AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE THAT ACADEMIC, ATHLETIC, AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION PLAY IN THE FIRST-YEAR FRESHMAN STUDENT ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The focus on student athlete experiences continues to be a growing area of inquiry for researchers in higher education. While much of the focus for student athletes is on their academic performance in relation to their retention and persistence, there is an increasing concern for educational administrators to understand the experiences of student athletes in higher education settings.

This study sought to gain a better understanding of the student athlete experience in higher education. To capture an understanding of the student athlete experience, the researcher asked: How do academic, athletic, and social experiences integrate to affect the freshman student athlete transition to college and impact their overall college experience? To answer this question, the researcher utilized a phenomenological qualitative methodology to depict the lived experiences of the student athletes at the participating institution.

Results indicated that certain pre-college goals and expectations of student athletes influenced their experience as they transitioned into the environment of the institution. Interactions that existed from a combination of the student athletes’ academic, athletic, and social perspectives impacted their overall experience of college-life. The most significant influences of the student athlete experience were those that were grounded in all three of their academic, athletic, and social perspectives to include building relationships and interacting with others in the academic, athletic, and social environment of the institution; accepting responsibility, developing time management skills, managing their role-balance, and integrating with team goals.
The thematic development of this study indicated that the student athlete experience could be explained from the perspective of their transition into the institution (Schlossberg, 1981) as well as their integration (Tinto, 1987) involvement (Astin, 1984) and identity (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) in the academic, athletic, and social environment of the institution. The general conclusions of the study were presented according to the themes that were produced through the descriptive and focus coding processes. Experiences that were exclusive to one perspective were found not as significant to understanding the overall college experience of student athletes than experiences that shared a combination of two or all three of the perspectives.

Key Words: Student Athlete, College Athletics, Phenomenology, Institutional Integration, Integration of Experiences, Student Athlete Experience
DEDICATION

To Cara, my parents, my family, and my friends for their constant love, encouragement, and support.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Intercollegiate athletics are an integral component of life at many colleges and universities. The experiences of college student athletes are a popular area of study within the broader context of the sociology of sport (Hyatt, 2003). Despite their relatively small representation on college campuses, Division I student athletes occupy a socially prominent place, whether as the subject of controversy or of celebration (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The student athlete experience is certainly atypical of the traditional college student and their differences can often be misunderstood by others in the university community.

College student athletes are a special and unique population that requires support for their academic, personal, and athletic needs and issues. Researchers have provided evidence that the student athlete population on a college campus fit the definition of a “non-traditional” or “special needs” student group (Hyatt, 2003). Unlike other college students (Broughton & Neyer, 2001), student athletes face an additional set of complex demands, stresses, and challenges that arise from their involvement in a competitive sport. Student athletes often lead stressful lives, have unique and time consuming demands placed upon them, and often face stereotyping and discrimination on campus and in the classroom (Hyatt, 2003). Due to the time and physical nature of practices and competitions, student athletes have less time and energy available for academics. Often, athletes must miss classes in order to compete and have less time to socialize than non-athletes. They also live in a “fishbowl” where their behavior is constantly scrutinized.
both on and off the court or field (Peltier, Laden, & Matranga, 1999), causing athletes to struggle to adapt to differing social and value expectations. Melendez (2008) suggested that student athletes could report a decreased sense of belonging to their college environment and increased sense of isolation, misunderstanding, and lack of support, which hinders their ability to reap the full benefits of their educational opportunities.

Institutional factors had a large influence on the social and academic experience of student athletes as well as their goals and aspirations (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997). Participation in college sports offers certain psychosocial benefits for student athletes that many non-athletes do not experience. The social recognition, similar to a “celebrity” status that some college athletes experience often helped them feel connected to and valued by the institution. In addition, the opportunity to be part of a team, with unified goals, aspirations, and expectations, often creates an atmosphere of inclusion and support for those involved (Melendez, 2008).

The national rate of student persistence and graduation has shown little change over the past decade and there remain a great deal of unknown factors that have yet to be explored (Tinto, 2006). Traditional models used to investigate the college student experience are not always sufficient and applicable towards understanding the student athlete experience (Tinto, 1975). By studying a unique student population, we can investigate from a new and different perspective to understand the academic, athletic, and social experiences of first-year freshmen student athletes and explore how these experiences might integrate to influence their overall college experience.


Statement of the Problem

The college student experience has increasingly become more important than ever to institutions in terms of student retention and graduation rates. For student athletes, the focus on retention and graduation has been even more intense (Radcliffe, Huesman, & Kellogg, 2006). While various models that have been developed on student retention and the college experience, Tinto (2006) suggested that student involvement is most critical during the first year of college. Tinto (2006) explained that it is one thing to understand why students leave, is another to know what institutions can do to encourage students to stay and succeed. To capture the college student experience in order to improve academic persistence and graduation rates, certain subgroups of college student populations prove to be more challenging than others. To understand how the integration of academic, athletic, and social experiences might impact the overall college student athlete experience, the phenomenon can be examined using appropriate research methods in differing settings and for differing students.

There were noticeable differences between student athletes and non-athlete students in their lifestyles, expectations and demands of their athletic and academic performance, and ways they were treated by non-athlete students and faculty on the college campus. The pressure to be a successful student and a successful athlete separated their two worlds and created a double life for the student athlete (Godfrey & Satterfield, 2009).

An increased understanding of the student athlete experience, especially during the transition from high school into college, has the potential to provide new knowledge
for educational leaders to assist in the development and adjustment of freshmen student athletes, thereby impacting their overall first-year college experience.

**Purpose of the Study**

The college experience can be viewed from a social perspective that encompasses the interplay between personal factors and institutional factors that make up the student athletes’ phenomenological experiences (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997). The first-year freshman student athlete’s ability to integrate into the social and academic life of the institution may be influenced by multiple factors. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, this study will identify the role that non-cognitive variables play in the academic, athletic, and social experiences of first-year freshman student athletes. Non-cognitive factors include variables that reflect the student athlete’s attitudes and motivations toward their achievement in academic, athletics, and other social activities. Additionally, an attempt is made to understand how the academic, athletic, and social experiences of student athletes might integrate to impact their overall college experience.

Complexities to the student athletes’ environment may be found significant in impacting their academic, athletic, and social experience, thereby affecting their overall college experience. Complexities include such factors as the student athlete’s inability to participate in campus activities due to their involvement in sport, certain leadership characteristics of personnel within the university community, and elements of segregation and discrimination. Conceptually, the rationale for this study is based on the premise that a balance of academic, athletic, and social activities may be beneficial to the development
and adjustment of freshmen student athletes, thus impacting their academic performance and their overall first-year college experience.

**Research Questions**

Since little evidence existed in the literature that examined the freshmen student athlete experience in relation to their interest and ability to integrate into the institution, the intention of the researcher was to examine the experience using various transition (Schlossberg, 1981), involvement (Astin, 1984), identity (Chickering, 1969), and integration (Tinto, 1987) models as a framework. The researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with currently enrolled sophomore student athletes that had concluded their freshmen terms the previous academic year. Sophomore athletes have been chosen for this study as they had most recently lived the experience of transiting from high school into the college setting. The researcher expected to capture the integration of the student athletes’ academic, athletic, and social experiences to reflect their overall experience and at the institution. Considering the inquiry of investigation, the researcher sought the answer to the following research questions:

**Central question.**

- How do academic, athletic, and social experiences integrate to affect the freshman student athlete transition to college and impact their overall first-year college experience?

**Subsequent questions.**

- What is the nature of the athletic, academic, and social experiences by student athletes on campus?
• How do athletic, academic, and social experiences impact the student athlete’s institutional commitment (Tinto, 1993), student involvement (Astin, 1984), transition into the institution (Schlossberg, 1981), and identity development (Chickering, 1969), and thus their overall experience of daily student life?

**Conceptual Framework**

The development of this study was focused on producing accurate and detailed descriptions of sophomore student athletes’ social, academic, and athletic experiences at the institution. To capture the accurate description of an experience, the participants were interviewed about an assortment of social, academic, and athletic influences in their college life. These influences included any academic interactions, social interactions, and athletic interactions. While each of the interviews with the participants produced a different set of experiences, a variety of influential factors and relationships were investigated to produce an overall first-year experience of being a student athlete at the participating institution. Figure 1.1 provides a basic visual representation of the conceptual framework used at a basis to begin the investigation.
Limitations

This study was designed to allow the participants’ voices to be heard in order to understand the student athlete experience from their own perspective. Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, the sample size was small. While not every student athlete was invited to participate in the study, it is the very nature of qualitative research to take the experiences of a few to understand the experiences of the whole. Seidman (1998) suggested that investigating the experiences from a small number of participants within a larger population who all experience similar structural and social conditions, can create enormous power.
Each institution and each sport is different and thus cannot be treated or understood as the same. The sample of students for this study was drawn from a single institution in the southeast. It only consisted of sophomore student athletes that participated on a non-revenue varsity team sport. In general, revenue athletes (football and men’s basketball) are more visible to the university community, but demonstrated an apparent lack of academic motivation when compared to non-revenue athletes (those that play sports other than football and men’s basketball). The academic achievement by athletes in non-revenue, or the more “minor” sports as some call it, was similar to that of the general student population (Purdy, Eitzen, & Hufnagel, 1982). Non-revenue athletes seemed more able to resist the athletic pressures and to put the necessary time and energy to be successful academically (Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). Non-revenue athletes were chosen for this study to control any potential variance between non-revenue and revenue athletes.

