic prominence (Hartley & Morphew, 2006). For example, the pursuit of being defined a perennial national powerhouse and the potential monetary compensations acquired through endorsements, television contracts, apparel sales, booster contributions and ticket sales are powerful incentives often driving athletic programs to do whatever is necessary to bring about celebrity status to a university. Ultimately this leads to many higher education administrations becoming vilified when sanctions and penalties, especially when there are repeated offenses, are levied against a school for incidents of misconduct. (Portuto & Vand, 2010).

In recent times, student-athletes have contended they are employees of the university, with football players from Northwestern University filing a request with the National Labor Relations Board to unionize (NCAA.org). The NCAA contends the participation in athletics is secondary to student status and is voluntary. However, issues on the likeness of players and the sale of their jerseys have brought about scrutiny as to the possible exploitation of the student athlete (Miller, 2012).

**Institutional Experiences**

There may be a plethora of factors and circumstances in the decisions surrounding which college to attend, which can have a significant impact on academic success and persistence to graduation (Judson, James & Aurand, 2004). Reportedly, one of the factors which contribute to academic success for student-athletes begins with the integrity
of the student when they choose a university to attend. The decision making process for high school athletes when choosing a college vary, depending on the individual and their sport of choice. The literature suggests that the success of a college program and the exposure the school gets after winning a national championship in the sport, has an influence on if the school becomes a significant factor in the college choice model for incoming freshman student-athletes (Toma & Cross, 1996).

For student-athletes, exposure to colleges and universities at an early age could possibly have an effect on their choice of schools when it comes time to apply for college based upon the notoriety, success and branding of the athletic program at a given university. In addition, for major revenue generating sports, the future economic potential for the student-athlete plays a significant role in college choice (Ryan, Groves & Schneider, 2007). Other factors include the high profile of college head coaching, the media attention that a university attracts, endorsements that the university has secured, as well as the facilities and amenities of the athletic department (Ryan, Groves & Schneider, 2007).

**Selecting a college.** The NCAA has set forth a series of guidelines to give student-athletes a realistic and comprehensive guide to the college recruiting process and stresses academics over athletic performance by reasoning that very few collegiate athletes make a living in professional sports (Karpinski & Earl, 1999). The NCAA also gives them relevant information about the recruiting process and reminds students that improprieties are a reality and that they should be wary so they do not become a victim of the illegal practices of an athletic program attempting to lure them to their university (Karpinski & Earl, 1999).
The NCAA organization asks whether student-athletes feel too much pressure to make a decision regarding college choice based on the recruiting and marketing practices of university recruiters. Also they ask whether it is a fair and level playing field or does the student-athlete become the victim in the process of a multi-billion dollar industry (Sander, 2008)? Additionally, the NCAA asks whether the student-athlete has become increasingly savvy and jaded to the recruiting practices of schools, and has thus turned the tables on the process and is now seemingly profiting and benefitting in a manner not entirely based on academics.

College choice and recruiting for athletes has also become a source of competition for colleges to attract the best possible talent to attend their schools (Karpinski & Earle, 1999). Toma and Cross (1996) suggest that the issue of college choice is influenced by the overall success and the amount of exposure that a particular college program has in comparison to other colleges (Tucker, 2004). Furthermore, recruits also feel that prospective coaches’ reputations and interpersonal abilities influence the decision making process of student-athletes (Ryan, Groves & Schneider, 2007). In addition, the literature suggests that recruits may feel that the decision making process does not allow them to get a full understanding of the parameters concerning time commitments to academics and athletics at a particular university, making the decision seem hasty as they are not given the same amount of information on the academic responsibilities versus the athletic commitment during the recruitment process (Sanders, 2008).

The hope and aspirations of academic success for student-athletes when choosing a college or university, may lay in the support and influence of family and friends concerning career opportunities after athletic participation (Ellis, 2011). Although the
influence of family and friends are significant in the college choice decisions for prospective college student-athletes, one study found that most decisions were made based on the criteria of amount of scholarship, coaches, campus, athletics, friends and academics (Judson, James & Aurand, 2004).

College choice for student-athletes at small, private universities differs in that student-athletes narrow their selection choice by creating lists of desirables in a university, with how much playing time they will potentially receive, and factor in the relationship they have with the head coach, using them as indicators when making a college choice (Johnson, Jubenville & Gross, 2009). In contrast to major university sports programs, the authors contend that these student-athletes have a broader interest regarding academics with concerns relating to degree programs offered and academic support services.

With any industry where there is the potential for substantial gains based on success, there may be rules that will be tested and create opportunities for exploitation. This type of exploitation in intercollegiate athletics is monitored by the NCAA for infractions, but often times, indiscretions can be missed and lead to a disservice to all involved (Potuto & Vand, 2010).

Academic success can be measured through persistence to graduation for student-athletes. The dream of a college education resulting in a degree has been studied among college student-athletes to determine what academic aspirations they had when entering college and if those aspirations changed during their tenure in higher education (Adler & Adler, 1985). One study found that although basketball players in a men’s revenue generating college programs had high academic aspirations when entering college, there
were many factors that contributed to a negative change over time, which led to a lack in academic confidence resulting in academic struggles.

Similarly, Comeaux (2005) studied how pre-existing academic success may be a reliable predictor of feelings of confidence and an assurance of capable achievement in the classroom when students enter an institution of higher education. If the student-athlete has had a history of success prior to college enrollment, then they have a better understanding of the demands and they possess the prioritizing and organizational skills required to achieve academically (Mangold, Bean & Adams, 2003). Furthermore, additional factors such as faculty engagement and faculty belief in student-athlete’s academic aspirations had significant positive responses concerning student-athletes’ academic success (Engstrom, McEwen & Williams, 1995).

In addition, persistence to graduation factors, such as the positive support that first generation college students receive from the institution, coaches family and friends, may play a significant role in the academic success of student-athletes (Jenkins, Miyazaki, and Janosik, 2009). First generation college students may have experiences of anxiety due to financial and social pressures (Stevens & Schoelfield, 2009) which can be alleviated through counseling services offered by the educational institution. These first generation student-athletes also have greater instances of academic success when they receive positive support in their high school years, yet the research also indicates that the support through high school may become irrelevant if the institution of higher education does not provide high levels of, and access to, academic, psychological and social support (Swail, W., Redd, K., and Perna, L., 2003).
Research Question 2

Based on the vast amount of literature referred to in this study, the following question was considered: What are the factors contributing to academic success and graduation rates at large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs?

Predicting academic success. Literature also addressed the prediction of academic success for student-athletes entering a university based on SAT scores and non-cognitive variables (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). The current standard measurement for predicting academic success (SAT and ACT scores) for non-traditional students, which includes student-athletes, may not be the best instrument to predict academic success. Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston (1992), suggest that non-cognitive variables such as self-concept, leadership, community and realistic self-appraisal are better measurements for predicting academic success for student-athletes.

Isolation. When considering a student’s athletic schedule along with their full academic load of classes and the amount of studying required to be an academically eligible to participate in college athletics, we see student-athletes have the heavy burden of managing their time and performances (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). At times, student-athletes may feel isolated from academic peers due to their regimented schedules which have been created for them by their athletic-academic advisors. These feelings of isolations can develop into non-participatory academic behaviors. In other words, the student-athlete may stop attending classes, or completing assignments.

Perceived preferential treatment contributes to a student-athlete’s social isolation which can cause repercussions such as socialization detachments and the inability to fully engage in their academic responsibilities (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita & Jensen, 2007). A
lack of academic confidence, self-doubt and fear of failure, especially for the student-athlete who was underprepared when entering college, may contribute to a lack of academic engagement, especially when school administrators, boosters and coaches define athletic success as the priority which inevitably creates an atmosphere of academic complacency (Simons, Van Rheenen & Covington, 1999).

Jolly (2008) studied how student-athletes’ schedules contributed to a lack of socialization and Jolly also found that many students felt that their time was not distributed evenly enough for them to study. At times, students felt helpless and underprepared, not due to a lack of motivation, but due to the time constraints placed upon them by their athletic and academic leaders/counselors/instructors.

**Culture and Socialization**

The socialization of student-athletes into the general community of a college or university can have significant impact on how successful they become academically (Rasmussen, 2009). There are higher incidents of academic success when the student-athlete has a sense of belonging and accepts the culture and environment of the college or university (Beamon, 2009). Literature suggests that when it comes to adapting socially, there are significant differences between student-athletes who transfer from two-year schools and their counterparts, freshmen athletes. Accordingly, the transfer student socializes faster when they arrive and have shorter adaption times than the freshman student (Ishitani, 2010).

The socialization of student-athletes begins with the admission process. When an athlete does not possess the academic and social criteria when entering university, the pre-existing academic disadvantages are magnified and become instantly problematic. If
the student-athlete’s social experiences are limited because he or she lacks confidence or feels unaccepted by their academic peers, participation and engaged involvement may be inadequate. If left unchecked, this type of behavioral patterns can lead to the creation of athletic sub-cultures which can lead to increasing social isolation (Sharp & Sheilly, 2008).

Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991) surveyed students who encompassed the general student body population, to gain insight into their attitudes towards academic success for student-athletes on campus. The study found that in the area of academic performance, most students were skeptical when student-athletes earned high grades. Additionally, students from the general population were not comfortable being assigned to partner with a student-athlete on assignments based on their perceived academic capabilities and they resented the added support that student-athletes received financially and academically as well. These types of prejudices at colleges and universities have been identified as having negative social impacts on student-athletes and their academic confidences which have a direct effect on student-athlete’s motivations for academic success and persistence to graduation (Engstrom and Sedlacek, 1991).

**Research Question 3**

To gain a better understanding about how behaviors and attitudes affect student-athletes progress, research question 3 for this study was: What are the attitudes of non-revenue generating, Division I athletes towards completion of a degree?

The culture at a university concerning student-athletes has many facets that can be harmful in the process for student-athletes’ academic success and persistence to graduation. Horton (2011) suggests that there are often certain biases and labels placed
upon the student-athlete population that may have significant detrimental effects on academic motivation. Negative perceptions of laziness, preferential treatment and academic ambiguity marginalize the efforts of the university and the student-athlete to integrate a culture of support and academic success for all students.

Franklin (2005) suggests that the NCAA has been developing and incrementally implementing regulatory criteria to assist in the transition of negative university cultures, to ones of inclusiveness and support for student-athletes. They do so by suggesting that the individual institutions are ultimately responsible for the implementation of standards set forth by the NCAA, but the creation of a cultural change requires the administration and faculty to place athletics as an important portion of the university’s mission statement, instead of a relegating athletic participation as negatively separate (Franklin, 2005).

Support Services

Powell (2009) indicates that student support services for student-athletes provide a wide range of opportunities for success. In an attempt to keep athletes eligible, counseling, tutoring, advisement, study hall, and library services are readily available and are mandatorily scheduled on a regular basis to assist athletes with time management to ensure greater instances of academic success.

According to Jenkins, Miyazaki, and Janosik (2009), today’s college student is statistically “no longer upper middle class, adolescent, white, or male,” but proportionately derives from working-class and minority backgrounds (p. 1). In numerous cases, this growing group of college students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds consists of first-generation students. Research shows that the academic
preparation these students receive in high school positively relates to their persistence rates in college (Swail, Redd, and Perna, 2003). However, any assistance the student may or may not have received at the high school level will not necessarily help them once they are enrolled in college. Therefore, it is critical that colleges provide environments which welcome first-generation college students as known as FGCS.

Exploitation of student-athletes for their athletic abilities and what they can bring to the athletic program with little or no regard for their academic accomplishments continues to plague college athletics (Horton, 2009). Horton (2009) also found that academic success for student-athletes is not the exclusive responsibility of the players and the coaching staff. The university administration and coaching staff should have complete support systems in place with stringent measures with early and often intervention practices to ensure that student-athletes are not only being provided the services, but utilizing them to their maximum capacity (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

Jenkins, Miyazaki, and Janosik (2009) found the college which created the most welcoming environments for first-generation students had mentoring programs where “coaches, professional friends, sponsors, and facilitators” served as role models (p. 9). These mentors provided students with “constructive intervention at critical and key transitional points” whether it was assistance with selecting classes, finding effective tutors, or maneuvering through the myriad of campus situations (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 9). In addition to providing student-athletes with mentors, some researchers (Swail, Redd, and Perna, 2003) discovered that when institutional commitment and missions align with a student’s academic goals there are greater increases in persistence rates.
Student-athletes, both revenue and non-revenue, indicate there are many academic and life skill advantages and experiences available to them. These include academic access to specific resources available only to student athletes such as preferred schedules of classes, counseling, study hall, tutoring, scholarship, time management and being a part of a team (Paule & Gilson, 2010).

As described above, integration into a college culture and environment has a direct effect on student persistence to graduation. If students are not involved in the registration process, class scheduling and when and where they study, then feelings of detachment can occur which can place the student-athlete at a distinct disadvantage academically. There can be tendencies to disengage from academics and concentrate more on athletic success to compensate for lack of motivation in the classroom (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Fletcher, Benshoff and Richburg (2003) indicate that the student-athlete experience is unique in many ways ranging from pressures to perform, stereotypical biases from faculty, staff and students and social isolation. The authors suggest that these unique experiences require special training and understanding from university counselors who can provide specific support for a differentiated psyche. Furthermore, Aries, McCarthy, Salovey and Banaji (2004) contend that student-athletes’ academic and athletic commitments create an athletic subculture that is harmful to their personal development which may be the cause of anxiety concerning academic performance and strained relationships with faculty.

These indicators suggest that there may be a need for universities to reform their approaches when providing support to student-athletes. From the acceptance of high
profile athletes on campus, there may also be preferential treatment in the admissions process which puts the student-athlete at an academic disadvantage where they may need additional support in order to have opportunities for success (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh and Hannah, 2006).

**Student Success.** There are instances when the student-athlete must make decisions concerning their academic and athletic success. If persistence to graduation is a priority to the student-athlete, then their personal decisions may have significant consequences concerning their future beyond the sports’ playing field. The support services, socialization and academic related scheduling set up by a university needs to be utilized to its fullest potential by the student-athlete to ensure greater instances of academic success and persistence to graduation (Powell, 2009).

Athletic and academic motivations are considered two separate entities in major college athletics. There are many instances of student-athlete role reversal, where the student-athletes’ priorities are reversed by placing athletic success first and academic success second (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). If student-athletes are underprepared academically when they enter college, it would be hard to argue that these students will be able to somehow catch up, feel confident, and thrive academically in a college environment given that the student-athlete’s schedule is much more difficult to manage (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000).

Moreover, some student-athletes expressed feelings of exploitation and low academic self-worth which contributed to feelings of inadequacy, resulting in low levels of academic motivation. The resources to assist students are available to them, but the
motivation to succeed would need to be strong with support coming from coaches, professors, and administrators of the college (Gaston-Gayles, 2004).

When faculty members encourage student-athletes, their confidences and motivations to academically succeed increase (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). In addition, when a university has a genuine, positive perception of the benefits of intercollegiate athletics on its campus, the tendency is for student-athletes to have a sense of comfort, belonging and acceptance that provides intrinsic motivation to succeed academically (Bonifiglio, 2009).

The ideal of having a professional career in athletics following a college athletic career may provide the motivation to stay academically eligible, yet the larger agenda of a career post athletic eligibility outside of athletics, is one which warrants exploration for student-athletes (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Consideration of college major should be a personal and serious choice for students in higher education.

**Students’ pathways.** The gateway to the future for these students will largely depend on the path they choose for themselves during these critical years of their lives. When student-athletes think of their future after their college career is over, the thought process may lead them down in a different direction from the rest of the student body (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). In their study, Potuto and Hanlon (2007) also found student-athletes are aware of the benefits they receive from being an athlete. The preferred registration, counseling, study hall, tutoring and support from coaches and administrators, benefits their academic endeavors along with financial assistance for scholarship athletes.
Research Question 4

Opportunities for fulfillment beyond the field of play are given to student-athletes through scholarship and support services. It is the responsibility of the student-athlete, the coaches, support services and the school, to explore the possibilities of what meaning and importance these opportunities have and what impact decisions made, may have on students’ futures once they have completed their education. Thus question 4 for this study asks: Are the self-expectations of student-athletes concerning academics different for school administrators and the coaching staff?

Killeya-Jones (2005) found that when student-athletes view their experience as students and athletes without discrepancy, they have greater instances of satisfaction in athletics and academics. Conversely, when student-athletes feel separatism between athletics and academics, they have tendencies to struggle with depression and identity confusion leading to academic and life struggles.

The argument of academics first, athletics second, has taken a significant turn in recent times. Football players at Northwestern University, a revenue-generating, Division I school, have filed a lawsuit with the National Labor Relations Board to change the status of student-athletes receiving college scholarships, to that of employees of the university, with student status considered separate. The NCAA contends there is no correlation between athletic participation and employment since athletic participation is strictly voluntary (NCAA.org).

Significance

The literature revealed a missing element concerning what the perceptions, challenges, and motivations are for student-athletes at large, public, Division I, non-
revenue generating universities. There are many instances of literature concerning big time, revenue generating programs where the goal of student-athlete success may not necessarily be persistence to graduation, but rather pursuit of a professional career in athletics. Concerns arise when the assumption is that if the goal is not the same for student-athletes who attend and participate in non-revenue generating programs where they are not on national television, attendance to games are on a much smaller scale and the coverage and exposure for them are not on the national level, and then the question becomes, if a student-athlete attends a non-revenue generating, non-major program, then what are the obstacles and perceptions that would prevent them from persisting to graduation?

The circumstances that exist for student-athletes at revenue-generating major athletic programs may be similar for athletes at non-revenue generating programs. There is the possibility that the goals of attaining a professional career in athletics may still be the driving force behind allowing student-athletes to maintain their academic eligibility to participate in collegiate athletics. For non-revenue generating men’s basketball programs, the lure of playing professionally in the National Basketball Association (N.B.A.) is still a possibility when a student graduates from these types of schools. But the possibility of playing professional basketball overseas may be more of a realistic option that players are taking advantage of when their academic eligibility is completed. Even with the option of playing professionally overseas, the odds are comparatively low in terms of being an option for students when compared to other professions that require academic completion. The transition from athletic eligibility to post athletic eligibility
without participating in professional sports may be a traumatic experience for some students (Chartrand & Lent, 1987).

Current literature does not address this particular sector of student-athlete participation. Johnson, Jubenville & Goss, (2009) reported that the literature does show some evidence of smaller schools’ athletic programs having separate motivators for college choice, which shows that academics can be a priority and closely associated with athletic participation. The gap in the literature accounts for larger schools that do not generate revenue, where the combination of academic success and persistence to graduation, as well as, participation in athletics at a high level of collegiate competition should be a winning experience for all involved.
Chapter Three

Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to explore academic success and persistence to graduation for men’s basketball players at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. Through interviews and observations, student-athletes’ behaviors and perspectives concerning academics were examined in an attempt to determine what factors affect persistence to graduation when students compete and perform at the collegiate level.

The goal was to contribute to the field of study and to make strong recommendations for systemic change and to provide better resources to student-athletes so they would have greater opportunities of academic success.

Research Questions

1) How do large, non-revenue generating Division I athletic programs monitor academic success for their men’s basketball teams?

2) What are the factors contributing to academic success and graduation rates at large, public, non-revenue generating Division I athletic programs?

3) What are the attitudes of non-revenue generating Division I athletes towards the completion of a degree?

4) Are self-expectations of student-athletes concerning academics different from school administrators and the coaching staff?

Since this case study was conducted at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating program, the setting was described and includes an explanation of the participants of the study (men’s basketball players) and the context in which they
engaged in both athletics and academics. The history of the program, with problems concerning persistence to graduation and other academic transgressions, were examined to document a pattern of behaviors that would require further investigation to determine the factors, circumstances and perceptions surrounding academic success.

The qualitative process included transcribed notations of a represented sample of 7 current student-athletes, 1 coach, 1 academic advisor and 4 observations of tutoring and advising sessions. The content of the interviews and observations are revealed with detailed explanations and rationale of the analysis of the data collected, which shows similarities and discrepancies in the data.

This chapter concludes with my perceived influence on the study and any biases I have contributed. The hope was to discover how institutional practices and student perceptions determine the effectiveness of student success and persistence to graduation. Newly analyzed methodologies have been suggested and will hopefully be implemented into pilot programs that struggle with comparable student success and persistence issues and help rectify or eliminate the obstacles keeping student-athletes from succeeding academically.

Research Design

Merriam (2009) describes a case study as an “in-depth descriptive study of a phenomenon”. For this case study, to discover a collective shared circumstance and experience, an ethnographic approach was utilized in an attempt to capture holistic data through descriptive observations and interviews with a purpose to provide a deep understanding of the perspectives of student-athletes pertaining to academic success and persistence to graduation. Academic success for the purpose of this case study is defined
as remaining eligible to participate in collegiate athletics which is “if the student maintains an overall grade point **average of 2.3 in their core courses** while successfully earning **6 credit hours** each term, they are eligible to participate in athletic related activities the following term, while completing **40 percent of** the required coursework by the end of year two, 60 percent by year three and **80 percent** by year four (NCAA.org). Athletic related financial scholarship money can be distributed up to five years, allowing student-athletes adequate time to persist to graduation (NCAA.org).

The descriptive data was compared, coded and analyzed for consistencies to identify patterns in similar experiences which allowed for a better understanding of the circumstances from the players’ perspective. The intent was to see if the institutional support system, the coaching staff and the players’ desires to achieve academically, were in line with a realistic process for success.

Johnson and Christensen (2004) define ethnography as a comprehensive description of the culture of a particular group. The ethnographic researcher assumed a subjective role in this case study and appropriately examined the points of view of interviewees. Through in-depth interviews and observations, student-athletes were examined in an effort to get a collective group culture concept which yielded rich, documented data, analyzed to determine if best practices are currently being utilized by both students and administrators.

The focus was to explore the thought process of student-athletes in relation to the systemic programs and internal motivators put in place to assist students with their academic progress. The interviews of the student-athletes were conducted to test correlations of the current and past academic assistance processes. This allowed the
study to comprehensively scrutinize past successes and failures of the process to legitimize emerging trends in the data.

Persistence to graduation and academic success of a men’s basketball team at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university were examined. The research questions investigated through an ethnographic case study, the connections between student-athletes on the men’s basketball team, and how their perceptions of academic success, persistence to graduation, and systemic support systems influence the number of players that actually commence to graduation. An ethnographic approach is appropriate due to shared experiences by the team members while the purpose of the case study was to examine similar themes of a particular group. Observations of student-athlete advisement and tutoring sessions were also documented, coupled with an interview with a member of the coaching staff to determine consistency with first-hand accounts collected in the interview process.

The non-revenue generating university in which this case study was conducted, does not have the same reputation that a big time college program would have in relation to having a connection to future professional careers in athletics. Since this is the case, then the question became why a student-athlete would not pursue an academic path that would lead to a professional career outside of professional athletics.

**Research Setting & Context**

The research setting for this case study was at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating, four-year, university. This particular university is home to over 20,000 students, more than 4,000 faculty and staff, and has been a staple in the same community for many years within a largely White and Hispanic serving area.
Institutional data shows that the campus population mirrors the surrounding communities with the majority of students being either Hispanic or White.

The university consists of 8 colleges and supports 17 men and women’s Division I athletic teams in a major athletic conference. The men’s basketball team’s current roster has 15 players, mostly from the surrounding area, with 3 senior class level student-athletes on the team. The men’s basketball program has had a recent history of committing infractions and violations against the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules and regulations. Concurrently, the NCAA has levied penalties against the program which includes an Occasion III penalty which is a 3 year ban from post season championship eligibility because the institution did not meet the standard Academic Progress Rate (APR).

This qualitative case study explored the factors that influenced persistence to graduation for the men’s basketball team at this large, Division I, public, non-revenue generating university through in-depth interviews with current team members and the coaching staff, to determine the perceptions and patterns from different perspectives to identify any themes that exist and to make recommendations to this program and other universities with similar circumstances. A criterion, stratified purposeful sampling was utilized since there is a specific criterion being used to select the participants, and sub groups were interviewed as well to ensure triangulation in the gathering of the data.

The site chosen for this study is appropriate due to its non-revenue generating status, and the recent infractions identified by the NCAA, as a university with sub-par graduation rates. The university administration for athletics has recognized persistence to graduation for the men’s basketball team as problematic and is open to identifying the
rationale behind the issue from the players’ perspective. The participants chosen for this study provided a unique perspective of their academic aspirations and motivations to succeed, and how the university’s academic support system either assisted or hindered their academic growth. Interviews with the student-athletes allowed for a comparison of past failures and potential current successes and outlined how perspectives and actions have been altered.

**Research Sample & Data Source**

The source of the data for this ethnographic case study is men’s basketball players at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. Through interviews, the intent was to gain a better understanding of the attitudes of student-athletes’ towards academic success and persistence to graduation. Using interviews and observations, this case study attempted to gather attitudes and opinions about academic success in relation to athletic schedules and whether persistence to graduation is considered a high priority, realistic goal which is well-orchestrated by the university and feasibly attainable for the players. Other sources including interviews with players and coaches, as well as, observations of the program and its participants were also utilized in an effort to triangulate and legitimize the data as well as to gauge whether academic services and schedules are conducive to academic success.

A stratified purposeful, criterion sampling was utilized in this case study. This mixed sampling strategy consists of comparisons between current men’s basketball players, with a subgroup consisting of coaches and academic advisors, which satisfies the criteria for a stratified purposeful strategy. A criterion sampling strategy was also used
due to the players belonging to a specific group of athletes meeting the criteria of being a student-athlete at large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university.

These individuals were chosen to assess and evaluate the potential characteristics and perspectives of academic success and persistence to graduation. Other sources were utilized to triangulate the legitimacy of the data. By conducting interviews with current players, coaches and advisors, as well as, observations of the program and its participants to gauge whether academic services and schedules are conducive to academic success, triangulation was accomplished. To gain more insight into the differences of pressures and schedules of the athletes, graduation rates were also referenced at the university to distinguish how the men’s basketball team rates compared to the general student body. These sampling strategies captured a variety of opinions surrounding a singular theme and were used to see if there were any common characteristics that could be synthesized into concrete conclusions that could have an impact in the field and bridge the gap for similar programs with similar circumstances.

The characteristics of the case study groups that were used in the interviews and observations are unique to this study due to the members of a specific group of individuals having a shared experience that can only be surveyed through these elite participants. To ensure that all of the rights of the subjects and the usage of the data were properly followed, this study was cleared by the Director of Athletics at the university, who oversaw the scheduling of all interviews and observations and assisted in the compliance of all human subjects protection processes in conjunction with the office of Graduate Studies, Research and International Programs.
Historically, this program has been problematic in its efforts to graduate student-athletes on the men’s basketball team. These issues were examined to determine where disconnects have taking place and if there have been any adjustments made by the university to rectify these shortcomings and if the participants view persistence to graduation differently.

Access to the athletes was secured at this site by the Athletic Director. Due to the researcher’s affiliation at the setting, convenience allowed for frequent interactions, observations and contact with the athletes, coaches and administrators. Additionally, the researcher was able to gain the trust of the participants which ensured that their responses and actions were genuine and accurate.

Interview locations and times were scheduled on campus with the Athletic Director at the team’s convenience and frequent observations of the program were conducted to gain familiarity with schedules and attitudes of the participants pertaining to academics.