The ability to generalize information to other institutions and student athletes that participate in revenue-producing sports was not possible. Crestwell, Plano, Gutmann, and Hanson (2003) suggested that qualitative studies acknowledge that reality and truth reside within the individual. While this research will not be generalizable to the population of all freshmen student athletes, it will be valuable to the participants in the study and the university that they attend.

The interpretation of the results represents a single point in time as the student athlete experience may vary during the course of their freshman year. The experiences, as lived by student athletes, were not measured numerically. This study took a qualitative
approach, whereby it gathered data in the form of spoken words and observable behaviors that were not reduced to numbers or statistics. The student athlete experience was discovered through having a conversation about their various relationships with other members of the same organization. As a qualitative research study, it must be assumed that the participants provided truthful information that was unique to them and not generalizable to all student athletes.

Relationships are referred to any interactions that took place in the individual’s environment, whether it is described as positive, negative, or neutral. Godfrey (2010) suggested, “relationships can be driven by culture, spiritual, and emotional factors that exist within the organizational culture” (p. 9). Therefore, this research only focused on student athletes that participated in non-revenue sports that competed in their sport during the fall semester. If participants were selected from sports that compete in different seasons (spring versus fall), the researcher felt their experiences may have reflected significant differences. Research that allowed student athletes to reflect upon their first academic year, (especially when their athletic season occurred during their first college semester), provided a better understanding of what resources institutions can provide student athletes to assist in their transition to college and to promote a positive and well-rounded freshman year experience. All members of the higher education community should take an interest in understanding what student athletes view as helpful practices to influence a positive transition and well-rounded first-year college experience.
Subjectivity Statement

My academic and professional experience has been extremely influential in my interest in studying the unique perspectives of student athletes, especially in ways to enhance their experience of college life. With two seasons spent professionally working with NFL Europe, in addition to my experience in college athletics throughout my undergraduate studies and as a graduate assistant, I have worked alongside a diverse group of student athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators. Throughout the research process for this study, I must set aside all preconceived notions about student athletes, athletic coaches, athletic administrators, academic personnel, faculty, and non-athletes in order to understand the social phenomenon as experienced by the participants. For my future career, I intend to continue working with student athletes as well as non-athlete students in the field of higher education to foster a strong and viable environment for their development and support.

Chapter Summary

The student athlete experience is certainly atypical of the traditional college student experience and the differences can often be misunderstood by others in the university community. Unlike other college students, student athletes face an additional set of complex demands, stresses, and challenges that arise from their involvement in a competitive sport (Broughton & Neyer, 2001). Traditional models used to investigate the college student experience are not always sufficient and applicable towards understanding the student athlete experience (Tinto, 1975). By studying a unique student population, we can investigate from a new and different perspective to understand the
academic, athletic, and social experiences of first-year freshmen student athletes and consider how these experiences might integrate to influence their overall college experience. An increased understanding of the student athlete experience, especially during the transition from high school into college, has the potential to provide new knowledge for educational leaders to assist in the development and adjustment of freshmen student athletes, thereby impacting their overall first-year college experience.

Next, Chapter Two discusses the current literature concerning the academic, athletic, and social experiences of student athletes and how those experiences relate to their overall college experience. More specifically, Chapter Two reviews the current understanding the student athlete experience by way of their transition into the institution, their institutional commitment to academics and athletics, the institutional environment, and complexities that student athletes’ experience.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Intercollegiate athletics can, and should be, a positive part of undergraduate education and an integral part of campus culture (Brand, 2006; Melendez, 2008). In perspective, intercollegiate athletics has potential to provide positive effects for the entire campus community. Many students derive a sense of pride and loyalty to their universities through the involvement with the sports culture. Intercollegiate athletics demonstrates positive values, which can be learned and adopted by the general student body. Some of these values include striving for excellence, perseverance, resilience, hard work, respect for others, sportsmanship and civility, and losing – and winning – with grace (Brand, 2006).

College athletics is viewed as a major component to the educational mission of the university. Shapiro (1984) suggested the main rationale for incorporating intercollegiate sport into institutions is that it provided athletes with educational opportunities. Although not necessarily part of the liberal-arts core, athletics can play the same type of role as other areas in higher education, such as music, art, business, and journalism. Brand (2006) claimed that when the educational experience of student athletes is compared with those studying the performance arts such as music, dance, and theater, it is difficult to find substantive differences.

Conversely, the relationship between sports and higher education has its criticisms. Intercollegiate athletics has been a controversial topic on college campuses and with the media for over 100 years (McHugh-Engstrom, Sedlecek, & McEwen, 1995).
Some scholars stated that college sports might have some redeeming developmental value for students, but that athletics is not part of the educational experience. Critics argued that sports on campus distort the mission of the institutions of higher learning (Brand, 2006). Examples of these criticisms included the exploitation of student athletes to overpaid coaches, the unfairness of limited opportunities for women students and minority coaches, academic fraud, growing athletic department budgets, and performance-enhancing drug use, to name a few (Brand, 2006). At some institutions, it is assumed that an athlete is socially inept and does not do well in the classroom and their lack of contact with the campus community makes them a group susceptible to stereotyping (Sellers, 1992; McHugh-Engstrom et al., 1995).

Throughout this study, the student athlete refers to student athletes that participate in a non-revenue producing sports in higher education at the Division I level. The setting for the research is a large-sized university located in the southeastern portion of the United States. The institution shall be referred to as ‘the participating institution’ to protect the anonymity of the research participants and other university constituents.

**Student Athlete Characteristics**

The benefits associated with participation in college athletics are well documented. Athletic participation has a direct effect on college social involvement, college grades, satisfaction with college, and completion of a college degree (Peltier et al., 1999). Astin (1993) reported that athletic participation while in college was positively associated with overall satisfaction with the college experience, motivation to earn a degree, and the development of interpersonal and leadership skills. Melendez (2006)
suggested that athletic participation often provides opportunities for social interaction and support, generating feelings of belonging and acceptance among one’s peer group and for developing feelings of pride and attachment to one’s school. Being successful on the field of play requires observation, weighing alternatives, assessing probabilities, and hypothesizing solutions. Of course, there are other ways to learn to think critically and solve problems, but athletic participation stimulates and encourages the learning of these skills (Brand, 2006).

Athletes seem to have a unique culture and set of experiences that differentiate them from others. Peltier et al. (1999) suggested that college athletes are to be considered the same as other nontraditional students with their own culture and difficulties in relating to the larger system. They spend much time together and often have common goals and values generated by their experiences (Peltier et al., 1999).

Due to their unique status and role in the university community, student athletes are provided with a number of opportunities for personal growth, including the development of social skills, opportunities for travel, and a chance to become more assertive (Melendez, 2008). Additionally, athletes commonly receive special academic benefits with extra assistance from teachers, counselors, coaches, and peers. Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) suggested the physical conditioning and discipline that accompany athletics might transfer to educational endeavors. The initial eligibility requirements to qualify for college scholarships might motivate athletes to achieve higher grades than they would otherwise. The prestige resulting from athletic participation produced a more positive self-concept and higher aspirations in other activities, including academic work.
(Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973). Additionally, sports participation has the potential for preventing and/or reducing at-risk behavior and enhancing development of competence skills (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997).

Spreitzer and Pugh (1973) suggested there are a number of psychological and sociological differences between athletes and non-athletes. Athletes were reported to be more extroverted, conventional in life-style, more positive in self-concepts, and had lower rates of juvenile delinquency than non-athletes (Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973). Despite no systematic differences in the two groups, the authors discovered that athletes tend to have higher grade point averages, higher educational expectations, and higher rates of college attendance than their non-athlete counterparts (Spreitzer & Pugh, 1973).

**Transition To College**

Upon entering the university, student athletes at Division I schools face a quantum leap in the athletic demands placed upon them. The academic expectations are likewise much more challenging (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). Adapting to college required individuals to adjust, both socially and intellectually to a new and different environment (Tinto, 1993). Zea, Jarama, and Bianchi (1995) defined adaptation to college as “remaining in college, enjoying psychological well-being, and performing well academically” (p. 511).

Students choosing to compete in intercollegiate athletics face a unique set of challenges and circumstances as they make the transition from high school to college. Student athletes must learn how to manage the transition to college life all while balancing their athletic and academic roles and planning for athletic retirement (Jordan &
Denson, 1990). These issues include living away for the first time, developing new social groups, and assuming responsibilities of self-discipline (Melendez, 2006). Parham (1993) identified six challenges that confronted college student athletes and affected their adjustment to college life: (a) balancing athletic and academic endeavors; (b) balancing social activities with the isolation of athletic pursuits; (c) balancing athletic success or lack of success with maintenance of mental equilibrium; (d) balancing physical health and injuries with the need to keep playing; (e) balancing the demands of various relationships, including coaches, parents, family, and friends; and (f) dealing with the termination of an athletic collegiate career. In addition, Melendez (2006) suggested that several non-academic issues affected the ability for first-year student athletes to adjust to college life, such as finances, loneliness, health, interpersonal struggles, autonomy, and change.