**Instruments and Procedures**

This research study consisted of making observations of and conducting interviews with players on the men’s basketball team at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating, 4-year University. An ethnographic study explores cultural similarities in a particular group which is appropriate for the interviews and observations conducted in this study. The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to gain a better understanding of how players view and value academic success and persistence to graduation. Also, this study intended to examine the academic support system afforded to these student-athletes and to determine if this support system is built for academic
eligibility during athletic eligibility only, or if it is structured to assist when athletic eligibility ends.

In addition, questions were explored to ascertain if athletes had plans for their futures. Were students setting out to be athletes only, or did they value the educational opportunities available to them? These types of questions were answered in a methodical, semi-structured interview process with observations and collected data to determine if the dynamics that exist within the institution and the goals that students set for themselves, contribute to academic success and persistence to graduation.

A research invitation was sent to interviewed and observed participants. These invitations allowed the potential participants to be fully briefed on the protocol and nature of this study. The invitation also detailed the approximate amount of time entailed in the interview, and informed the participant that this was strictly a voluntary participatory undertaking and that all information regarding identifiable characteristics was anonymous. Invitations gave participants the lead researcher’s contact information (name, phone number and e-mail address) so they could contact him if they were interested in participating in this study.

Informed consent forms were utilized to outline the purpose of the study, to describe what and how long the study would take, to detail how an audio recorder would be utilized and kept secure and confidential, to define how the data would be used, and to help participants understand some of the potential risks and discomforts that they may or may not experience during the study. Participants were also notified that if they chose to participate and experienced any signs of discomfort, they could have any portion or all of their transcripts removed and/or remove themselves from the study at any time. They
were also informed of resources which were available to them if they felt they were in need of counseling or support.

Finally, the interview protocol consisted of informing the participant of the purpose of the interview, an explanation of the confidentiality agreement, informed consents, the identification and contact information of the principal investigator, the timing of the interview, commencement of the interview, closing questions and post interview session. In the event, the participant signed the consent agreement, they were again informed of the student’s purpose and been given a list of the interview questions that would be asked of them. For example, a typical question along with sub questions identifying and digging deeper into the understanding of the answers included:

Do you, as a student-athlete, have a plan for your future as an athlete only, or do you value the educational opportunities available to you?

This type of question was designed to add to the methodical, semi-structured interview process, which along with observations and data collection, determined if the dynamics that exist within the institution and the goals students have set for themselves, contribute to academic success and persistence to graduation. According to Bernard (1994), semi-structured interviews allow for the interviewer to follow a structured questioning pattern but have the flexibility to follow different avenues when appropriate.

Data Collection

Utilizing an ethnographic approach, the researcher conducted observations and interviews with current men’s basketball players, as well as, coaches and an athletic administrator at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. An ethnographic approach allowed for first hand experiences and perspectives of a specific,
collective group of student-athletes, and served to guide the study to see if there were any patterns that emerged from the data to gain insight into the components of academic success and persistence to graduation.

During the interview process, perspectives from the coaches and academic advisors revealed how the support systems, time management and socialization into the university community contributed to the academic success or failure of student-athletes. In addition, the observations of the current players and coaches as they proceed through a typical day of practice, classes, study hall, tutoring and socialization, provided valuable unknown data. The data garnered from interviews and observations explored potential reasons why some student-athletes at non-revenue generating programs do not persist to graduation.

For this case study, the researcher was in contact with the Athletic Director and was granted access to the e-mails of current team members, coaches and administrators. This data helped define different perspectives concerning the same subject. E-mails detailing the subject of the case study and the parameters surrounding participation were sent to all current players who were past their first year of eligibility to ensure that they had completed at least one year of study and competitive athletics. First, e-mail invitations were sent then consent forms were sent to players in an effort to gain how the program, the academic support system and the players’ perspectives had recently changed. Potential participants received full disclosure information about this case study to ensure they had the means to make an informed decision when choosing to participate. They understood that they could remove themselves from the process at any time, they
would have access to the data for review, and that counseling services would be available to them, if needed.

The student-athlete participants selection process was based on how many potential participants there were, giving priority after examining the data to ascertain which students were academically eligible for the longest periods of time, how many units they were away from fulfilling graduation requirements, and if the student had ever been placed on academic probation. The criteria for selecting participating coaches were if they had to have at least 3 years of coaching experience at the Division I level.

Each interview took place on campus so the participants felt comfortable in their setting. The semi-structured interviews were scheduled for one hour, but were very flexible and time adjusted depending on the level of dialogue given by participants. The researcher’s intention was to conduct all of the interviews during a two week period to keep the data fresh and consistent, and then transcribe the data as soon as possible.

To gain a better understanding of the time constraints that the athletes have to contend with, observations took place in the tutoring center, and while shadowing the team. The intent was to couple perceptions concerning academic success and persistence to graduation with support systems with the amount of time available to commit to academics versus athletics and to see if there were any correlations between these factors.

One of my goals as the lead researcher was to complete my data collection and then exit from the field and lives of the participants with them knowing that all steps to ensure their confidentiality during the interview and observation process were taken. Participants hopefully understood that I was very thankful for their time and openness concerning their participation. They were also given opportunities to review the
transcripts and were informed that they may remove their testimony if they did not feel comfortable with the results.

In addition to submitting proper protocol and complying with the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), there was a member check and peer review process when the data was collected which ensured the study was conducted as ethically as possible.

This case study consisted of two stages of data analysis; preliminary data analysis and thematic data analysis. Interpretations were utilized to synthesize and analyze the data gathered to identify themes that emerged from the data collection process. These two stages allowed for the identifying of themes which were coded and compartmentalized. This process led to a greater understanding of the data as the coded data was then interpreted to form some educated conclusions. Through analysis of the data and review of the literature, gaps and recommendation on the subject of academic success and persistence to graduation for men’s basketball players at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university emerged.

Review of the literature suggests that student-athletes may have a difficult time adjusting to the academic rigor of college level coursework and a full athletic schedule (Harmon, 2010). Questions concerning socialization outside of athletics, academic confidence, and university support for academics and academic preparedness prior to college have been analyzed for big time college athletes, which may contribute to academic difficulties and eventual non-persistence have surfaced (Comeaux, 2005). The notion of a professional career in athletics also looms large regarding persistence, with
many student-athletes leaving school early or being exploited for their athletic talents only, leaving many athletes without obtaining a degree.

Gaps in the literature reveal that non-revenue generating programs have low percentages of athletes playing professionally in the National Basketball Association (NBA). This leads one to question why these student-athletes would not then persist to graduation if the realistic expectation is not to have opportunities for a professional career in athletics.

In order to gain a better understanding of the time constraints that athletes have to contend with, identifiable gaps in the literature were compared to the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and observations. The literature served as the basis for forming codes by guiding the categories of difficulties that student-athletes may have with academic success and persistence to graduation.

Early data analysis consisted of journals, themes from the literature, pilot studies informal interviews and observations to assist in organizing and categorizing emerging data, insight and themes. The information gathered from the interviews and observations materialized as the bulk of the study to determine trends and themes in order to make clear assessments of perspectives of the subjects. It was critical to keep all information gathered in coded form to maintain an organized and thorough study.

After interviews and observations were completed, transcribing commenced with detailed records being coded using ATLAS Ti software which kept organized records of trends, which initially began with large-scale categories and eventually funneled down to more concise categories grouped and identified with similar findings in the data. The
observation and interview-coded data were compared to identify themes which helped the lead researcher make educated conclusions as to the meaning of the data.

By looking for similar themes in coded transcript data, observations, journals and notes, and then comparing them with the gaps in the literature and determining how connections are made, a meaningful case study revealed insightful, identifiable characteristics which allowed the researcher to make recommendations to similar athletic programs to ensure greater instances of academic success and persistence to graduation occur.

Role of the Researcher

My research was conducted at the university in which I have established relationships with athletes, coaches, and administrators. This connection gave me a unique perspective and working knowledge of the culture and climate on the campus. According to the mission statement at the university, student access and success is the number one priority and these attributes should trickle down to all aspects of student life and their experiences. This statement does not exclude student-athletes and appropriate efforts are made by the university to understand the unique experiences of student-athletes and to provide them with support so they have greater instances of academic success.

My role as the lead researcher had the potential to bring a selection of biases into this case study. My experience as a former athlete allowed me to share similar roles with the current athletes that I interviewed, observed and collected data on. I have an intimate understanding of how easy it is to fall into a situation where athletics consumes every aspect of a young life, and how life after basketball, outside of a career in professional
athletics, is not even taken into consideration. It is for these reasons that I conducted interviews with a transparency by identifying my own biases in relation to the research and through a series of detailed journals. I ensured that reflexivity (Watt, 2007) was utilized by keeping a journal of my thoughts and thought process so my own biases were kept to a minimum, which allowed me to stay accountable to the authenticity of the research process. This allowed for the data to dictate what the outcomes of the analysis would become.

During the member checking process (Carlson, 2010), interviewed participants were given copies of the transcripts in order to verify the accuracy of the data to capture the intent of the responses, making sure that I briefed them ahead of time on what to expect when reading through the transcripts to ensure a mutual understanding of the data. Also, I relied on my peers in the doctoral cohort, as well as, my dissertation chair and other faculty to provide me with constructive feedback of the content thus keeping my role as the lead researcher as genuine and impartial as possible.

It was also very important that I immersed myself in the environment of the student-athletes by attending games, practices, tutoring and advising sessions. This helped me gain a better understanding of the demands placed upon them by their academic and full athletic schedules. My commitment was to gain a better understanding of the culture and to be able to bring a level of familiarity and comfort to the process and to have the data be authentic.

When immersing myself in the environment, I attempted to portray myself as a professional at all times by remaining an observer. Although I felt it was important to show the participating interviewees that I have similar experiences to them, I also
displayed academic integrity while maintaining semi-formal transparent notes and journal entries. At the same time, I want ensured that the athletes felt comfortable during the interview process to capture their true perspectives on academics and persistence to graduation.

Research questions were designed to see if the university systemic process is helpful in achieving academic success, or if the athletes felt that the university values athletic performance more than academic performance. A triangulation method (Denzin, 1989) was implemented in this study to verify the findings through interviews with current players and coaches, and observations of academic advising and tutoring. Since this was a single site case study, the questions and triangulation provided multiple perspectives on the same subject while keeping the biases of only one group of participants to a minimum.
Chapter Four

Results and Findings

Chapter four provides the results of the qualitative findings from participant interviews and is organized by themes derived from the set of semi-structured interview questions created by the lead researcher. The primary research questions of this study were consistently administered to each interviewee to include: How do large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs monitor academic success for their men’s basketball team? What are the factors contributing to academic success and graduation rates at large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs? What are the attitudes of non-revenue generating Division I athletes towards the completion of a degree? Are the self-expectations of student-athletes concerning academics different from school administrators and the coaching staff?

Presentation of Qualitative Data

The purpose of this study was to identify patterns and common experiences of former and current men’s basketball players, coaches and administrators at a large, 4-year, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and observations, this study aspired to potentially reveal a better understanding of the perspectives and circumstances that influence academic success and persistence to graduation. The qualitative data was obtained from transcribed interviews and from the lead researcher’s personal observations and understandings of the academic advising, specifically the freshmen student services department.

Data Collection. Data collection occurred over a two-week period during the summer 2014 semester at a large, 4-year, public, Division I, non-revenue generating
university. Seven students, one academic advisor and one coach participated in the interview process. Qualitative data was transcribed and then was uploaded into Atlas.Ti version 7.7. The output and semi-structured interview questions provided the codes and themes used to create the sections and subsections in this chapter.

As described in the methodology section of chapter three, a stratified purposeful, criterion sampling, ethnographic case study was utilized to ensure the best possible detailed outcome of perspectives, thoughts, motivations and beliefs. These methods were appropriate because the mixed sampling strategy consisted of comparisons between current men’s basketball players at different class levels, as well as, subgroups of one academic advisor and one coach. Additionally, observations of the specialized student services programs offered to student athletes provided a better perspective on how, if any, the academic assistance available influenced the players and allowed them the ability to prioritize their academic opportunities.

**Interviewed Participants.** Seven student athletes, one academic advisor and one basketball coach responded to open-ended qualitative questions. Student Participants A, B, and C entered into their senior year during the fall 2014 semester, while Participants D, and E were looking forward to being juniors, and Participants F, and G defined themselves as Freshmen during the interview process.

While interview inquiries were consistent and ranged from 10 to 12 questions, depending on whether probing questions were asked, the abundant feedback from participants was informative and used to design and write the qualitative themes in this chapter. Overall, students were asked to define their college experiences and daily activities as athletes, to ascertain whether they were meeting their academic goals of
graduating, to consider whether the university staff and coaches had provided a support program ensuring students would succeed, and finally to make recommendations to future students enrolling in the university’s athletic program.

**Overall Experience of a Student Athlete**

When asked to describe their daily experiences being a student athlete on the men’s basketball team at a large, public, Division 1, non-revenue generating, four year university, the students described very regimented and timed daily routines. Best described by Participant #B, a senior-level Pan African Studies major, a typical day at school includes:

Ok, so it’d be like weights at 7:45, [Uh hm] class at like 9:00 or 9:30, and then, we might have another class from like 11:00 to 12:15. And then, we have to get ready for practice. So like, I mean, a lot of athletes like to get ready, you know, like an hour before practice. We’ll have practice at like, 2:30. [Uh hm] So we’ll probably eat between, and then get ready for practice. And then, practice from like 2:30 to like 5:00. And then, we have homework to do, so here, at [the researched university] they have like [ahh], a center where we can get tutoring, and help with our homework and stuff like that. So, we’re normally scheduled there, probably about 7:00. So my, my first year of being here, it was all of that, and then, after practice, I was going to tutoring from 7:00 to 9:00.
According to the seven Participants, the above schedule is fairly common for all of the athletes, with the only exception being mandatory tutoring for the lower grades. For example, for Participants #A, B, and C, who were entering into their senior years, as well as Participants #D, and E, who were going to be juniors, study hall was no longer a mandatory requirement. However, for Participants #F, and G, attending two-hour sessions in the tutoring center was a mandatory requirement and an addition to their busy daily schedules, a topic to be detailed further in this chapter.

**Managing a busy schedule.** When probed about how they manage their busy schedules, the seniors (Participants #A, B, and C) used verbiage which showed their maturity levels when compared to their younger classmates (Participants #F, and G). According to Participant #C, a senior-level Psychology major, balancing classes and sports is about not putting off assignments until the last minute.

I would say, staying very like up to date in class work,

don’t put it off, try not to procrastinate too much because

you know then, you’ll have like games and you’re

traveling, you’re trying to get everything done, but if you

can, like say you have a homework assignment or

something they give you, try to get it done as soon as

possible if you have some free time on campus during the

day or something like that, just so, you know, it doesn’t get

all umm, wait until the last minute and then if you have

games or you’re traveling you won’t be able to get it done

on time so…just stay on top of things early.
While Participant #C has learned to plan for the unknown activities that can come up in an athlete’s schedule, Participant #F, a freshman Business major, is seemingly just taking each day in the spotlight as it comes without planning for any surprises. When asked how he handles such a busy schedule, he replied, “Ahh, shoot, I just, don’t know, I just, I just really like, I don’t know, I’m really just determined I guess, you gotta be hungry, you know, you gotta do all things right all the time now, because you know, now we’re in the public eyes and all that, so, you know, it’s just the will, and you know, the pride to do well” (Participant #F). As stated by Benson (2000), student-athletes may have more difficult roads towards successfully graduating and reaching goals, but Powell (2009) contends that with support programs readily available, students have better chances of becoming successful in both academics and in athletics. As a freshmen, Participant #F may not have fully used or learned from the available support programs, while Participant #C has had two full years of support and thus seems to have a better grasp of planning with purpose.

Academic advising: Class schedules and preparing for a major. With knowledge of the university’s specialized service programs for student-athletes, the Lead Researcher asked Participants to talk about how their busy class schedules developed and how, if at all, their majors were influenced. For Participant A, talking to an Athletic Advisor every semester helped him keep on track towards graduating in four years and also helped him go from being a Business Management major to a Communications major. “I majored in business management, but, I just had picked a major because I was getting into college, and I was all excited and didn’t really care; but as time went on I figured out what I actually like in communications” (Participant #A, Senior).
Having had a positive experience with a female Athletic Advisor, Participant #A went on to state, “She’s been advising probably thousands of athletes before, so she basically knows what she’s doing. I feel comfortable having my education in her hands” (Participant #A, Senior). Participant #B, a transferring Senior and Pan African Studies major was also assisted by the same female Athletic Advisor. She helped him change his major from Communications to a study he believes will help him remain on-track to graduate and ultimately help him counsel people in the future. “I wanted to graduate on time, so I had to change my major to Pan African Studies” (Participant #B).

Another Senior, Participant #C, a Psychology major, found the Athletic Advisor and University Professors to be exceedingly helpful in planning his schedule around practices and games as well as meeting his required class assignments and tests. Regarding the Academic-Athletic Advisor, he stated,

She’ll help us…pick the classes, like you’ll have some options but there’s like certain classes that you need to take; so she’ll help us work it out so we can like, get…our class scheduled around our practice times and around weights. And, umm, I remember I had to drop one class because the final was going to be scheduled on the day we had a game (Participant #C, Senior).

In terms of finding extra academic assistance, the student continued,

I have a good relationship with them [his Professors] so, they know like, if I have a game or something they’ll say you know you can either finish it early or come in at this
time or, you know, I’ll give you a little extension here; so they, they work with you and they understand that we’re traveling and we have all this other stuff, so, ahumm, I’m able to work, sometimes independently, like if we have a lab I can just do it on my own time or something like that (Participant #C, Senior).

For the above senior majoring in Psychology, a set schedule of classes leading towards him finishing in four years was ideal. He also found the guidance of his Academic Athlete Advisor and the flexibility of his professors preferable to the last minute meetings or practices the coaches sometimes scheduled.

The only thing that I would say, is if the basketball, like the coaches or something like that if they had more of like a, like a set schedule because sometimes they’ll text us like at 10:00 or the night before, that we have to be somewhere in the morning, at like 7am, and you’re just kinda like alright, you just threw that on us but at the same time, umm, it’s like a job, really, so you know, you always have to be ready, and I don’t mind it, you know. But if there was a little bit more, you know, of a concrete schedule, I mean that would help, but at the same time, like, I can deal with it because, it’s like, aside from school, basketball is your first priority so you always have to be ready whenever they text
you or give you a call (Participant #C, Senior, Psychology major).

According to Participant #D, an undeclared major, and Participant #E, a Communications major, both junior-standing, declaring a major during their freshmen year was not required. Instead, they met with the same Academic Athletic Advisor as the above three seniors and prepared their course schedules according to their goals.

“Picking a major was really difficult for me. She [Academic Athletic Advisor] asked…what you wanna do and ah, what you’re interested in, and she allows you to pick and she works with you and helps you pick um, some just GE classes” (Participant #D, Junior, Undeclared major). While NCAA has increased the Academic Progress Rate (APR) standard which Sharp and Sheilley (2008) believe may add strain to athletes to choose a major they may not be interested in, the university where this study was conducted may be giving student-athletes a chance to become interested in a major by having them work on their General Education courses first as in Participant #D’s case.

Understanding that some of the University’s courses, depending on the Degree, conflict with games, practices, and the basketball department’s agenda, the lead researcher asked Participant #D a follow-up question regarding his current undeclared status. When asked, “So, what if you choose a major at some point, and it doesn’t fit into your schedule, like as far as practice and games?” Participant #D replied, “I know girls on the soccer team have um, have had classes during practice. And it’s the only, umm, time that they offer the class, and that’s of course their major, so they kinda have to take it. So I know coaches are really, um, they work around it. Cause they know like, um
that’s the reason, obviously, why we are here, to go to school; but they work around it” (Participant #D, Junior).

For Participant #E, a junior, the decision to become a Communications major was because he believed the courses would cover a quantity of general education classes and lead to a basic career. “I know it’s’ such a broad major” (Participant #E). However, when also asked what would happen if the major he selected didn’t fit into the athletic schedule laid out for him, Participant #E shared that he considered changing his major to Music but then stayed a Communications major because of the inevitable scheduling conflicts. As explained by Participant #E,

Earlier in the year, I had, cause I, I like music. I kinda do music too. Ahumm, that’s like a side thing right now. But I had talked to a professor that was in the music department, and he had told me, like, the thing with music, like, if you declare that as a major, cause in order to get into the music department, you have to, like, take three test. Which is like the performance test, where you have to know how to play an instrument. And I haven’t played an instrument since I was younger. So I knew I wasn’t gonna take that test. But he told me, like, you know, if with music and just a lot of majors at this school, you know it’s tough to have basketball and a certain major go hand in hand. Cause it’s like, with music, and like sports, it’s like, two different things. So you have to, like, put dedication and
hours towards one or the other. So he gave me that advice. I was like, alright, whatever. I’ll just deal with it [playing music] on the side or whatnot (Participant #E, Junior).

When probed to further contemplate the aspects of being an athlete and music major, Participant #E responded, “Yea, it’ll probably be tough to, to do basketball. Cause there’s so much you have to do, like extracurricular things with the music. So, I don’t even think there has been any music majors playing athletics” (Participant #E, Communications major). When asked whether the student-athlete felt he had the freedom to choose beyond those things that really can’t fit in to his basketball schedule, the student replied, “For the most part, yeah” (Participant #E, Junior, Communications major).

As hypothesized by Simons, Van Rheenen & Covington (1999), a lack of academic engagement, particularly if university administrators, coaches, advisors, and boosters prioritize success purely in athletic terms, may perpetuate a student’s lack of academic confidence, and feelings of self-doubt and fear of failure. For Participant #F, a freshman Business major, support from one of his assistant coaches seems to have given him a solid foundation and built up his confidence. “One of our assistant coaches, he really takes us, sits us down and talks about you know, what classes are good for us, and what we like to do, and what you know what our tendencies are and what we can handle and that type of stuff so, umm, he, he pretty much just, he does it all for us and you know, gets us in classes that we, that we can perform well in” (Participant #F, Business major).

When considering a student-athlete’s persistence to reaching his academic goals, systemic support systems may influence the numbers of players that actual commence to
graduation as does having a student who is clear about his goals. When asked about his meeting with the University’s Academic Advisor, Participant #G, a freshman, replied, “I basically told her I want to finish in three, and I want to be a mechanical engineer. And she basically told me I need A, B, and C, and I just follow those things, those guidelines” (Participant #G). When asked whether it was realistic to finish in three years, his response was “Well, I’ll be able to finish my general…ed in one, and then probably the mechanical part in maybe four, so it’ll take five” (Participant #G, Freshman, Mechanical Engineering major). When probed further about whether his athletic schedule can fit into a Mechanical Engineering class schedule, the student replied, “Yea, just less, very, very less social life but I mean if that’s what it takes” (Participant #G).

In addition to being determined, Participant #G discovered a support system of people who were honest when guiding him towards his goals. When asked about his experiences with recruiters from other universities, Participant #G talked about how they didn’t have Engineering programs as advertised, but when he approached the coaches at the university in this study, Participant #G was put in contact with the Academic Advisor in charge of assisting athletes. “Actually it was Coach M. He told me, I, he was upfront, he was like, I don’t know [details about the Mechanical Engineering program], but I’ll have you meet with Academic Advisor M and she’ll let you know everything and you know, and that’s kind of what I was looking for, like truth, honesty, and...so when I met with her, she told me it was gonna be difficult, but it’s doable so, I was just went for it, that’s all I needed” (Participant #G, Freshman).

While NCAA regulations don’t require athletes to visit Academic Advisors, the university in this study has made it a priority to make guidance a part of the athletic
culture. Guidance for the three seniors has amounted to them maintaining busy schedules and often being able to plan and prepare early for last-minute practices, and traveling to games. The university’s Academic Advisors were able to show the two junior athletes in this study that there were and are certain majors that do not coincide well with the athletic programs, specifically basketball, but did not discourage them from pursuing their academic interests. For freshman Participant #F, having an Advisor that could help him uncover what he was interested in, was crucial towards his Business major plan. While Participant #G, an ambitious Mechanical Engineering major, required an Advisor that could ascertain whether he could reach his goals in the three year time period he set. Ultimately, Academic Advisors were able to assure Participant #G that even if he gave up all of his socializing time, his three-year plan was tight but still worth stretching for, a move many basketball players know very well.

**University culture and socialization.** As detailed above by Participant #G, academic and athletic goals can often leave a student with very little time for socializing. Jolly (2008) found that a lack of socialization left student-athletes feeling overwhelmed and underprepared. When asked to confirm that there is not a great deal of time to socialize due to his athletic and academic schedule, Participant #B, a Senior Communications major, stated, “Ahumm, it’s busy. A lot busy, ahumm, also a lot people say like, ‘we have no life’. [Laughing]. Ahhh, I mean as far as social life, I mean, not really. It’s kinda, down from, you know, your average student” (Participant #B). Often, students’ busy academic and athletic schedules don’t provide them time to seek and receive help for social guidance or academic assistance.
According to Rasmussen (2009), the socialization of student-athletes into the general community of a college or university, can have a significant impact on how successful students become academically. However, for the student-athletes in this study, teammates and other basketball players seem to be the only source of their social group.

Social life? Ahhh, you know it just consist of like me and my teammates, ahhh, inside the locker room, like we just chillin’ there after practice and we’ll just talk, socialize or whatever. And then outside of that ahhhh, I don’t have that many friends that go to this school, but I’m still in touch with a lot of my friends from high school. And ahhhh, I grew up in the area, ahhh, like 20 minutes away from here, so, you know, I might go to my house sometimes and just say what’s up to my family. Student #E (Junior, Communications major).

Similar to Student #E, Student #F, a freshmen, who transferred from out of state, the friends he socializes with are other athletes. “Right now, I’ve, I, I just really just kick it with the athletes…but you know, if I see somebody that you know, that’s cool I might you know approach them, make a friend or something, so it’s not a problem” (Participant #F, Business major). While these social interactions strictly between athletes and teammates may not seem like a problem, some theorists believe there are higher incidents of academic success when the student-athlete has a sense of belonging and accepts the culture and environment of the college or university (Beamon, 2009).
According to Ishitani (2010), transfer students socialize at a faster pace than freshmen, and, as uncovered by Participant #C, a senior, learn the value of how and with whom a student spends his time constructively, can have positive results. “I would say just, stick, just hang out with the right crowd. ‘Cause, you know, there are people, there are always athletes who are doing the wrong things as well, you know. But, umm, it’s, it’s completely, you know, possible to go out and not even drink, not do anything and still have a great time” (Participant #C, Psychology major). As this study aimed to uncover the factors that influence student success and persistence, the idea of socializing athletes into the mainstream student body has advantages and disadvantages. If athletes are held to a higher standard when it comes to social activities like drinking, those athletes may fair better hanging out with their own crowd. But if student-athletes are to gain a full college experience that may enhance their persistence and success, more socializing with non-athletes may be an avenue the athletic department could encourage their athletes to pursue.

**Test versus basketball practice.** Student-athletes were asked to describe the steps they would take if they had to study for a test at the same time they had a practice or a game. While Engstrom, McEwen, and William (1995) contend that major college athletic departments have been scrutinized for supplying athletes with privileges and special treatment, the Lead Researcher of this study was interested in uncovering whether athletes were reprimanded or punished for missing a practice or game due to studying or a test. When asked whether the coaching staff was receptive and understanding about these types of situations where an athlete might miss a basketball practice because he had to study, Participant #B stated, “Yea, yea they are. Ahumm, actually this past year, like,
I’ve had situations like that, where I’ve had to miss some practices or like, you know, leave practice early to study and stuff like that” (Participant #B, Senior). When asked if there were any penalties, like extra running, Participant #B laughed and said, “No. Not at all” (Participant #B, Senior).