Sport participation can promote certain developmental, social, emotional, and attitudinal experiences that ease this transition into college for many student athletes (Melendez, 2006). Marsh and Kleitman (2003) suggested that athletic participation in high school produce many positive outcomes for incoming freshman college student athletes including improved adjustment to college, higher grades, higher self-esteem, and higher educational aspirations. Learning how to effectively manage time between athletics and academics was essential for student athletes to succeed academically, especially in the first-year of college. This balancing act, requiring conscious and persistent effort, is no easy task (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000).
Much of the research on student experiences has focused on the critical first year of college. Student athlete development programs have designed initiatives to enrich the freshman year experience, ranging from expanded and extended orientation, freshman seminars, and a variety of extracurricular programs (Tinto, 2006; Hyatt, 2003). Many of these initiatives were considered add-ons to the existing university activities, but necessary to provide student athletes the assistance they needed to persist and gain a well-rounded first-year experience. Many college sport programs encourage mentoring of freshman student athletes by more senior teammates to assist in their adjustment from high school to college (Melendez, 2006).

**Recruitment**

The transformation of college athletics over the past 30 years into a multi-billion dollar, internationally recognized business has changed the focus of intercollegiate athletic departments, especially in their recruiting efforts (Letawsky, Schnieder, Pederson, & Palmer, 2003). To ensure the cycle of successful athletic seasons, it is imperative that athletic departments recruit the most athletically talented and academically eligible student athletes’ possible. Letawsky et al. (2003) reported this puts institutions in a better position to win more championships, produce more revenue, and increase visibility.

The students entering institutions of higher education today are much different than those of previous generations. Often called Generation Y, Baby Boomers II, and Millennials, this group has often been described as ambitious, precocious, stressed, wayward, and indifferent. They have also been characterized as being exposed to greater
“grown up” activity and less experienced in exercising discipline and decision-making (Espenshade, Chung, & Walling, 2004). It is imperative that those involved in the recruitment of student athletes understand the factors that are most influential in their selection of an institution and the methods used by college-bound students in their search process.

Both athletic and academic influences are important to the student athlete when selecting a college. Athletic factors included the reputation of the head coach, the school’s sports traditions, the athletic training facilities, the opportunity to play early, the athletic scholarship, and the official on-campus visit (Letawsky et al., 2003). Further, athletes competing at the Division I-A level are exposed to playing on television, before large crowds, and in an environment where teams have a better chance of winning a conference or national championship. Other factors included the nature of the campus environment (i.e. rural/urban setting, location, distance from home), the academic reputation, and the influence of parents/guardians and friends (Galotti & Mark, 1994).

Admissions

College entrance requirements represented by required standardized tests, grade point average (GPA), and advanced course backgrounds have all changed the playing field of college admissions over the last twenty years. Admissions to elite colleges and universities in the United States are not now and have never been based solely on academic merit. It is no secret that being a recruited athlete significantly improves one’s chances of being admitted to an elite university. Espenshade et al. (2004) claimed the odds of acceptance for athletes were four times as large as those for non-athletes. To
assemble a freshman class that best meets institutional goals and values, undergraduate admission officers routinely give extra weight to numerous student attributes, including athletic ability, musical talent, rural background, lower socioeconomic statues, gender, alumni connections, geography, and unusual life experiences (Espenshade et al., 2004). Placing more of an emphasis on characteristics such as pre-college leadership experience might be beneficial as leadership ability can be attached to work drive, self-regulation, and other desirable personality characteristics (Mattson, 2007).

In an effort to field collegiate teams of the best possible athletes, schools admit students who do not always meet their admission standards. At half of all Division I-A institutions, student athletes that were not satisfying minimal university entry requirements were accepted as ‘special admits’ at a rate of ten times higher than that permitted in the rest of the freshman class (Peltier et al., 1999). Over the past two decades, these student athletes who were admitted to select universities and colleges with Division I athletic programs have risen in numbers due to the increasingly competitive entrance requirements.

The disparity between the academic preparedness of general student and student athlete populations can be severe, yet it has gone largely unstudied and unchecked nationally (Jaschik, 1998). The data provided from the most recent certification reports of the NCAA claimed that thirty-one public universities in the nation’s six largest athletic conferences reported having special admits, or admitting students using standards below the normal entrance requirements for reasons including having a ‘special talent.’ There were no NCAA limits on special admits, nor were there national statistics on their
performance, including how many of the students graduate or how far below academic admission requirements some schools are willing to go (Alesia, 2008).

**Cognitive and Non-cognitive Variables**

Institutions mainly use a variety of cognitive variables as intelligence measures to select and admit student athletes. The most common predictors of academic potential have traditionally been high school Grade Point Average (GPA) and class rank, standardized test scores such as the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) and ACT (American College Testing), and parental education (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Standardized test scores and high school grade point averages in a number of core courses are maintained as reliable predictors of academic potential of incoming students; however, the SAT has also been criticized as racially and culturally biased (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). With such controversy surrounding standardized tests, greater emphasis may need to be placed on non-cognitive variables predictive of academic performance.

Non-cognitive variables are personal or social beliefs, motivations, and attitudes of the individual student or members of the campus community that reflect the academic potential of college students. Specifically for student athletes, Simons and Van Rheenen (2000) suggested that non-cognitive variables were generally in the same range as those for other student populations. For student athletes, non-cognitive variables included academic self-concept, educational goals, mental health, and academic motivation (Sedlececk & Adams-Gaston, 1992). In addition, social factors such as social status, social support, parents’ and peer educational engagement, as well as community
involvement, have also been shown to be significant predictors of student athletes’ academic potential (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000).

A student athlete’s academic success may be affected by the extent to which they have integrated into the academic and social environments of the college (Astin, 1993). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that student athletes’ academic experiences were largely determined by the degree to which they engaged in class activities, interacted with faculty, and learned how to work well with peers. Astin (1984) revealed that the more time and energy students devoted to learning and the more intensely they engaged within the college environment both academically and socially, the greater their potential for satisfaction with their educational experience.

Hyatt (2003) suggested that non-cognitive variables should be used to assess the needs of student athletes, and it was suggested and that they participate in sessions to develop non-cognitive skills such as goal commitment and long-term goal setting. In a study of freshman student athletes, Sedlacek and Adams-Gaston (1992) found non-cognitive variables, particularly self-concept, self-appraisal, support systems, and community service, to be better predictors of academic performance than SAT scores. These findings suggested that standardized test scores should not be used as the only predictor of initial academic performance. Hyatt (2003) suggested that institutions should consider using more non-cognitive variables to evaluate the student athlete’s eligibility to compete academically at the college as well as to implement intervention and support programs.
Self-Concept

Congruence between one’s self-concept and one’s environmental experiences was imperative for human adjustment and well-being (Melendez, 2008). One’s self-concept is determined by an individual’s perception of their ability to achieve success (Covington, 1992). Success demonstrates competence or ability, thus enhancing someone’s self-worth (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000).

Because there was often a focus on athletics over academics, specifically when the athlete missed classes due to their athletic schedule, a student athlete may fall behind and feel frustrated toward their academic work, thus developing a low academic self-concept. Academic self-concept is how students view their own abilities and interests in academics. The result of low academic self-concept for student athletes was a perpetuation of a low level of academic motivation which inhibited their academic integration (Hyatt, 2003). Sedlecek and Adams-Gaston (1992) revealed that the academic success of student athletes was strongly influenced by their levels of social support and self-confidence. If under-prepared, or perceived to be under-prepared by faculty, students took a passive role in the learning process and their academic development suffered (Hyatt, 2003).

An increased focus on the athletic role by student athletes may result in the formation of an overly strong athletic identity. Individuals who develop strong athletic identities seem to place sport at a higher level of importance than academics, linking their athletic performance with self-esteem. Brewer (1999) reported that a strong athletic identity produced benefits of a significant sense of self, establishment of social networks,
improved life management skills, and increased sport-related motivation. Potential difficulties included dealing with injuries, dealing with sport career termination, and the potential hindrance to career development (Melendez, 2006).

**Institutional Commitment**

To understand the college experiences of student athletes, it is important to understand their commitments to various aspects of their lives; that is their academic success, their sport, and their institution (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). A student athlete’s commitment to athletics and academics is an interactive process that involves evaluation of the student athlete’s personal attitudes and abilities (Coakley, 2001). Hyatt (2003) suggested a high level of institutional commitment increased the likelihood of the student interacting socially with peers, teammates, other non-athlete students, staff, and faculty, and thereby increased their overall satisfaction with campus experiences. Student athletes are brought into the institution for athletic and academic purposes. If a student athlete has no prior history or exposure to an institution, then it would be in the interest of the coach and athletic administrators to actively develop the institutional commitment once the student is on campus. A high level of institutional commitment can enhance the student’s willingness to get more involved in the social and academic aspects of the campus and vise versa, thereby increasing their commitment to degree attainment. Unfortunately, variables such as lack of integration, discrimination, and isolation prohibited the development of institutional commitment as well as social and academic integration in student athletes (Hyatt, 2003).