As suggested by Rasmussen (2009), often times, the student-athlete cannot anticipate or comprehend what the impact may be when he is confronted with the experience of being a student and an athlete simultaneously at the collegiate level. When asked what he would do if he had to study for a test and also had a practice or a game, Participant #F replied, “Ahh, school comes first. Ahhh, I’d probably, you know, contact the coaching staff, ah, let them know that, you know, I have this serious project or you know homework that I have to get done and you know and they’ll probably be like, you know it’s okay you can miss or whatever, because you know, school first” (Participant #F, Freshman).

In contrast, the senior student-athletes in this research have learned to prepare for surprises,

Umm, well really, I would make sure that I studied before a practice or a game, you know. Because ah, I’m not gonna, I wouldn’t ever text my coach and be like hey I can’t make it to practice I got a test you know. I have to take care of that beforehand because that’s on me. ‘Cause you know, most of the classes that you have, they’re going to give you the exam dates like at the beginning of the semester so you
know when you have to take it. So I’d make sure to have
time for that and do it before hand (Participant #C, Senior).

Lower level students like Participant #F and Participant #G seek help from coaches regarding situations like missing a practice or game in order to study for a test. “Ahh, I would just have to study, you know, my coaches they’re very school orientated, so, if I have to come late to practice because of a study session or you know, maybe, maybe even not play because of the test or whatever I would just have to do so. You know, school is before basketball. I’m a student first you know, then an athlete second so” (Participant #G, Freshman, Mechanical Engineer major).

**Tutoring sessions.** Student-athletes, both revenue and non-revenue, indicate there are many academic and life skill advantages and experiences available to them. These services include access to specific resources available only to student athletes such as preferred schedules of classes, counseling, study hall, tutoring, scholarship, time management and being a part of a team (Paule & Gilson, 2010). Participants were asked to describe their experiences with the University’s academic tutoring. While the two freshmen Participant(s) #F and #G had not experienced mandatory peer tutoring during the summer 2014 semester, their upper level teammates provided feedback regarding their freshmen experiences.

When asked to confirm and describe his experience with mandatory tutoring, Participant #A, a Communications major, stated, “Yea, it was mandatory. But ahumm, I mean, in terms of tutoring, I didn’t find it to be helpful. I didn’t feel like I was getting that much help on what I was doing. I just felt like, I was given time to do my homework and assignments, so, that’s basically what I got out of it” (Participant #A, Senior). When
asked to elaborate on where he found problems, he stated, “In terms of time management, like having the time where I could do my homework and stuff, yea, I felt like I needed it. But, I just felt like, in terms of me learning better and getting help on an assignment, I felt like that need wasn’t really met” (Participant #A). As stated above by Dumond, Lynch, and Platania (2008), student athletes are often given preferential treatment in the form of tutoring and support because they are expected to succeed in both academics and athletics.

For the junior students, Participant(s) #D and #E, the experiences they had with the tutoring department were similar to Senior Participant #A. All three students understood the concept of the tutoring center and the extra help given to athletes to ensure their academic success, however both junior students explained feeling overwhelmed by the time commitments during their freshmen year.

Yea, ah, like I said, my freshmen year I was doing a lot of tutoring. Ahhumm, and through, through the time, like you know, it would get annoying, and that’s like, like right after practice, you gotta go to tutoring for like 2 hours or something. So like, your whole day is just dedicated to basketball and school. So, you know, the older I’ve gotten, the more freedom you start getting, but, ahhh, like I said, again, it was really helpful my freshmen year (Participant #E, Junior, Communications major).

While Participant #E found the dedicated two hours of tutoring constraining on his freshmen schedule, Participant #D describes a negative experience with the
employees in the tutoring center. “The only thing I can say is like, they’re super serious in there now and it’s kind of annoying. The ladies up there, like, they just get super mad really easily. And it’s like, we’re a bunch of athletes. Like, you need to relax a little bit, like chill. But ah, the tutors, I like the tutors, they’re nice, they help out a lot, as much as they can” (Participant #D, Junior). When asked to describe his positive experiences with the peer tutors, which the Lead Researcher discovered are usually students who are also athletes, Participant #D provided the following insight:

And they’ll know like, if we’re tired one day, they’ll like they’ll understand. They’ll be like, ok like, if you’re tired right now, then just come in at this time. Like they help work around our schedule. Or if we’re hungry and we didn’t get anything to eat after practice, because we just got done, like, we just gotta send them, like maybe like send them a text or go in and say, like, oh I, I didn’t eat. Can I grab something to eat real quick? They’ll be like yea, hurry up and come back. It’s just, it’s nice because they sympathize for us. Like they feel our pain.

Participant #D was asked to elaborate further about his experiences of being tutored by student-athletes and if there were any benefits.

We go to ah, that’s what’s nice about our tutoring center.

We get tutored by other athletes. And, what’s nice about it is, they know our schedule. Like they know the life that we live. Like we don’t just go in there, and they’re regular
students and they’re like, what’s your problem? Like no, they like, they sympathize for us because they go through what we go through.

Powell (2009) specified that student support services for student-athletes provide a wide range of opportunities for success. In examining a typical first day at the tutoring center, one finds a great deal of preparation, effort, and support goes into ensuring that student athletes don’t fail to complete their assignments, prepare for their exams, or miss any academic duties.

Uumm, the first day of tutoring you’re supposed to bring in your syllabus and all your books. So, you bring in your syllabus, and it gives you everything that you have due. And then you’ll make a calendar of it, and then, aahhmm they give out these sheets that actually have your assignments and your grades on them, and every time, like I know for math, whenever I was being tutored for math, like, she knew my syllabus, so she knew what I had coming up. And we would study for that accordingly. So it was, it was all prescheduled really, so every single time I had a grade I took a test, she knew I took a test. She was like, ahh, pull your test out. I’m just like aaahhhh (Participant #D, Junior, Undeclared major).

While the above students found a few areas in need of improvement, Participant #B stated the “tutoring has definitely helped me. Ahumm, just getting it from another
person’s point of view. Like, like, this past year, I had, like, a lot of papers, and just having someone read over my paper, and ahh, kinda have, you know, their thoughts on like, things or views, on the things I’m writing about, kinda helped out a lot” (Participant #B, Senior, Pan African Studies major).

The student was asked to detail his tutoring sessions:

Ahh, yea. Umm, so basically, like, we’ll have to be there at like 7:30, umm, and we basically, like, have to come in with what we’re going to work on. And, I mean, we’ll figure out the assignment together, or, I’ll, the tutor will get a better understanding of what the assignment is. And then, umm, we kinda work on the assignment, and then, I mean, if we need help, ahh, we’ll call on the tutor to, to go over. Yea, they know a lot of that stuff too, so like, if I needed to study for a test, and it’s the top of the week, and the test was like on Thursday, then, we’re gonna be studying every tutoring session; or parts of the tutor session, every tutor session (Participant #B).

In determining whether the university’s systemic process was useful in helping student athletes achieve academic success, observations, student questions, as well as academic advisor and coach responses were used at a single site. The students’ perspectives have shown a few different opinions about what makes a good tutoring center. Coach M was asked a series of questions to determine if he found the center to be effective in helping his athletes achieve high academic goals.
When asked if he believed his athletes really benefitted from the tutoring program and took the program seriously, Coach M responded,

It’s definitely a benefit…some of them probably when they first get here, as freshmen, they probably don’t take it as serious because that’s just another thing added into their day that doesn’t allow them to do what they want to do. Ummm, and you know, some of the general education classes probably could be completed without tutoring but what that does is, is set them up with a structure, ah going forward that they’re already in this routine to when the classes arrive that they do need the tutoring for, they are already in a routine, so it’s nothing new. Umm, and then they understand the benefits of the tutoring once they start to get to these upper division classes. So it’s, I mean all these questions, a lot of it, all kind of, to me seems like it relates to maturity, when they start to mature they start to see everything in a way more clearer picture (Coach M).

Prior to answering the next question, Coach M was informed that some of the participants in the study, who defined themselves as good high school students, said they didn’t need tutoring and found the mandatory sessions to be a waste of time. To which Coach M said,

At this point in their college career all of them are going to say, I mean it was a question we asked in a meeting the
other day, all of them want to play basketball for money, so that’s kind of where a lot of the conversations end; ahumm, because as someone who is here to build them up you don’t want to tear down their dreams right now…so you kind of sprinkle the reality in, in different ways but that’s pretty much all of their number one goals, but I have talked to some of them who want to be engineers…so on and so forth so we have some guys on our team that have bright futures in corporate or you know, in the work place (Coach M).

Coach M continued with descriptions of the program and its objectives of keeping athletes on a straight and narrow path.

I think that the program that we provide is excellent…you know they have to meet with…an academic advisor. They have to meet with the person on our staff who’s in charge of academics. They have to deal with tutors…so…to mess up…you gotta want to try to mess up. Basically, I mean, there is a program in place that has a track record of success, and as long as you follow that, you should be okay.

While most university systems aim to increase student enrollment, increase graduation rates, sustain financial security and develop productive members of society (Hartley & Morphew, 2006), there has been a trend of building up institutions’ athletic
programs reputations by perpetuating a “win at all cost” attitude even while disregarding academic integrity which oftentimes, jeopardizes the athletic programs, campus honor and alumni support (Benford, 2007). As found in Coach M’s responses, the organization skills, dedication, and time needed to ensure a student succeeds in their long-term academic pursuits, is just as important as a student’s long-term athletic goals.

**Career goals.** Current literature suggests that non-revenue generating institutions have similar academic and athletic structures as revenue generating institutions with differences occurring in the pressure-to-perform arena (Adler & Adler, 1985). Theories concerning pay for play type scenarios and aspirations of a professional career in athletics may or may not be prevalent in non-revenue generating institutions. As theorized, attitudes of players’ own futures may be an important aspect of persistence to graduation (Karpinski & Earle, 1999). Thus, considering the athletic program of the university being studied, as well as, the participants’ outlook, questions were asked to determine whether a non-revenue generating program changed the prioritization of students’ post athletic eligibility career choices. Participants were asked to answer the following question, “What are your career goals?”

Participant #A, a Communications major, stated his career goal was to “play professional athletics straight from here [the university]. Then go back to school and work on my masters, so I can become a sports analyst” (Participant #A, Senior). When prompted to define what he meant by playing professionally, Participant #A said, “NBA or overseas” (Participant #A). When asked if playing professionally was a realistic goal and by what means would he get there, Participant #A claimed, “It’s very realistic. I mean I’ve been working hard all my life and it has only led me to success and basically
I’ve met people in my life with good connections that can get there, such as…Coach T [one of the university’s basketball coaches]. I mean he’s played in the NBA, so he can get me ready for whatever I need to be ready for” (Participant #A, Senior).

Gaston-Gayles (2009) indicate that while aspirations may be high for a professional career in athletics, the percentages indicate that an education in exchange for athletic commitment may be a more viable alternative for these student-athletes at these non-revenue generating schools. However, the dream of playing professionally is still on the minds of the senior students in this study, including Participant #B, also a Communications major who said, “Career goals? Like I said, I wanna play professionally. After playing, I would like to coach, a little bit, and then, from there go onto my career” (Participant #B). While his long-term career goals include working with troubled youth and helping them get on the right path, Participant #B still envisioned having a professional basketball career before starting his counseling career.

When asked how realistic it was for him to have a career in professional athletics, Participant #B described how and where those opportunities were in the following commentary.

Ahh man, (laughing) ahhh, I mean, I, I feel it’s right in front of me. This coming season, I just feel like I have to produce, umm, not big numbers, umm, I just have to, put up the right numbers and hopefully get lucky. Yea, umm, as far as here. Then overseas, I feel like, I feel like I can, I can play overseas. I have a couple of buddies that went overseas this past year. One guy went to Italy; played
pretty well there, so man, I mean, it’s not too, it’s not too unrealistic, I mean, like I said, I just, have to put up the right numbers for it. Overseas…money comes into play with this. I’ve heard guys or I know guys, who have played in the D League and the pay isn’t too well. And then, as far as overseas, the pay could be really well, yea, so

(Participant #B, Senior).

According to the NCAA, the percentage of non-revenue generating college athletes going on to professional careers in athletics is significantly lower compared to major, revenue-generating programs (NCAA.org). However, the enthusiasm and determination displayed by Participant #B prompted follow up questions regarding the athlete’s eligibility and pro-contract offers. Participant #B was asked, “What would you do if your eligibility ended during the spring semester and you were offered a pro-contract to go overseas or something, but you’re not finished completing your degree?

I haven’t really thought too much about that, but umm, I’m sure there will be something I can work out, I mean, (laughing) I haven’t really put too much thought into that. I mean that’s, a lot of people say that, like I know a lot of guys who say, like, they’ll come back, but probably don’t come back. I mean…I’d try to finish. I mean, I’d try to work something out to finish, just ‘cause like, it’s right there. You know. I think the best way would be, ahumm, coming up with a plan academically, and kinda following
that plan. Knowing what you need to get, as far as, umm, classes to take and stuff like that. And, umm, the university, they kinda help you out with that, umm, they give you that structure, or that plan to try to reach your degree (Participant #B).

While Participant(s) #A and #B believe they have what it takes to play with the NBA or on a pro team overseas, Participant #C, also a senior, had a different response when he was asked how realistic it was for him to play professional basketball.

I wouldn’t say it’s very realistic to have a, like, an actual job, playing basketball, but I mean, like coaching, or doing something else with the game, I feel like I have some knowledge, and I could help, help it out. I mean I could probably have some kind of…I feel like I could have some kind of career that involved basketball or my sport, but, I mean, I don’t know how much money it’s going to make and if it’s my best option at the end of the day. So that’s why I feel like that’s, umm, academics is really my best, my strong suit (Participant #C).

However, when asked whether he would quit school to pursue a pro-contract offer to play basketball, Participant #C had a different response.

Aww that’s tough. *(Laughing)* That’s really tough.

‘Cause I’m so close to being done, it just seems like I could come back like, after the pro career, and just take those last
two classes and get that degree, so I might have to take it. Just to try it, you know, ‘cause you know, it was a goal of mine. I would absolutely, at the end of the day, finish my degree, whatever, whenever, how, whatever age I was, after basketball, if it had to be before or after, I would finish the degree (Participant #C, Senior).

While Mangold, Bean, and Adams (2003) found the percentages of athletes turning professional early to be lower for schools that do not have big athletic programs, this study aspired to ascertain why any non-revenue generating Division I athletes do not complete their degree. The responses given by the above three seniors provides some answers. For Participant #A, a professional career in basketball seems very possible as he has been working hard and making connections through his coaches. Although a little less confident than Participant #A, Participant #B feels a professional career is still possible, but he, like Participant #C, would jump at the chance to play overseas even if it meant not finishing their degrees until later. Therefore, the knowledge of knowing the university will still be there when they finish their basketball careers and believing they can pick up their studies where they left off, helps Participant(s) #B and #C confidently commit to an imagined pro-career either with the NBA or an overseas team.

While current literature suggests that non-revenue generating institutions have similar academic and athletic structures as revenue generating universities with differences occurring in the pressure-to-perform area which often intensifies in revenue generating programs, the two junior participants in this study had personal pressures of their own which may or may not influence their persistence towards degree completion.
(Adler & Adler, 1985). When asked about his career goals and whether playing professional was a realistic future goal, Participant #D described the pressure he feels to perform on the court. He said, “The seriousness of working out and things like that have changed. Because, I mean I have two years left, and that sounds like a long time, but it’s not. Like I know last year, ahh, one thing that I did a lot, was whenever I was playing, was I passed the ball a lot. And I can’t, I can’t do that anymore” (Participant #D, Junior, Undeclared major). When asked why he couldn’t pass the ball as much anymore, he replied,

Because, I need to start to establish myself as a player, not just a person that’s on the court passing the ball I around; I need to be a threat on the court. So I can’t just, I can’t just pass the ball, because anybody can pass the ball. So I need to make myself, I need to make sure that, coach needs me on the court. So, the seriousness of it changes, your whole outlook on everything changes, as you grow and get older. And of course it would…whenever you’re here to play a sport, that’s what changes your outlook on things. And how, it’s like, it’s like, whenever you’re little and you don’t realize things, and then like once you get older, you’re like oh my gosh, I can’t believe I didn’t see that back then. But that’s what it’s like (Participant #D, Junior).

In addition to understanding the nuances of basketball court politics and competition, Participant #D detailed his thoughts about whether he was good enough of a
player to be in the NBA to which he declared, “I feel like...I’m a realist. I don’t. I, there are things that I could do to get there, that I need to work on, that I need to get a lot better at. But right now, no. I don’t. I don’t do what I need to do, to get there, I’m not that, as a high caliber player to get there. But, I could be. That just depends like I said, on how much I work” (Participant #D, Junior). Whether these student-athletes are taking full advantage of the provided opportunities during and post athletic eligibility, it is apparent that their attitudes regarding their own futures may be an important aspect of their persistence to graduation (Karpinski & Earle, 1999).

For Participant #D, the pressure to perform better on the court seems to penetrate his thoughts, as does the pressure he feels for not performing up to a potential that may or may not result in playing professionally in the NBA. Clearly, his perceptions and beliefs relating to his career goals have an impact on how Participant #D thinks about basketball and perhaps, as theorized by Karpinski and Earle (1999), may affect his persistence to graduation. While Participant #D defined areas where he felt pressure to personally improve his performance, Participant #E described a pressure to realistically assess his goals before he missed his opportunity to play professionally.

My goals have changed. Just like you’re saying, my perspective on things. I’m, it’s not that I’m like ahumm, like short changing myself in any way, but it’s just like, after a certain time, the older you get, and you just, and you just look at things like, you know, in reality. How the NBA works, and professional basketball works. You just look at this last draft, and it’s all dudes under, like, you know, 19,
18. And then, at that, you know, being at a mid-major school, you know, it’s tough, how it is. So, professionally, I’m, I’m, I’m not saying that it can’t happen, uumm, but you always just gotta look, just in case, what if it doesn’t (Participant #E).

Students who attend non-revenue, Division I, mid-major universities may have similar pressures to sacrifice and perform like students from revenue generating universities, yet the professional opportunities may not be as readily available. The two junior-level student athletes in this study, describe self-pressure to meet possible professional and career aspirations that may or may not be attainable. According to Gaston-Gayles and Joy (2004), for some student-athletes, the lure of turning professional in their sport of choice before their senior year may provide explanations as to why some may not persist to graduation. One has to wonder if these added pressures take focus away from studies and academic goals, thus hindering persistence.

**Importance of graduating.** Student-athlete perceptions concerning academic success and persistence to graduation, while being one hundred percent committed to athletic success, can be a difficult task to accomplish (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). Aspirations may be high for a professional career in athletics, but the percentages indicate that an education in exchange for athletic commitment may be a more viable alternative for these student-athletes at these non-revenue generating schools (Gaston-Gayles, 2009). When asked how important graduating from college was to the participants in this study, they responded accordingly, “Oh, it’s extremely important. I know that, you know basketball has been my passion all my life but at the end of the day, you know, not a lot
of people are going to make it professionally, so having that education is really what I’m going to do for the rest of my life” (Participant #C, Senior, Psychology).

While Participant #D, the undeclared major and junior student, replied, “I feel like it’s important for everybody. For the simple fact that nobody comes here and is one and done. So why would you come here for three years, to not graduate? Why would you take all those classes for nothing? And of course my family. I know my mom wants me to graduate. And family is a big part of my life so, I try to make them happy” (Participant #D, Junior). While junior Participant #E stated that graduating from college was “probably the most important thing. Ahh, to, to earn a degree. Ahhh, like I wanna, I don’t think I’d be in college otherwise, if that wasn’t the ultimatum, to get a degree or just to graduate, then, you know, I like, I, for, for myself, like I’ve seriously put, you know, academics over, over anything” (Participant #E, Junior, Communications major). Freshmen Participants #F and #G both claimed that graduating was “very important” with Participant #G adding that “No one in my family has graduated from college yet, so I’ll be the first, so, my family is kind of like, banking on me, like, oh yeah this is it, finally someone so (Participant #G, Freshman, Mechanical Engineering major).

As hypothesized by Adler and Adler (1985), academic success can be measured through persistence to graduation for student-athletes. Additionally, graduation should be the ultimate goal of the student-athlete in the event that a professional career in athletics does not materialize according to Karpinski and Earle (1999). In the responses above, participants feel graduating is very important, and in some cases, they remind us that an education is the reason they are attending the university and working so hard. This confirms Karpinski and Earle (1999) as well as Ryan, Groves, and Schneider (2007) who
contend that the criteria for college choice should be one based on academics first, rather than exposure and earning potential in athletics. Noticeably, the above participants would relish a professional basketball career and work hard on the court in case the opportunity arises, however they all clearly understand that their main purpose for attending the university is to be educated first and foremost.

**Degree or no degree.** With the above knowledge, Participants were asked to discuss the differences between earning a degree and not earning a degree. This question was open-ended in nature and was interpreted by each participant accordingly. Per Ryan, Groves, and Schneider (2007), the purpose and intent of higher education for students in the United States pursuing a degree is having the opportunity to better themselves intellectually and to potentially increase the total amount on money they may earn in their lifetime. Participant #A grasped the experts’ concept when he stated, “Earning a degree would be, being able to use what you learned in college and relate that to your everyday life and future. And not earning a degree, would be a, just getting good grades in college and forgetting everything that you learned, and in the future, not being able to apply it” (Participant #A, Senior, Communications major).

Participant #C also understood the basic principles and opportunities a college degree is supposed to bring when he said, “The difference between earning a degree and not earning a degree? I would say, I mean, definitely a lot of possibilities, because I know having a degree will open up doors, and not having a degree, you know, those same opportunities aren’t going to be offered to you, and, and it’ll in turn, probably lead to a better life or a better lifestyle” (Participant #C, Senior, Psychology major). While there are many different paths that students take in order to eventually obtain a degree; some
may be more difficult to obtain, particularly if the students are not quite sure what they want to do or why having a degree is important to their future.

For example, Participant #D, the junior student who has not declared a major, is unclear what a college degree will do for him because he has no selected a major and is not focused on a career path.

Uhhmm, accomplishments. I mean, it’s, it’s, it’s significant because obviously I said that I want to accomplish that. But, umm, I don’t, like I said, it’s really tough for me because I don’t have any certain career path in mind. So, it’s not like I want to, it’s not like I’m getting a degree in business and I want to go into business and I don’t have, like, the degree to do so. So I don’t really have anything to put forth it to, so, it’s tough for me to say.

While both junior students, Participant #D above and Participant #E below, with approximately two years of coursework to go, have received benefits due to their athletic status including preferred registration, counseling, study hall, tutoring, and support (Potuto and Hanlan, 2007), but still have little concept of the importance of a college education, which makes it difficult to persist towards the goal of completion.

In, in my opinion ahhh, personally, just because I know so many people or just, I’ve heard of so many people that don’t have degrees but they’re like geniuses or just great individuals. People that haven’t gone to college or whatnot, like my father for instance, he hasn’t earned his
degree, but like, I look at him as, like he’s pretty much my hero. So, stories like music moguls like Kanye or something, I know he’s like a, like he’s a little crazy, but he didn’t go to college or whatever, and then, you just got a lot of people who don’t have degrees versus people that do, and there’s people that are still, like, smart, and just know what they’re doing. And have their, have their stuff together. And then there’s people who do have degrees, and aren’t doing anything. So in my opinion, like it’s, I feel like it’s just, it’s just like, it’s just there, just to say that you have it. That’s just my opinion about it.

The gateway to the future for these students will largely depend on the path they choose for themselves during these critical years of their lives and the responses from the junior and freshmen participants don’t show a great deal of understanding about how an education leads to a career. Should the university athletic department have a more in depth dialogue about the paths student athletes are choosing and should these discussions occur with the general student body as well? Because when the lead researcher asked Participants #F and #G for their definitions regarding the differences between having a degree and not having a degree, he had to help define it for them and below is their follow-up responses to his explanations.

Okay, alright, yeah, it’s not, what you just said, once you have your degree now you have opportunities to do, you know, make a good living and do what you’re supposed to
do, but not earning a degree is like a handicap, now you, you’re back to you know, where you came from when you started college, so you know, it’s, it was no point in you coming if you didn’t you know get a degree (Participant #F, Freshman, Business major).

For Participant #G, the long-term benefits of having a college education remained unclear to him at the time of his interview, however as seen by the senior participants’ responses, the gravity of its importance may become more relevant, the closer he comes to being a senior student athlete.

I feel like, you know, to get to college you, you have to be a, you know, a, student somewhere along the line so I feel like everyone got it, it’s just the time management. A lot of times people lose sight of things, start partying, hanging out around with the wrong people. If you just stay focused and stick to what got you here, I feel like you gonna make, you gonna earn your degree; and if you lose sight of it, you’re not (Participant #G, Freshman, Mechanical Engineering major).

Beyond the distractions described by Participant #G, student-athletes may benefit from additional assistance in planning their career objectives. This type of guidance may include lessons concerning the step-by-step processes and building, which occurs when a student applies what they learned in the classroom. While the above basketball players are quite familiar with the selection process of the NBA and professional teams overseas
and how lucrative playing professional may be, they may benefit more knowing what it means to be a Mechanical Engineer or the importance of selecting a major sooner rather than later.

**Student to student recommendations.** When asking participants to list the recommendations they would make to a new freshman student-athlete entering the university’s athletic and academic program, these young men of varying futures offered a number of suggestions regarding the navigation of the process. “Basically, managing time. I mean, umm, don’t procrastinate on assignments, which means, which I still do today, (laughing) but I mean, I’m so used to doing it, it just works out for me. ‘Cause that’s just the way I am, but I mean, basically, make it easier on yourself by, ah, going to class every day, doing the little things necessary to succeed” (Participant #A, Senior, Communications major). Participant #B provided students with the similar advice as Participant #A. “Being early to everything…that plays a huge part. Kinda staying focused really. Cause I feel like I’ve done that, towards the end of my college career, I’ve buckled down and stayed a lot more focused” (Participant #B, Senior, Communications major). As suggested by Powell (2009), if persistence to graduation is a priority to the student-athlete, then their personal decisions may have significant consequences concerning their future beyond the sports’ playing field.

For Participant #C, the personal decision to curb his social life was his lesson and thus shared experience for the incoming freshmen class.

I would say…don’t get caught up in like the social scene or the party life, ‘cause it’s easy. You’re away from home now and you have freedom and you know, you’re gonna,
you know, you might start putting off classes and you’re
gonna see your grades slip, and I would say just have fun,
enjoy it, and you know, just be able to manage your time,
so you have enough time where you can get all the work
you need to, done, before, you know, you can go out on the
weekends and still have fun at the same time you know.
That’s what I would say (Participant #C, Senior,
Psychology).

Powell (2009) suggests, and Participant #D concurs, that students would greatly
benefit from scheduling their social and academic calendars effectively, perhaps with the
help of the university, to utilize time to its fullest potential. “Use their time wisely. Just
don’t wait ‘til, umm the last minute to do stuff” (Participant #D, Junior, Undeclared
major). Others recommend seeking help from classmates, counselors, and professors.