**Student Athlete Aspirations**

A college student’s goal commitment is a strong predictor of persistence. Goal commitment is described as the strength of the individual student’s goals of attending college and completing a degree (Tinto, 1993). A variety of institutional factors influence the social and academic experiences of students as well as their goals and aspirations (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997). Student athletes’ goals are typically not focused solely on academic achievements or athletic participation (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Stevenson (1999) suggested that in general, student athletes develop a commitment to sport participation as they establish personal reputations and identities as athletes at their institutions. Relationships within the family and even peer encouragement and praise also influence the athletic commitment of student athletes (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Adler and Adler (1991) found that student athletes transitioned into college life with feelings of optimism about their desired academic goals; however, within a few semesters, they began to devalue the academic role because of sport demands and expectations that inhibited their involvement in academic activities.

Student athletes spent a great deal of time together and often have common goals and values generated by their experiences (Sedlachek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Hyatt (2003) suggested that student athletes are often committed to attending college to participate in sports or to attain the status associated with college athletics, but less committed to obtaining a degree. In addition, student athletes at institutions with more competitive athletic programs report feeling more pressure to emphasize athletics over academics (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997).
Hyatt (2003) reported that student athletes do not develop or are not as likely to make commitments to long-term goals. This lack of goal formation or commitment was a result of the students’ misconception about the opportunities for advancement into the professional ranks and their total immersion into their roles as an athlete (Hyatt, 2003). Competitive student athletes routinely use goal setting for immediate outcome goals, such as making the team, setting a record, winning a championship, and earning a scholarship, but some of these student athletes failed to carry these skills over to other life experiences (Hyatt, 2003).

The athletic demands placed on student athletes and the types of academic and personal development activities provided for them influence their learning and engagement with the institution (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Despite an increase in the number of student athletes that have graduated from four-year colleges, some athletes are less committed to getting a degree (Hyatt, 2003). Gaston-Gayles (2004) suggested that demands and career aspirations associated with college sports have been linked to the failure of some athletes to balance academic and athletic tasks.

Goal discrepancy occurs when an individual’s expectations are inconsistent with his or her current status. A goal discrepant student athlete would be a student athlete that holds expectations of a professional sport career when their current athletic status does not warrant such a lofty goal. Sellers and Kuperminc (1997) suggested that football and male basketball players were more than twice as likely to expect professional sport careers than other athletes. However, Lapchick (1991) estimated that only about 4% of all college football players will make it into the National Football League (NFL) and that
roughly 6% of all college basketball players will have a career in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

Sellers and Kuperminc (1997) suggested the experiences of student athletes on campus seems to be more important in predicting athletic goal discrepancy than the student athletes’ personal background. Adler and Adler (1985) found that many student athletes reported disengagement from their academic ideals due to a lack of reinforcement of academic goals and an over reinforcement of athletic goals, but it was also suggested that high aspirations in athletics did not necessarily adversely impact their aspirations or performance in academics. Sellers and Kuperminc (1997) claimed it is possible for student athletes to have unrealistically high athletic aspirations and still maintain high academic aspirations.

The Academic and Athletic Environments

In the earliest research exploring student retention issues, the blame was often placed on the student (Tinto, 1993). Students that did not stay in school were thought to be less able, less motivated, and less interested or unaware of the benefits that a college education can provide. In the 1970s, the views shifted to consider the role of the environment, in particular the institution and surrounding community (Tinto, 1993).

Throughout the literature on college student development, one thing that was made clear was that students experience college in different ways (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The college student experience was built on their social and academic interactions (Tinto, 1975) and the context on which those interactions took place (Feldman & Newcomb, 1994). The athletic-academic environment in the university
setting has historically been problematic, much of which is based on the assumption that sports is anti-intellectual and contrasts the academic culture (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). Student athletes rationalize poor academic performance with the belief they were being exploited by the university for their athletic ability to generate income (Peltier et al., 1999). Further, Peltier et al. (1999) suggested that the athlete is being used to bring status to the institution, but not provided enough support to be successful either academically or socially. This lack of confidence in their ability to compete academically deprived these athletes of an enriching college experience (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000).

**Resources**

Once admitted to the institution, student athletes must meet a minimum GPA and credit hour requirement to maintain their eligibility. To keep student athletes eligible, universities invested considerable resources in academic support services (Price & Weiss, 2000). Advising and counseling services for student athletes began in the 1970s and focused on three main areas: (a) class scheduling, (b) academic tutoring, and (c) time management (Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984). In the 1980s, athletic administrators began to view college student athletes as a special population with unique concerns. To influence academic success in terms of GPA and degree completion, efforts were made through student athlete support programs to address common issues that face student athletes, especially early in their college careers. At the institutional level, programs focused on instructional effectiveness and the provision of strong academic support programs. For the individual athlete, the focus rested on more attitudinal variables and
what might be called “maturity,” or the ability to withstand the many distractions of college life (Walter, Smith, Hoey, Wilhelm, & Miller, 1987).

In recent years, the NCAA has taken steps aimed at improving educational persistence and graduation rates for athletes (Hyatt, 2003). Retention and graduation improvements in the student athlete population may be attributable to these changes in NCAA academic criteria as well as improvements in student athlete academic support programs, improved social support within the student athlete community, and improved psychological support services for student athletes (Melendez, 2006). Critical components of academic support programs included academic advising, orientation, tutoring, supplemental instruction, skills development programs, mentoring programs, and placement testing (Tinto, 1993). Many colleges offered priority registration for student athletes and have an advisor who assigns schedules and classes (Willingham, 2009).

Gaston-Gayles (2004) recommended designing specific programs and services for student athletes to increase their academic motivation with the goal of improving academic performance. Programs should focus on building confidence, time management, and individual effort regarding academic related tasks as well as how to take responsibility for academic failures. Several athletic programs nationally have employed learning skills specialists to develop appropriate study and academic skills programs with the goal of increasing success in the classroom.

It is important to examine the history, culture, and economics of collegiate athletics as an effort to better understand the educational dilemma of admitting the high-
risk student athlete. As some athletes entered college with lower GPAs in high school and scored significantly lower on standardized tests, they had to work much harder than their peers to succeed academically (Peltier et al., 1999). Academically ‘higher risk’ student athletes, as a group, primarily received additional academic and social support from the department of athletics (Mattson, 2007). Characteristics of high-risk students include their reluctance to take advantage of support programs and to ask for instructors’ feedback and beyond was a lack of integration into the academic and social life of college (Abrams & Jernigan, 1984). The National Academic Advising Association (NAAA) suggested that this sub-group of students was considered academically underprepared as a result of prior educational experiences of academic failure, poor preparation, and low expectations (Miller & Murray, 2005). Approximately 10 percent of student athletes required serious counseling due to these prior experiences (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 1991), but even the best academic support programs may not be able to offer enough remedial instruction to support these students’ efforts toward graduation, and more importantly their success in life after college (Willingham, 2009).

**Academic, Athletic, and Social Institutional Integration**

Tinto’s (1987) student-attrition model suggested student athletes’ grades, intellectual development, and engagement with a degree program increases the likelihood of academic institutional integration. Research on the academic experience of college athletes, specifically freshman athletes, suggested that the focus shift towards factors related to their success while they are in college, such as their institutional integration and their motivation to succeed (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Cromeaux and Harrison (2011)
stated that, “academic integration is expected to influence goal commitment, sport commitment, and institutional commitment, and ultimately academic success” (p. 239). A student athlete’s academic integration into the campus community could include their academic achievement through the frequency of communications with advisors, faculty, and career counselors, memberships in academic clubs, and participation in study groups and internships (Hyatt, 2003). Melendez (2006) stated that student athletes have traditionally reported greater feelings of inclusion, satisfaction with college, personal identity and ego linkage to their schools, and increased motivation to achieve a degree when compared to their non-athletic peers, all of which reflect greater institutional attachment.

Attempts to improve the academic performance of student athletes should not focus on academic skills alone, but they should encourage student athletes to feel an integral part of the academic and social community and thus identify more fully with academic pursuits (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). Social integration occurs primarily through student athletes’ engagement with campus activities, interactions with faculty, and interactions with non-athlete peers (Cromeaux & Harrison, 2011). Social integration may include developing close friendships, memberships in clubs and groups, informal relationships with faculty and staff, and attendance at social or cultural campus events. Student athletes may also find an adequate sense of belonging, support, and friendship within the athletic team (Hyatt, 2003). Integrating and adjusting to the social environment not only requires time and interest from the student, but the availability of
opportunities on campus. The institution must provide an environment that is comfortable to the student and they must be willing to take time to integrate.

Because of the many academic scandals that occurred in Division I college sports, barriers were often set-up between the academic side of the institution and athletic departments. Kane, Leo, and Holleran (2008) suggested that institutions should have positive and significant interactions between coaches and faculty as these interactions are critical to more completely integrating athletics into the university community as a whole. Further, Kane et al. (2008) recommended that institutions take a pro-active approach to encourage cooperation among faculty, coaches, and the academic and athletic staff. Reflected by the Faculty Advisory Committee on Academics and Athletics at University of Minnesota, “efforts must be made to insure that student athletes are treated as integral members of the university community, eligible to participate in all its activities, and to take full advantage of the opportunities and services that the university can provide to facilitate their development and graduation” (Kane et al., 2008). Examples of these integration techniques included creating opportunities for academic and athletic personnel to discuss matters of mutual interest (e.g. student athlete graduation rates), inviting coaches and athletic administrators to participate in campus-related events (e.g. orientation week), and actively publicizing and promoting the academic accomplishments of student athletes (e.g. make the Dean’s list, graduate with honors) (Kane et al., 2008).
Roles: Student Athlete Versus Athlete Student

For fifty years, the NCAA has used the term ‘student athlete’ to describe the athletes that participate in sports and academics at its member schools. The NCAA’s constant and insistent media message has been that these young men and women are learning important life lessons by engaging in intercollegiate athletics and are, therefore, student athletes, not mere athletes (McCormick & McCormick, 2006). Branch (2011) suggested that the term was developed to be deliberately ambiguous, stating, “college players were not students at play (which might understate their athletic obligations), nor were they just athletes in college (which might imply they were professionals)” (p. 84).

The term “student athlete” presents an apparent motivational contradiction. Goode (1960) suggested when individuals were expected to fill multiple roles, they could experience role strain in which commitment to one role detracts from the commitment to another. Simons and Van Rheenen (2000) suggested that student athletes were likely to experience role strain because of the competing time and energy demands of their athletic and academic roles. In some cases, student athletes were highly motivated to succeed in their sport and yet many seem to lack the same motivation to succeed in the classroom (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). Students that were unable to transfer the motivation from athletics into academics were much less successful as students than as athletes (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). The lack in academic motivation was reflected by general dis-identification with the school.
Complexities: Time Demands

Being a college athlete presented many unique opportunities yet also conveyed an array of problems and complexities. Student athletes should be mainstreamed into the academic life of their universities and given the same academic opportunities as non-athletes. Such incongruence with the environment can have detrimental effects on many aspects of the players’ social and emotional development and adjustment (Melendez, 2008).

The nature of intercollegiate competition required students to often be absent from class during their season of competition. The student was likely to fall behind, miss important lectures, information, and materials, all of which made them feel less prepared and less oriented to the course (Hyatt, 2003). The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) recommended for institutions to schedule athletic competitions and associated travel to minimize lost class time. Additionally, it was recommended that athletically related activities (e.g., formal and informal practices, team meetings, and any activities at which the attendance of student athletes is required) should be scheduled outside the prime times of academic classes (Hyatt, 2003).

Complexities: Isolation, Segregation, and Discrimination

Student involvement is defined as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to their academic experiences and how devoted or committed the student is towards academics” (Astin, 1984). Because of their demanding schedules, student athletes were often physically alienated from the academic world (Hyatt, 2003). Jordan and Denson (1990) suggested that it is common for athletic and
student athlete academic facilities to be removed from central campus areas where other services are provided, thus isolating the athletes from the general student population. In some cases, institutional policies isolated student athletes from the rest of the campus population, which may have reinforced a focus on athletics over academics (Sellers & Kuperminc, 1997). Further, athletic isolation may limit the student athletes’ opportunities for contact with other non-athletes’ in such areas as career expectations and aspirations as well as other opportunities to socialize with classmates, integrate into the culture of the campus, or develop relationships with other students and faculty (Hyatt, 2003). From the perspective of members of the campus community, Hyatt (2003) also suggested that the isolation of the athletes also make it difficult for community members, faculty, and non-athlete students to become familiar with the needs of the student athlete population.

Athletes seem to have a unique culture and set of experiences in life that differentiate them from others (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). Due to their unique culture and set of experiences, student athletes are subjected to prejudice and discrimination much like groups thought of as “minority” cultures (Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992). A student athlete’s perception of discrimination can affect their comfort level within the campus community, which could result in further isolation and decreased willingness to become involved (Hyatt, 2003).

There is an underlying and growing disconnect of intercollegiate athletics within the campus-based academic community as some students and faculty have negative stereotypes of student athletes (Peltier et al., 1999). Academic fraud, academically
underperforming student athletes, growing athletics department budgets, large compensation packages for some coaches, and many other issues fueled this discontent (Brand, 2006). Hyatt (2003) suggested that faculty and students for the most part are unfamiliar with the specifics of the operation of an athletics program. Their perception was that the athletes were taking more than a fair share of the institution’s resources and that the athletes and athletic department were being extended unusual privileges. Often because of the special services or accommodations provided to the student athlete population, student athletes were perceived by faculty and peers as spoiled and pampered. Sedlachek and Adams-Gaston (1992) coined this prejudice against student athletes as ‘athletism’ and recommended that orientation programs could help student athletes understand this ‘ism’ along with racism. Because they were athletes, helping athletes learn to deal with prejudices was an important role for counselors (Sedlachek & Adams-Gaston, 1992).

The student athletes’ perceived elite status also added to discrimination. Student athletes, when triumphant on the field, were often the recipients of adoration and idolatry, but they were also victims of animosity and resentment resulting from their elevated social status (Melendez, 2008). Stereotypes of ‘dumb jocks’ or as ‘not serious about their education’ from non-athletic students and faculty have consistently plagued student athletes (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000). Student athletes in general are viewed as academically less capable, as beneficiaries of athletic scholarships, and as students whose sole purpose for being in college is sport competition (Engstrom, Sedlecek, & McEwen, 1997). These stereotypes often leave student athletes feeling isolated, misunderstood,
and unsupported (Melendez, 2008). Combining the stereotypes and both the intrinsic and extrinsic gratification they receive for their athletic participation, made it easier for many student athletes to prioritize athletics above academics (Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000).

**Chapter Summary**

The student athlete experience in higher education was shaped through their academic, athletic, and social aspects of their college life. This chapter summarized a variety of influences found in the existing literature in order to investigate the student athlete experience. The college student experience was predicated on their social and academic interactions (Tinto, 1975) and the context on which those interactions took place (Feldman & Newcomb, 1994).

Student athletes arrived on their campuses with a unique set of personal characteristics, expectations, and goals. Athletic participation tended to have a direct effect on college social involvement, college grades, the college experience, and the completion of a college degree (Peltier et al., 1999). Athletes often had common goals and values generated by their experiences as athletes (Sedlachek & Adams-Gaston, 1992).

The environment also impacted the student athlete experience. The environment referred to any interactions that were made with members of the academic, athletic, or social communities. The environment also involved any gained or lost opportunities from the student athlete perspective. In some cases, athletes had time demands that did not allow them to take advantage of some academic and social activities; however,
athletes were often entitled to additional academic resources, support programs, and community engagement.

Student athletes also faced a set of complexities and tensions. The time demands of the student athlete’s schedule minimized their opportunities to socialize with classmates, integrate into the culture of the campus, or develop relationships with other students and faculty (Hyatt, 2003). College athletes often felt isolated from the campus community and confused regarding their roles on campus (Melendez, 2008). Also, perception and identity also impacted the student athlete experience, as some non-athlete students and faculty may have negative stereotypes of student athletes, which can affect the comfort level of the athlete in the campus community (Peltier et al., 1999; Simons & Van Rheenen, 2000).

This literature review examines academic, athletic, and social elements of the student athlete experience to assist educational leaders in directing new and current resources toward programs that aim to support and balance the student athletes’ academic, athletic, and social experiences, thereby promoting a positive transition into the institution and a well-rounded first-year experience. By studying a unique student population such as first-year freshman student athletes, the perceptions of this sub-population of students are explored to provide a better understanding of their overall experience.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the steps taken throughout the analysis process that led the researcher to develop conclusions describing the “lived experiences” of student athletes (Creswell, 1998). Researchers have long debated the value of qualitative and quantitative methods in educational research (Cronbach, 1975). Qualitative research is broadly defined as, “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). While quantitative researchers seek determination and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek illumination and understanding to similar situations. Cronbach (1975) claimed that statistical research is not able to take full account of the many interaction effects that take place in social settings. Qualitative methods will be used in this study to gain new perspectives and more in-depth information than could be obtained quantitatively.

This chapter begins with brief participant profiles exposing any similarities and differences between their statuses at the institution. This includes such conditions as the student athlete’s major and other varying experiences that related to the thematic analysis. This allows the reader to follow the analysis process used by the researcher to analyze the data captured from the individual interview transcriptions.

Seidman (1998) stated that investigating the experiences from a limited number of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions can create
enormous power. To investigate the experiences of student athletes with similar structural conditions, the researcher selected participants from non-revenue sports teams that participate in regular-season competitions and practices over the course of the fall semester. The participants also play sports that are similar in season length, require approximately the same amount of preparation time (i.e. practice, conditioning, watching film, etc.), and require around the same amount of travel away from campus for individual or team competitions. To ensure the participants experienced similar social conditions, the researcher selected only sophomore student athletes that live in on-campus housing at the institution and are, in most cases, required to spend a certain number of hours in the student athlete enrichment center. Regardless of the sport in which an athlete participates, they are held to the same academic and behavior standards. While these structural and social conditions were not discussed with the student athletes prior to their participation in this study, the experiences they shared reflected similarities in living environments, travel schedules, and in some cases, the athletic and academic demands placed upon them.

**Participant/Subject Selection**

The participants for this study consisted of eleven currently enrolled sophomore student athletes at the participating institution. Sophomore student athletes had most recently transitioned into the institution and therefore were selected as the participants for this study to best understand their experiences. Individual interviews were conducted with five male and six female student athletes that participated in a non-revenue sport at one NCAA Division I-A university located in the southeast region of the United States.
Participants in this study only included student athletes that participated in a varsity-level sport and were enrolled full-time as sophomores, having just completed their freshman year the previous academic year. Sophomore athletes were chosen for this study as they have most recently transitioned into the institution and lived the experience. The participants were not selected by means of academic standing, scholarship designation, playing status, hometown, or program of study.