Academically…just get as much help as you, as you can
get, you know. Talk to classmates, like just don’t, don’t
just sit in there and just think you’re better than everybody,
just because you’re an athlete. Like you gotta, you should,
talk to as many people in class and talk to your professors.
Talk to Academic Advisors and just talk to a lot of people,
and just, you know, have them help you as much as, as
much as they can (Participant #E, Junior, Communications
major).
Jenkins, Miyazaki, and Janosik (2009) found the college which created the most welcoming environments for first-generation students had mentoring programs where “coaches, professional friends, sponsors, and facilitators” served as role models (p. 9). If a university has these types of advertised programs in place, they may increase their instances of persisting and graduating. Mentors provide students with “constructive intervention at critical and key transitional points” whether it is assistance with selecting classes, finding effective tutors, or maneuvering through the myriad of campus situations (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 9).

As described above, integration into a college culture and environment has a direct effect on student persistence to graduation. If students are not involved in the registration process, class scheduling and when and where they study, then feelings of detachment can occur which can place the student-athlete at a distinct disadvantage academically. There can be tendencies to disengage from academics and concentrate more on athletic success to compensate for lack of motivation in the classroom (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). For the two freshmen participants in this study, the advice to seek help and support is something they would recommend to the students succeeding them.

Yeah, I mean because here, I can’t speak for other universities, I know for a fact here like, people, all my, my, my teammates, and they tell me all the time, like if, you know these classes, they not hard you know, just pay attention, ahh, because you know, most of the time you are going to get a professor that, that’s lenient you know, that wants you to, you know, to, to get that extra help and wants
to help you, you know, because they know you’re traveling, and you’re an athlete so, you know, you just gotta, you just gotta do it (Participant #F, Freshman, Business major).

According to Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009), when faculty members encourage student-athletes, their confidence and motivation to academically succeed increase.

Ask for help, you know whenever you, whenever you need something, don’t be afraid. A lot of times people, are afraid to ask because they feel like it may be a dumb question or they being annoying but I feel like any dumb, the only dumb question is a question that’s not asked so. Just you asking for help and taking advice from anyone and everyone ‘cause there’s people that’s been here that’s doing, that’s done what you’re doing now so, just take what, they mistakes and you know, try to fix it. Learn from them (Participant #G, Freshman, Mechanical Engineering major).

Additionally, when a university has a genuine, positive perception of the benefits of intercollegiate athletics on its campus, the tendency is for student-athletes to have a sense of comfort, belonging and acceptance that provides intrinsic motivation to succeed academically (Bonifiglio, 2009). For the above student-athletes, the university’s programs have made them feel secure enough to ask questions, seek help, and engage on campus, which ultimately should help them persist towards graduation.
**Student to university recommendations.** As suggested by Fletcher, Benshoff and Richburg (2003), the student-athlete experience is unique in many ways, ranging from pressures to perform, stereotypical biases from faculty, staff and students, as well as, social isolation. The authors suggest that these unique experiences require special training and understanding from university counselors who can provide specific support for a differentiated psyche. When participants were asked if they felt the university supplied them with all of the resources they needed to academically succeed, Participant #A said,

I don’t know, more guidance counselors, like basically as in not only talking about academics, like not only have academic tutors, but having guidance counselors to a sense where they [student-athletes] talk about their everyday life, like, how they experience college, their everyday life, and just know the things that may become distractions and distract them [student-athletes] from their academics or their basketball career. Basically encourage them, encouraging them to stay on track (Participant #A, Senior, Communications major).

In addition to providing students like Participant #A with more guidance counselors which Fletcher, Benshoff, and Richburg (2003) maintain takes special training and understanding, Participant #D has fiscal concerns he would like the university to address. When asked if the university supplied all of the resources he needed and whether he took advantage of those resources, Participant #D replied,
Yea, there are, there are definitely things out there that we
don’t know about in terms of, like, scholarships and stuff
like that. Like as long as we, like they’re there, but we
don’t like use them. I know, for like the athletes, shoot,
living is like, kinda tough. Cause they only give you like, a
certain amount of money, and, you have to worry about
food, yada yada yada, but you don’t really have any money
to do anything else after that. That’s the only thing about
the school that I can’t stand; is they don’t understand how,
like high the cost of living is out here. And the amount of
money that we get, definitely doesn’t (Participant #D,
Junior, Undeclared major)

In their study, Potuto and Hanlon (2007) found student-athletes are aware of the
benefits they receive from being an athlete. The preferred registration, counseling, study
hall, tutoring and support from coaches and administrators, benefits their academic
endeavors, along with financial assistance for scholarship athletes. These indicators
suggest that there may be a need for universities to reform their approaches when
providing support to student-athletes. From the acceptance of high profile athletes on
campus, there may also be preferential treatment in the admissions process which puts the
student-athlete at an academic disadvantage where they may need additional support in
order to have opportunities for success (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh and Hannah, 2006).
Moreover, university administrators, counselors, and coaches may need to be more
forthcoming about the types of financial support that is, and is not, available and then
also help students manage the funds they do receive. As suggested by Participant #A, life lessons and guidance will encourage students to remain on track towards athletic success as well as academic persistence.

**Coach’s thoughts.** Athletic and academic motivations are considered two separate entities in major college athletics. There are many instances of student-athlete role reversal, where the student-athletes’ priorities are reversed by placing athletic success first and academic success second (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). If student-athletes are underprepared academically when they enter college, it would be difficult to argue that these students will be able to somehow catch up, feel confident, and thrive academically in a college environment given that the student-athlete’s schedule is much more difficult to manage (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). When asked to describe his athlete and academic expectations for the student-athletes coming to the university, Coach M stated,

> Definitely to all, to see them all get a degree, that’s my number one…priority. Ahh, I shouldn’t say number one because my job is kind of ahh, relying on you know, what they do on the court so I think it’s ahhh, an even fifty, fifty on how they develop as players and as, and in the classroom, but at the end I would like to see all of them get a college degree. That’s a great feeling and it’s something that they can have with them for the remainder of their lives (Coach M).

As stated in chapter two, the gateway to the future for these students will largely depend on the path they choose for themselves during these critical years of their lives.
The resources to assist students are available to them, but the motivation to succeed would need to be strong with support coming from coaches, professors, and administrators of the college (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). When student-athletes think of their future after their college career is over, the thought process may lead them in a different direction from the rest of the student body (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007). When Coach M was asked if he thought his student-athletes understood the gravity and importance of getting a degree, he said,

I think…each individual is different and like what you spoke about earlier I think as time goes on and they get closer to the end I think that degree becomes more important to them and I think when they get here they probably came here…specifically for athletics, but like you said I think as time goes on, reality starts to get to them a little bit and then they start to understand the importance of getting that piece of paper (Coach M).

While Ryan, Groves, and Schneider (2007) contend that the decision making processes made by many student-athlete recruits are based on prospective coaches’ reputations, interpersonal abilities and influence, more is needed from coaches and support staff in both revenue generating and non-revenue generating institutions. As suggested by Miller and Kerr (2002) as well as the NCAA and the Participants in this study, coaches and support staff members should monitor and assist student-athletes in a genre of intervention and navigating capacities. Students of varying ages and class levels need financial guidance, time management advice, and life lessons. It’s not just about a
student winning the game or persisting to graduation, but it is a combination of both, which will inevitably lead to a balanced, educated person.

Summary of Findings

In chapter four, the results of this ethnographic case study exploring academic success and persistence to graduation for men’s basketball players at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university concluded that student-athletes have tremendously rigorous and busy schedules. For the older student-athletes, the senior and junior participants, maintaining a tight schedule has become second nature, while the two freshmen participants struggled to keep on top of their practices, study sessions, academics, and social lives.

As hypothesized by Simons, Van Rheenen & Covington (1999), a lack of academic engagement, particularly if university administrators, coaches, advisors, and boosters prioritize success purely in athletic terms, may perpetuate a student’s lack of academic confidence, and feelings of self-doubt and fear of failure. However, the participants in this study found a great deal of support from assistant coaches, academic advisors, head coaches, and members of the tutoring center. Student-athletes found appropriate personnel to help them schedule classes, complete homework assignments, study for exams, and maintain a full practice and game agenda. The participants seemed focused and realistic about their futures. As described by Participant #G, who knew what he wanted to major in and just needed the academic counselor to assist in the organization of his class schedule for him, serves as an example of a systemic support system influencing a player towards academic persistence.
Although observations uncovered that most of the participants in this study took their tutoring sessions quite seriously and found them to be helpful, there were others who found the sessions to be a waste of time, basically taking up large amounts of time during their day. Interview and observation data showed that student-athletes’ behaviors and perspectives concerning peer versus university personnel members in the tutoring centers, were quite different and influenced how they felt about their mandatory study sessions. As discovered, student-athletes prefer to be tutored by other student-athletes as opposed to being helped by university personnel. One of the goals of this study was to contribute to the field of study and to make strong recommendations for systemic change and to provide better resources to student-athletes so they would have greater opportunities of academic success. Thus, based on the data provided by student-athletes, my recommendation in the area of tutoring centers is to have more student-athletes conducting the tutoring sessions and reporting back to an administrator on the progress of each student. This will allow the administrator to provide feedback and provide a plan for future tutoring sessions to maximize potential instances of academic success.

Student-athletes reported they do not socialize with the general university population. Instead, they prefer to almost exclusively, “chill, socialize, or whatever” with their teammates. This type of behavior may leave athletes feeling isolated and overwhelmed which may hinder their persistence levels. Alternatively, staying close to like-minded individuals for their socializing needs, student-athletes may find comfort with other athletes because they share very similar career goals and like experiences.

The majority of the participants in this study declared that they would like a basketball career playing in the NBA or on a professional overseas team. As stated by
Miller and Kerr (2002), the ideal of having a professional career in athletics following a college athletic career may provide the motivation to stay academically eligible. While consideration of a college major should be a personal and serious choice for students in higher education, many of the athletes in this study were motivated by the possibility of playing professionally.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

Overview of the Problem

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore academic success and persistence patterns geared at helping men’s basketball players towards graduating from a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating university. By understanding the circumstances which affect student-athletes’ persistence, advisors of athletic and academic programs should be more focused on improving students’ academic and athletic performances by creating environments specifically tailored and conducive to assist students succeed and persist to graduation. To accomplish this task, the lead researcher asked how large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs monitor academic success of men’s basketball teams and what are the factors contributing to academic success and graduation rates. In addition, the lead researcher considered the attitudes athletes had towards completing a degree and whether their expectations differed from those of the school administrators and the coaching staff. Ultimately, the goal of this research was to contribute to the field of study and to make strong recommendations for systemic change and to provide better resources to student-athletes so they would have greater instances of reaching academic success.

Overview of the Research

Answers to the question as to whether student-athletes are taking full advantage of the provided opportunities during, and post athletic eligibility, were uncovered in the responses provided by student-athletes during their semi-structured interviews. Students had very organized academic and athletic schedules which Engstrom, McEwen and William (1995) attribute to the privileges and special treatment given to student-athletes.
The results of this study indicate that various forms of preferential treatments including having classes scheduled and designed by university personnel familiar with the athletic department’s basketball practices and games, may have a direct correlation to the inspection and monitoring authority given to the NCAA, which can penalize college programs that do not adhere to the established rules and regulations (NCAA.org). Future researchers may find new connections between NCAA rules and regulations and university programs.

While study participants communicated how university representatives helped them in preparing for a career and/or a future inside and outside of basketball, according to Gaston, Gayles, and Hu (2009), it’s these types of preferential treatments which may pressure student-athletes to artificially elevate and isolate themselves in order to maintain and achieve a particular status, sometimes at the detriment of their academic achievements or overall college experiences, including social interactions. The study participants also indicated that athletic and academic schedules may provide a roadmap to potentially successful careers, but may also be too regimented and time constricting to manage without negative repercussions. Future researchers may want to measure the amount of effort student-athletes put into academics versus athletics based on the perceived pressures placed on them by seemingly helpful university representatives. Yost (2010) reminds researchers that student-athletes can begin to get a sense of entitlement that clouds their judgment and blurs the lines between responsibilities which ultimately need to be defined for them by academic and athletic leadership.
Summary of the Findings

Using the study’s primary questions during the interview and observation processes, research question one aimed at understanding how large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs monitor academic success for their men’s basketball team. According to Coach M and the seven Participants, monitoring the academic success of student-athletes began with preparing students’ class and practice schedules. The coordinator “gives them the classes that they need to…stay on track to get their degree…and that person makes sure that they [the student-athletes] get the classes…that don’t conflict with their athletic schedules” (Coach M). In addition to planning student-athletes’ academic and athletic agendas, there are “staff who pretty much dedicate” themselves by “following up on what academic support” the students need (Coach M).

All of the participants in this study spoke about the university’s tutoring center. “There’s a coach in there and they just kind of monitor and make sure you’re working on your academic, umm, any school projects or homework that you might have” (Participant #C, Senior). According to Powell (2009), services for student-athletes including class scheduling, counseling, study hall, time management, and tutoring, provide a wide range of opportunities for success. The results from the interviews with the seven participants show that these busy student-athletes are all on their way towards persisting towards graduation. They reportedly receive a tremendous amount of individual support when preparing their goals, classes, and training. They also contend that the tutoring and counseling assistance they are given has helped them successfully pass their classes, reach their goals, and have created positive experiences on campus.
Participants’ responses to question two regarding the factors contributing to academic success and graduation rates at large, public, non-revenue generating, Division I athletic programs, found that properly scheduled classes and practices, as well as, support from assistant coaches, academic advisors, head coaches and members of the tutoring center, ensure students complete their required course assignments while attending practices and games. As hypothesized by Simons, Van Rheenen & Covington (1999), a lack of academic engagement, particularly if university administrators, coaches, advisors, and boosters prioritize success purely in athletic terms, may perpetuate a student’s lack of academic confidence, and feelings of self-doubt and fear of failure. However, the responses of the study’s participants indicate they were focused on their futures and on their way towards completing their degrees and graduating. It’s possible that because the university where this study was conducted was non-revenue generating Division I level school, the pressure to win games is balanced for the students by the academic support programs.