There were numerous previous studies that examined athletes from what were considered ‘revenue sports’ (i.e. football, basketball, and in some cases ice hockey or others). These sports often included higher profile athletes that faced more complex demands as the commercialism of their sport shined a brighter light on coaches and team success (often measured in wins and losses) as well as their academic and athletic performance (Brand, 2006). Due to the nature and their involvement in their sport, revenue sport athletes also experienced additional time constraints or were restricted to certain academic programs and often found to have higher rates of goal discrepancy than athletes from non-revenue sports (Brand, 2006).

For this study, certain athletes were selected from non-revenue sport teams for a couple of reasons. First, the sport that they participated in was a non-revenue sport that competed in their regular season during the fall semester. If athletes were chosen from sports that competed at different times during the year, the researcher felt there could be significant differences in the student athletes’ overall experience that would impact the findings of the study.
Protection of the Participants

Student athletes at the participating institution were invited to participate in the study by signing a consent form before being interviewed. This form assured the participants that their privacy was protected in all documents and publications that result from the study. The participants’ were given pseudonyms and the institution was generically referred to as ‘the participating institution’ to ensure confidentiality. Each of the participants were consulted about their pseudonym to be used as the researcher’s main goal was protect the participants from any inconvenience or discomfort as in-depth interviews often include sensitive and individually specific information that might identify the individual to the reader (Seidman, 1998), I did all within my ability to insure that the participant’s privacy remained protected. Before any data was collected, this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the participating institution (Appendix C). Prior to collecting data from the participants, permissions were obtained from head coaches of the athletes involved in the study and other athletic administrative personnel.

Digital audio files of the interviews were kept in electronic format and locked in a password-protected file on the researcher’s personal computer. Back-up audio files of the interviews and transcriptions were also kept in a password-protected folder on the researcher’s personal hard-drive. Any paper copies were securely kept at the researcher’s residence. Upon completion of the research, the audio interviews were deleted and only one set of paper transcriptions were kept. All other paper copies of interviews or field notes were shredded.
Participant Profiles

Participant #1

Anita is a 19 year-old Caucasian female. She is on a non-revenue sports team at the participating institution. As a freshman, Anita started most of the games during the athletic season. Anita came to the institution from outside the region and is the “only one in (her) family who is really going to and planning on finishing out a four-year university and getting a degree.” She is majoring in sports marketing with a minor in communications.

Participant #2

Barbara is a 19 year-old Caucasian student athlete on a non-revenue sports team at the participating institution. Barbara is from another college town that is within the region of the participating institution. Although she has not dismissed the idea of playing her sport after college, she is very academically driven. Through her experiences in the engineering program as well as playing on an “on-the-rise athletic program,” she feels she is getting “the best of both worlds” for her college experience.

Participant #3

Carrie is a 19 year-old Caucasian student athlete on a non-revenue sports team at the participating institution. Her hometown is a located in another state within the region of the participating institution. During the recruiting process, she was inspired that she could “play right away to help turn the program around.” Carrie is currently a pre-business major but is planning to switch into marketing with a minor in psychology.
Carrie likes treating her sport as a “get-away” from her academic responsibilities and feels that “it’s cool to be a student athlete at a big school.”

**Participant #4**

Douglas is a 19 year-old Caucasian male. He plays on a non-revenue athletic team at the participating institution. Douglas came to the institution from outside of the region where he had previously lived all of his years before attending college. After exploring a variety of majors in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, Douglas settled on pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering. On the athletic field, Douglas is focused on having “break-out seasons” over the next couple of years to “solidify a place to play professionally” after finishing his degree.

**Participant #5**

Erica is a 20 year-old Caucasian female. She plays on a non-revenue athletic team at the participating institution. Erica transferred to the institution after completing one year at a different school out of the region and closer to her hometown. Erica is a management major that aspires to work in athletics after college. If Erica were not a student athlete, she would “probably play a club sport because (she) couldn’t deal with not filling (her) time with something.”

**Participant #6**

Fredrick is a 19 year-old Caucasian male student athlete. Fredrick came to play his sport at the institution from outside of the United States. Fredrick wants to play a college sport in the United States to “keep the door open to play professionally as well as to get a degree in higher education.” He is a marketing major with a communications
minor and interested in working in the business side of athletics when his athletic career comes to an end.

**Participant #7**

George is a 20 year-old Caucasian male. George is a sophomore student athlete that plays on a non-revenue sport at the participating institution. Before college, George was very interested in playing professionally, but college has made him realize that “maybe professional sport isn’t something for me.” He has grown up around the area of the participating institution and is interested in starting his own business when he finishes his college athletic career. George claimed that being an athlete in college has “opened up many more doors for me I feel it’s going to help me in the future.”

**Participant #8**

Henry is a 20 year-old Caucasian male. Henry is from outside of the region and came to the institution to specifically play his sport as well as enroll in the general engineering program. Growing up, Henry wanted to play professional sports but now he is more focused on getting a degree and making sure he’s “set-up for a job.” Henry came into the institution a semester earlier than other freshman athletes so he feels his experiences are “different than your typical freshman student athlete.”

**Participant #9**

Irene is a 19 year-old Caucasian female. Irene is a sophomore student athlete that competes on a non-revenue sports team at the participating institution. She is interested in working in the medical field after earning a degree in health sciences with a minor in business. Irene has always wanted to play a sport in college and since her sport has been
a big part of her life for so long, she can’t think of not playing after college. When comparing her experiences to that of non-athlete students, Irene says hers is “a lot different, but that’s not a bad thing.”

**Participant #10**

Jacob is a 19 year-old African American male. He is midway through his sophomore year playing a non-revenue sport at the participating institution. Jacob is from outside the region of the institution. When asked for the reason that he came to the institution, his first response was, “the weather!” Jacob is majoring in mechanical engineering because he “likes math and science...and working with (his) hands and thinking about how stuff works.” Jacob has always wanted to play his sport professionally and is hoping that he can improve enough in college to make it to the next level. Jacob stated, “my college life is my sport pretty much, I don’t really understand how it could be different.”

**Participant #11**

Kevin is a 19 year-old Caucasian male. He is currently a sophomore that plays on a non-revenue sports team at the participating institution. Kevin is from the surrounding area of the institution and is very familiar with its academic and athletic reputations. He is a pre-business major and wants to eventually switch it over into business management. When asked about his experience of college life as a student athlete, Kevin said, “it’s been a good impact on my career and I wouldn’t go back and trade it for anything.”

The eleven participants for this study were a mix of male and female student athletes that participated in non-revenue sports at the participating institution. Table 3.1
summarizes the participant profiles by age, gender, race, current major, and hometown (i.e. distance from the participating institution to their home). Six of the participants were male and five were female. One of the participants was African American and ten of the participants were Caucasian. One of the student athletes enrolled at the institution a semester early and began participating in their sport while one other student transferred into the participating institution from a different college. Each of the student athletes included in this study enrolled in summer classes and lived in on-campus housing prior to the start of their first freshman semester. The population of non-athlete students and student athletes are further depicted in Figures 3.1 – 3.9.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Current Major</th>
<th>Hometown**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Sports Marketing with a minor in Communications</td>
<td>Out-of-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>In-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Pre-Business</td>
<td>In-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Out-of-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Out-of-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fredrick</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Marketing with a minor in Communications</td>
<td>Out-of-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Out-of-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irene</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Health Sciences with a minor in Business</td>
<td>In-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Out-of-region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Pre-Business</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *The participant names do not include actual names. The researcher selected alternative names to be referred to within the study. **Home refers to the distance of the student athlete's hometown from the institution (Local = from within 50 mile radius of institution; In-region = from within 200 mile radius of the institution; Out-of-region = from beyond 200 mile radius of the institution).
Figure 3.1. Undergraduate Student Population

- 422, 2%
- 16,931, 98%

Students-Athletes
Non-Athletes

Figure 3.2. Gender Distribution of all Undergraduate Students

- 7775, 46%
- 9156, 54%

Male Students
Female Students
Figure 3.3. Gender Distribution of All Student-Athletes

- Male Student-Athletes: 243, 58%
- Female Student-Athletes: 179, 42%

Figure 3.4. Racial Demographic of All Undergraduate Students

- Caucasian: 14105, 83%
- Black or African American: 1057, 6%
- Asian: 439, 3%
- Hispanic: 301, 2%
- Other: 1029, 6%
Figure 3.5. Academic Department Demographic of All Students

Figure 3.6. Academic Department Demographic of Student Athletes
Figure 3.7. Gender Distribution of Research Participants

- Male: 5, 45%
- Female: 6, 55%

Figure 3.8. Academic Major Distribution of Research Participants

- College of Agriculture, Forestry, & Life Sciences: 0
- College of Architecture, Arts, & Humanities: 0
- College of Business & Behavioral Sciences: 6
- College of Engineering & Science: 4
- College of Health, Education, and Human Development: 1
Social Phenomenology

It is important to emphasize the emergent nature of a qualitative research design (Hoepfl, 1997). The purpose of phenomenology is to understand shared meanings of participants by examining and understanding a lived and shared experience. Since qualitative researchers observe and interpret meanings from within their context, it is not appropriate to finalize strategies before data collection has begun (Patton, 1980).

It is important for phenomenologists, as well as other qualitative researchers, to put aside their assumptions and interpretations that may occur during the data collection. The perspective rests on the experiences of others, examining what is real to them, what they value, what they pay attention to, and how they construct their own theories, beliefs, values, and attitudes. Phenomenological research is very abstract and conceptual which poses many challenges to researchers using this methodology. Phenomenology is not just

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Figure 3.9. Research Participant Distance From Home

- Out-of-Region, 6, 55%
- In-Region, 3, 27%
- Local, 2, 18%
used to develop social issues and theories like grounded theory; it is designed to understand the human experience.

No research method will ever be able to fully describe people’s experiences, what they think, or where they derive their meaning of life. It can simply provide an overview of a particular case or situation, their experiences, and the realities they hold for the world they live in (Hoepfl, 1997). This research is not intended to prove or disprove a theory, policy, or action. Rather, social phenomenology has been chosen for this study to capture the experiences of the participants, allowing their story to be told and their voices to be heard.

Phenomenological inquiry uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings (Hoepfl, 1997). Phenomenology was developed by Schutz (1967) to understand the process by which people construct and maintain their “social reality.” Schutz (1967) was interested in how people constructed their experiences to shape their reality they way they view their meaning of the world. Concerned with how ordinary members of society live their everyday lives, Schutz (1967) based his ideas on Karl Marx’s adage that people actively construct their worlds, but not completely on their own terms. The perspective rests on the experiences of others: what is real to them, what do they value, what do they pay attention to, and how do they construct their own theories, beliefs, values, and attitudes? The purpose of phenomenology is to understand shared meanings of participants by examining a lived experience (Schutz, 1967).
Data Collection Procedures

The most prevailing form of data collection associated with qualitative inquiry is interviews (Hoepfl, 1997). The identified participants were asked to take-part in up to two, 50-minute face-to-face individual interviews. The researcher also reviewed the right to schedule subsequent interviews with participants if needed to garner a better understanding of participants’ perspectives. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer was free to expand and explore deeper concepts and ideas within the predetermined inquiry areas. Although the same questions were asked of each participant (Appendix A), there were no predetermined responses. The on-campus interviews took place at previously scheduled times at a predetermined location on the campus of the participating institution. The 50-minute semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in their entirety to a text document. During the interviews, student athletes were asked similar questions to provide an increasingly clear portrayal of their experiences. The participants discussed topics from several different perspectives that when combined, provided unique qualities of lived experiences and those that stood out (Moustakas, 1994).

Using the data collected through the interview transcriptions, the researcher used phenomenological reflection to construct thematic portrayals of the experience. The researcher read each interview to get a sense of what the participant was saying, followed by re-reading to check for accuracies. Revisiting the raw data several times allowed the researcher to accurately find descriptions to justify the interpretations of the data. Textual descriptions were constructed for each of the themes found in each participant’s
experience. Through integrating various meanings and themes across all of the interviews, the researcher identified commonalities that focused on specific content. The meanings and themes of each participant were then studied to depict the experience of the group as a whole. Examining themes across each of the interviews also allowed the researcher to understand the participants’ experiences.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used throughout the methodology development and data analysis was focused in phenomenological inquiry to examine the experiences of student athletes as they transitioned into the academic, athletic, and social environments of the institution. Figure 3.1 displays the theoretical model that was developed by the researcher throughout the review of the literature before collecting the data for this study. This model helped the researcher to conceptualize how certain pre-college characteristics of student athletes might impact their transition into the environment and what effect it had on their experience. To carry it further, the researcher examined various complexities and tensions that often face student athletes and how those complexities impact their academic, athletic, and social integration into the institution. Lastly, the researcher sought to find out through phenomenological methods how experiential overlap or integration impacted the student athlete’s college life experience.

The theoretical framework of this study utilized the ideas of four theorists: Tinto (1987); Astin (1984); Schlossberg (1989), and Chickering and Reisser (1993). Each of the theorists offers a slightly different way to examine the data to produce an explanation of significant elements of the participants’ experiences. Schlossberg (1989) examined
student transitions focusing on the support they sought or received. Environmental factors were discussed in relation to academic, athletic, and social integration (Tinto, 1987), student involvement (Astin, 1984), and student identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Each of these theorists are discussed in relation to the analysis of the data in Chapter Five. In some cases, ideas of the theorists overlapped and were discussed in relation to various transitional and environmental experiences of the participants.
Data Analysis: Phenomenological Reduction

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) defined qualitative data analysis as, “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). The way to carry out a qualitative analysis was to place raw data into logical, meaningful categories, to examine them in a holistic fashion, and to find a way to communicate or interpret it to others (Patton, 1980).

There was a systematic procedure to analyzing phenomenological data. To begin, data analysis required a description of the researcher’s own experience with the
phenomenon, followed by identifying significant statements, meaning units, and the development of themes (Moustakas, 1994). After transcription of the interviews, a line-by-line coding process began to textually capture the actual lived experience of the research participants. This presented a challenge to the researcher in that the focus of the research must be rooted in the topic to answer the research questions. However, the researcher developed the interview questions with the research questions in mind and asked the same questions to each participant to keep the data focused on appropriate and applicable topics pertaining to the study (Saldana, 2009). The questions were very broad and allowed the participants to share any experiences that pertained to their role as a student athlete at the institution. So therefore, there was a wide range of information being shared that needed to be grouped and organized in order construct an understanding of their experience (Saldana, 2009).

Phenomenological reduction and bracketing were used to categorize the data in order to summarize the themes of what the participant was saying. Every statement was treated as having an equal value. The researcher considered each of the brackets and themes as equals in order to disclose an accurate description of the nature and essence of the phenomenon being observed. The themes were categorized together in order to narratively discuss and present the findings in the final report. Once the analysis of data was complete, the researcher verified that concrete, detailed descriptions were obtained from the participants. The researcher also ensured that the phenomenological reduction had been maintained throughout the analysis and that essential meanings were accurately discovered and communicated in a narrative form to adequately answer the research
questions (Moustakas, 1994).

Each interview was transcribed in order to transfer the data from an audio format into a written document. After each interview was transcribed, the process of coding the data began. Coding is a process where data is interpreted and filed into categories or themes to help the researcher gain perspective. While in quantitative research, data is required to fit into preconceived codes (i.e. GPA, political affiliation, level of education, etc.), in a phenomenological study the researcher’s interpretations are what shape the codes. Coding occurred in two stages of the process in order to continue uncovering themes.

Analysis began with the identification of categories or themes that emerged from the raw data. The purpose of coding was not only to describe what was being said in the interview, but also to acquire a new understanding. By using descriptive coding followed by focus coding, conceptual categories and common themes were developed. Words, phrases, or ideas that appeared to be similar were grouped into the same category and translated into common themes. Themes were generally a short description of an experience that could contextually represent the actual experience of the participant based upon a significant statement they made. The re-examination of the categories or themes to see how they were linked was used to compare and combine data in new ways to help the researcher assemble the “big picture” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

While coding, the researcher constantly thought about meanings of the data to find gaps and to make comparisons. As themes emerged from the data, the researcher gained greater awareness of the experiences of the participants and began to identify how
concepts were related to each other. By integrating the categories and themes, the data produced a detailed description of the participants’ experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Through this method of transcribing and coding, a more thorough understanding of experience was discovered and the researcher could work to further understand situation. The next section gives a more detailed account of how the coding process was completed.

**The Coding Process**

At the conclusion of the initial interview process, the researcher transcribed each interview verbatim. This provided the researcher with the information needed to begin the process of coding to identify significant statements of the participants in the study. The process of selecting significant statements from the eleven transcribed interviews was accomplished through identifying relevant statements with respect to the significance of the description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher sorted relevant statements from the original interview transcription documents into several individual documents. The meaning statements were then sorted by their relevance and meaningfulness to answering the research questions by using the process of descriptive coding.

After the first-cycle of coding was complete, the researcher determined that the data needed reorganization based on the perception of the experience as presented by the participants. Therefore the second-cycle focus coding process was used to further clarify what the participants were saying about their college experience. The process of descriptive coding and focus coding are described below and examples of each process are provided. Finally, the themes that contain multiple perspectives from the participants
(e.g. academic, athletic, and social perspectives) were grouped together on an additional document for further analysis into exclusive and integrated experiences.

**First-Cycle Coding: Descriptive Coding**

Descriptive coding is a foundation for qualitative analysis and its primary goal is to assist the researcher in understanding exactly what the participant was communicating (Wolcott, 1994). The researcher used descriptive coding to summarize the basic topic of a passage, using a word or short phrase (i.e. “Study Hall” or “Academic Resources”). These words or short phrases and their related data served as illustrative data to support the researcher’s interpretation. Tesch (1990) differentiated that “it is important that descriptive codes are identifications of the topic, not abbreviates of the content. The topic is what is talked or written about. The content is the substance of the message” (p. 119).