Research question three contemplated what the attitudes of non-revenue generating Division I athletes were towards the completion of their degrees. Participants supplied an array of responses when asked, but most of the student-athletes confirmed that completing a degree was important to them, and their families. The gradation or level of each participant’s response was skewed when they were asked to explain how it would affect their academic plans if they were offered a professional basketball contract before they had graduated. In their responses, some participants explained that graduating with a degree was one of the main reasons they were attending the university which confirms Karpinski and Earle (1999) as well as Ryan, Groves, and Schneider.
(2007) who contend that the criteria for college choice should be one based on academics first, rather than exposure and earning potential in athletics. However, it was noticeable that when participants were asked to contemplate what a professional basketball career would do to their academic goals, most of them stated they would opt to play professionally and find a way to finish their degree at a later date. When asked to elaborate on why they believed earning a degree was important, most participants believed a degree would improve their future careers outside of athletics, create a positive image with their families, and provide more realistic professional opportunities. Since most people’s future career successes are unknown, participants’ expressed non-specific, vague responses about exactly how a degree was going to improve their lives, which were seemingly appropriate. Therefore, while there are many different paths that students take in order to eventually obtain a degree; some may be more difficult, particularly if students express forms of apprehension and ambiguity concerning what they want to do or why having a degree is important to their future.

Research question four examined whether the self-expectations of student-athletes concerning academics differ from school administrators and the coaching staff. As shown with research question three, there are many instances of student-athlete role reversal, where the student-athletes’ priorities are reversed by placing athletic success first and academic success second (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). While Participants in this study ranked playing professional basketball over completing their degree, Coach M was asked to describe his athlete and academic expectations for his athletes attending the university. Coach M stated that although he wants the university’s basketball team to win, he definitely wants to see all of his athletes complete their degrees. The pressure to
perform well enough athletically with the possibility of being offered a professional contract may distract a student from being completely dedicated to his studies and persisting towards graduation. Also, as stated by Coach M, he wants to see his students persist to graduation, while at the same time he wants to win games for the university. Participants’ and the Coach’s responses are similar, in that students are expected to be concerned about their academic goals, while at the same time, expel great efforts and time commitments to the pursuit of athletic performance.

**Conclusion**

For revenue and non-revenue generating student-athletes, the purpose and intent of higher education for students in the United States pursuing a degree is having the opportunity to better themselves intellectually and potentially increase the total amount on money they may earn in a lifetime (Ryan, Groves & Schneider, 2007). For the participants in this study, the university has provided them with academic support systems established to ensure the potential for greater instances of academic success and persist to graduation. Participants confirmed that academic support also included tutors and coaches who knew what was expected of them in the classroom, as well as, on the court. As stated by Dumond, Lynch, and Platania (2008), student athletes are often given preferential treatment in the form of tutoring and support because they are expected to succeed in both academics and athletics. Reportedly, the participants are fully engaged in practices and at games, while at the same time accomplishing the complimented and regulated academic objectives required by their instructors and the university.

The academic recruitment, choice, career guidance and preparation of student-athletes at this particular university still remain somewhat ambiguous. Future research
should focus on the processes in place from high school recruitment, to assist in the
determination of how effective a university is in the selection of student-athletes through
admission and how effective their career guidance practices are to achieve academic
success and persistence to graduation.

Recommendations

One of the goals of this study was to contribute to the field of study and to make
strong recommendations for systemic change and to provide better resources to student-
athletes so they would have greater opportunities of academic success. Thus, based on
the data provided by student-athletes, my recommendation in the area of tutoring centers
is to have more tutor student-athlete to student-athlete interaction. This seems more
productive for student-athletes and allows for them to feel more comfortable in the
process which may provide more academic engagement.

Student-athletes in this study reported they do not socialize with the general
university population. Instead they prefer to “chill, socialize, or whatever” with their
teammates. This type of behavior may leave athletes feeling isolated and overwhelmed
which may hinder their persistence levels. The concept of social capital in relation to
student-athletes (Clopton & Finch, 2010), identifies the social relations between the
participants of athletic teams and how this has an effect on their identity, self-worth and
connectedness to the overall academic mission of a university. The relationships built
through social networks can have either a positive or negative impact on academics and
achievement, depending on how these particular networks function and if they are in line
with a moral conduct code or deviate from ethical standards (Martin, 2009). So, while
Participant #C, a Senior Psychology major, suggested Freshmen students do not get
“caught up in the social scene or the party life,” future researchers may want to assess whether athletes benefit more or less when socializing with non-athletic students (Participant #C),

Although the resources to be academically successful are seemingly in place for these student-athletes, the career guidance component could be a major factor in the academic interests, and ultimately, the importance placed on academics. Career assessments as incoming freshmen were not reported as a mandatory process to determine where their academic talents and interests lie, which may have a significant impact on the academic direction the student-athlete may choose. Academic programs of interest should be accommodated by the university despite conflicts in scheduling between class time and athletic participation time.

Recruiting practices by the university should include academic interest and success at the high school level, which requires less remediation and shows dedication by the student-athlete to balancing academics and athletics successfully. The recruiting of a balanced student who values academics, as well as, athletics shows the commitment of the university to greater instances of academic success and will also expose the potential ulterior motive of a university to compromise academic success to raise the level of athletic success to revenue-generating status at the expense of academic integrity.
References


Clark, R., & Batista, P. (2009). Do BCS National Championships lead to recruiting


Engstrom, C., McEwen, M., & Williams, E. (1995). Faculty attitudes toward male


Appendix A

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE
MEN’S BASKETBALL PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION STUDY
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Email from Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, to California State University, Northridge men’s basketball team members.

Dear men’s basketball team member,

I am writing to inform you about a dissertation study that is being conducted at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) regarding academic success and persistence to graduation. Scott Tsunoda, a doctoral candidate, is conducting the study as part of the Ed.D. degree requirements.

The purpose of Scott Tsunoda’s dissertation study is to explore the perceptions of men’s basketball players at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating 4-year university. This study will add new knowledge to existing information regarding specific student-athlete’s perceptions regarding academic success and persistence to graduation. Your participation in this study would require one 60-minute one-on-one interview, and subject to a series of observations.

Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Scott Tsunoda at scott.tsunoda@csun.edu or 310-621-4738. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Scott Tsunoda
You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Scott Tsunoda. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are (1) a current or former men’s basketball player, (2) completed a minimum of one year as a student-athlete (3) are willing to share your perceptions. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this ethnographic case study will be to explore perceptions concerning persistence to graduation for men’s basketball players at a large Division I, public, non-revenue generating university. Student-athlete and coach’s behaviors and perspectives will be examined to attempt to determine the circumstances and attitudes concerning academic success when competing and performing at the collegiate level. Campus culture and influences with post collegiate athletic performance aspirations will also be explored to gain a better understanding of the demands and expectations of this specific group of student-athletes.

Procedures
If you elect to participate in this study, you will be asked to (1) complete a 60-minute one-on-one interview and (2) subject to a series of observations.

Potential Risks and Discomforts to Participants
Given the purpose of the study on issues that may be personal, some interview question could be more sensitive, including questions related to experiences with and/or perceptions of academic, athletic and social experiences related to participation as a student-athlete. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. If, after your participation in the study, you feel that you need to seek support services, please contact CSUN’s University Counseling Services in Bayramian Hall, Suite 520, 818-677-2366, 818-677-7834 (TTY), or e-mail: coun@csun.edu.

Potential Benefits to Participants
You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this study examines men’s basketball players’ perceptions on academic success and persistence to graduation as it relates to student-athlete experiences. As a participant in the both the one-on-one interview and the observations, you may develop a greater awareness of the development of your own academic success, which may facilitate change for you personally. In addition, findings from this study may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. The information gleaned from the study may lead to greater awareness among similar programs to create a lasting standard to follow to promote academic success and
persistence to graduation among student-athletes at large Division I, public, non-revenue generating universities that struggle in this area.

Payment to Participants for Participation
Research participants will not be paid for their participation in this study.

Audio Recording of Participants
During the course of the project, participants may be audio recorded. Your initials here ______ signify your consent to be audio recorded. You will be audio recorded for reasons related to data analysis and interpretation. During the audio recording, you may decline to be recorded and have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. Digital audio recordings (i.e., files) will be stored on the laptop (password protected of the principal investigator). De-identified records in the form of transcriptions (i.e., files) will be maintained on the laptop (password protected) of the principal investigator for the period through which findings from the study will be disseminated. After this period digital audio files and transcription files will be destroyed.

Confidentiality of Data
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will not be used in the reporting of findings. Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be assigned a random, three-digit number to protect you. No identifying information will be used, and your institution and/or program will not be identified by name in any published report.

Uses of Data
The information that you provide in this study may be used in institutional reports, instructional material, and/or scholarly presentations and publications. Any information that you provide in connection with this study will not be associated with your name or your personally identifying characteristics. That is, any direct quotations of what you say in connection with this study will be used in published or publically available documents in a way that cannot be associated with you.

Participation, Withdrawal, and Review
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. Once your participation in interviews has concluded, you will have a period of 30 days (from the date of the final interview) to review digital audio files and/or transcriptions (whichever are available) from your interviews and/or withdrawal consent and participation in this study. If you withdrawal consent after participation in the interviews has concluded, digital audio files and/or
transcription files (whichever are available) from your interviews will be immediately destroyed.

**Identification of Investigators**

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this research and your participation in this study, you may contact the following: Scott Tsunoda via email at scott.tsunoda@csun.edu or by telephone at 310-621-4738. In addition, you may contact the following: Dr. Jody Dunlap via email at jody.dunlap@csun.edu or office telephone at 818-677-3078.

**Rights of Research Participants**

You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You can halt your participation in the study at any time. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, California State University, Northridge, 265 University Hall, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330, 818-677-2901.

**Affirmation by Signature of Research Participant**

I have read and understand the procedures described in this “Consent to Participate in Research.” My questions have all been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

___________________________________________
Name of Participant

___________________________________________      __________________
Signature of Participant              Date

**Affirmation by Signature of Investigator or Designee**

In my judgment the research participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

___________________________________________
Name of Investigator or Designee

___________________________________________                     __________________
Signature of Investigator or Designee                                      Date
Appendix C

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTH RIDGE
MEN'S BASKETBALL PERSISTENCE TO GRADUATION STUDY
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:
Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Before we begin the interview session, I’d like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the interview:
As we discussed, this interview is a one-on-one interview intended to collect information for a research study that explores student-athlete perceptions regarding academic success and persistence to graduation. During this interview, we will talk about your student-athlete experiences and attitudes concerning academic success and persistence to graduation.

Confidentiality:
Any information you share with me today will be used for research purposes only. I will be aggregating results from all interviews and will not be attributing comments to any particular person. Personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name and school, will not be used to identify you in any report or document. Today’s interview session will be audio-recorded. I will also be taking notes of the conversation. The audio recordings may be transcribed for analysis. The audio recorded file, transcribed file, and notes will be stored securely in a password protected laptop of the principle investigator until completion of interview analysis. Upon completion of analysis, files and notes will be destroyed. Only the researchers identified in the Consent to Participate will have access to the files and notes. The files and notes will be accessed and analyzed in strict confidentiality. Finally your name or personally identifying information will not be used in any published or public reports.

Informed consent:
This consent notice summarizes some information from the Consent to Participate in Research and communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for participants, potential benefits to participants, payment to participants for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research participants. Procedures in this interview are limited to semi-structured personal interview sessions. Because the study deals with issues that are sensitive, some interview questions may involve issues of a personal nature. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, findings from this study may provide insights into
academic success, persistence to graduation and may contribute to our knowledge on the subject. Interview participants will not be paid for their participation in this interview. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without interview. You can halt your participation in the interview at any time. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this interview.

Identification and contact information of principal investigator:
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, the details of this study, or any other concerns please contact Scott Tsunoda at his mailing address: College of the Canyons, 26455 Rockwell Canyon Drive, Santa Clarita, CA 91355. Alternatively, you may contact Scott Tsunoda via telephone at 310-621-4738 or via email at scott.tsunoda@csun.edu.

Timing:
Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions:

1. Given that you are a participant on the men’s basketball team at a large, public, Division I, non-revenue generating 4-year university, please describe your experiences being a student-athlete.
   a) What is a typical day at school like for you?
   b) How do you manage your schedule?

2. How would you describe your college experience?
   a) Are you currently on track to graduate?
   b) Why or why not?

3. How is your academic schedule prepared?
   a) Would you prefer that it be handled differently? Why?

4. What were your academic and athletic goals when you first started school?
a) How have they changed since you’ve been in school?

b) Can you provide examples of how and why they may have changed?

5. How important is graduating to you?

   a) What has been the impact of your feelings about graduation?

6. What would you do if you had to study for a test and also had practice or a game?

   a) Can you provide an example?

7. What are your experiences with academic counseling or tutoring?

   a) How have these services assisted you?

   b) Are there any problems with these services?

   c) Can you provide an example of a typical counseling or tutoring session?

8. What are your career goals?

   a) Is obtaining a degree important in achieving your career goals?

   b) Why or why not?

9. How realistic is it for you to have a career in professional athletics?

   a) What, if any, is the best plan to get there?

10. What are your plans following the end of your athletic eligibility?

    a) How, if at all, does the university prepare you for this time period?

11. What’s the difference between earning a degree and not earning a degree?

    a) How does this apply to your life plans?

12. What would you recommend for incoming freshman athletes to do when attending school in order to be academically successful?

    a) What is the reasoning behind your recommendations?
13. What are the best ways for student-athletes to reach graduation?

   a) In what ways, if any, could the university be more helpful in this process?

Closing Questions:

1. I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues.
2. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed?
3. Do you have anything else to add at this time?
4. Have you said everything that you wanted to say but didn’t get a chance to say?
5. Have you shared everything that is significant about these experiences with me?
6. If there’s anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing
Thank you for participating in today’s interview session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?