Throughout the first-cycle coding process, the participants used specific terms to reference various elements of their academic, athletic, and social environments. In some cases, omitting these terms could marginalize the participant’s voice, impacting the researcher’s understanding of the experience. In-vivo coding, a process where codes are produced using the participant’s actual words and jargon, is often used by researchers to understand the unique culture of the participants’ experiences and their worldviews (Stringer, 1999). While the participants in this study used several of their own terms to describe elements of their experience, coding the data using these terms could potentially expose the identity of the institution to the reader. For example, participants often referred to their experiences in ‘study hall’ with the name of the actual study hall
program. Participants also referred to the ‘athletic resource building’ using the name of the building. For this study, the researcher determined that using specific terms would not impact the understanding of the experience as communicated by the participants, therefore descriptive coding was an appropriate method.

Due to the high volume of data collected, a group of subcodes were needed to further specify or detail the experience as lived by the participant. Gibbs (2007) explained that the most general code is called the ‘parent’ while its subcodes are the ‘children.’ Subcodes that share the same parent are ‘siblings’ in a hierarchy (p. 74). Table 3.2 displays how the first-cycle coding process was completed.
Table 3.2.
Descriptive Coding: Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote from Participant</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code (Subcode)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEORGE: High school to college is a huge step up. You have to study for college, not like high school (laughs).</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Adjustment (Summer School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARRIE: Well, our (academic resource building) advisor was really helpful. Before I would meet with my major advisor, we would pick out the classes for my schedule and if I had any type of question, it was answered and that really helped me out.</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Resource (Advising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HENRY: It’s so difficult to study on the road for me personally. I mean I can’t read on the bus, I’ll get sick. I get anxious before games so there’s no way I can whip out my math textbook (laughs).</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Demands (Travel)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the descriptive coding process, the researcher understood three distinct ‘phases’ that emerged as themes from the participants’ college experience: (a) pre-college goals and expectations; (b) transition into the institution; and (c) detailed descriptions of the environment. Table 3.3 displays a list of general coding themes followed by the code and subcode.
### Table 3.3.
Descriptive Coding: Themes, Codes, & Subcodes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Goals &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>Motivations</td>
<td>Family, Scholarship, New Experiences, Play College Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Factors</td>
<td>Reputation, Pride, Location, Degree Program, Facilities, Conference, Playing Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Coach, Teammates, Friends, Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Career</td>
<td></td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Institution/Community</td>
<td>Culture Shock!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rigor</td>
<td>Building Relationships, Living with Athletes, Summer School, Orientation, Summer to Fall, Personal Fitness, Physical Demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td>Faculty, Athletic Personnel, Non-Athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Role-Model, Responsibility, Team Unity, Leadership, Style of Play, Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Study Hall/Tutors, Advising, Scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demands</td>
<td>Travel, Role-Balance, Time Management, Physical Demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Involvement, Opportunities, Isolation, Social Circles, Commitments, Team Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second-Cycle Coding: Focused Coding

Even though the identified themes represented categories with very few overlapping elements, a second coding process was needed to further organize the data into a more coherent and logical account of the student athlete experience. Second-cycle coding was an advanced way of reorganizing and reanalyzing data that was previously coded through the first-cycle method. As a first-cycle coding method, descriptive coding was considered essential groundwork for a second-style coding process (Charmas, 2006).

A second-cycle coding process was needed for this study to help organize the data and assist the researcher to further develop a sense of the perspectives of the themes based on the participants’ perspectives. During the first-cycle coding process, the researcher noted three distinct ‘perspectives’ from which the participants were sharing their experiences: (a) academic experiences; (b) athletic experiences; and (c) social experiences. In some cases, the descriptive categories represented a participant’s experience in one ‘phase’ (i.e. transition) from one ‘perspective’ (i.e. academic experience), whereas other participants shared an experience in a ‘phase’ from a different or a combination of ‘perspectives’ (i.e. athletic and social experiences). Through this process, the first-cycle codes (and associated coded data) were reorganized and reconfigured to develop a smaller and more select list of categories, themes, and concepts. Table 3.4 shows an example of how participants’ descriptions of their college experience were coded during one ‘phase’ but from multiple ‘perspectives.’
Table 3.4.
Focus Coding: Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotes from Participants*</th>
<th>THEME: Code Subcode: (Perspective)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FREDRICK: So I went straight into classes, straight into working out with the team, meeting the team and stuff.</td>
<td>TRANSITION: Adjustment Building Relationships: (Academic/Athletic/Social)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I think I was busy initially having to do jobs and sort little silly things out. I had to get myself medically cleared.</td>
<td>ENVIRONMENT: Identity Responsibility: (Athletic/Social)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had to get registered for classes, go do all the study halls sorted out.</td>
<td>TRANSITION: Adjustment Summer School: (Academic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are so many things to do I think I was so busy for the first month I kind of forgot about missing home. It didn’t cross my mind.</td>
<td>TRANSITION: Adjustment Physical Demands: (Academic/Athletic/Social)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRENE: Freshman fall was an adjustment just because you’re having all the workouts And then just like all the traveling and having to miss (classes) And also communicating with your professors And so I was really glad I came in during the summer and I started out with a 4.0 because summer classes are a little more, you know, not as challenging. So I’m really glad I did that and I feel like I made the adjustment really well.</td>
<td>TRANSITION: Adjustment Physical Demands: (Athletic) ENVIRONMENT: Demands Travel: (Academic) ENVIRONMENT: Perception Faculty: (Academic) TRANSITION: Adjustment Summer School: (Academic)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Quotes from the participants represent a continuous statement. The quotes were pulled apart to show how individual statements were coded and sorted according to their phase, theme, and perspective(s).
Focused coding was used as a second-cycle coding method to identify the most significant themes in the data (Charmas, 2006). Focused coding was also used to help the researcher understand which themes or categories made the most analytic sense to provide an answer to the research questions. The process began with the researcher recoding the data and clustering the participants’ lived experiences based on the original theme, but with a defined perspective in mind. The themes were then reorganized on separate documents, each with a focus on the participants’ academic experience, athletic experience, or social experience. For example, all qualitative data passages coded as “Academic Rigor” were extracted from the interview transcriptions and reassembled in a separate file. Note that “Academic Rigor” can be categorized in two ways. It is largely a part of the “Transition Phase” yet strictly from the perspective of an “Academic Experience.” This process allowed the researcher to construct an organized narrative portrait from multiple perspectives in order to further analyze and understand the student athlete experience from various phases of college life. Tables 3.5 – 3.7 displays the themes, codes, and subcodes broken down by each perspective (athletic, academic, and social) after completing both the descriptive and coding processes.
Table 3.5.
Focus Coding: The Academic Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code*</th>
<th>Subcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Goals &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Family Scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Adjustment</td>
<td>Summer School Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer to Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Athletic Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Athlete Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Study Hall / Tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demands</td>
<td>Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Team Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Code represents identification of the topic, not content.
Table 3.6.  
Focus Coding: The Athletic Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Goals &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Play College Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Factor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Playing Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td>Previous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Career</td>
<td></td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Adjustment</td>
<td>Personal Fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Athletic Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Athlete Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Style of Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role-Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands</td>
<td></td>
<td>Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Team Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Circles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.7.
Focus Coding: The Social Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Subcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Goals &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Family New Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td>Previous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Adjustment</td>
<td>Culture Shock!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Living with Athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer to Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Non-Athlete Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Athletic Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Role-Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Team Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands</td>
<td></td>
<td>Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Team Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding: Integration of Experiences

Through the entire coding process, the researcher noticed that some of the significant statements of the participants were being made from two or all three of the perspectives that were discovered in the focus coding process. By combining the overlapping perspectives themes, codes, and subcodes, the researcher was able to organize the data in terms of the participants’ integrated experiences. Some of the participants’ shared experiences were informed exclusively through one perspective. For example, as the participants discussed their interest in a particular ‘degree program’ at the institution, it appeared that they were speaking from the perspective of their academic goals and expectations, rather than from athletic or social perspective, but some themes could be attributed to two or all three of the perspectives. For example, when the participants discussed their goals and expectations to earn an athletic or academic ‘scholarship,’ they were speaking from the athletic and academic perspective, but not the social perspective. Table 3.8 displays the themes, codes, and subcodes as they were grouped by each combination of perspectives.
Table 3.8. Focus Coding: Integration of Experiences Based on Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code: Subcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic / Athletic</td>
<td>Goals &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>Motivation: Scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resource: Scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration: Commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic / Social</td>
<td>Goals &amp; Expectations</td>
<td>Connection: Previous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjustment: Personal Fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity: Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity: Role-Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity: Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration: Social Circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social / Academic</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Adjustment: Summer School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjustment: Summer To Fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic / Athletic / Social</td>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Adjustment: Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perception: Athletic Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perception: Non-Athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demands: Time Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demands: Role-Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity: Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration: Team Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trustworthiness of Findings**

Regardless of the research method, the subject of the study, or in this case the phenomena that is being captured, there is a great responsibility for researchers to report accurate results and to make valid conclusions. In scientific research, validity and trustworthiness ensure that the results of a study were accurate and that the findings were clearly understood by the reader. Bailey (2007) stated that trustworthiness does not require the reader to agree with the researcher, but that the reader can see how researchers arrived at the conclusion that they made.
Strategies such as peer reviewing and triangulation were often used to enhance trustworthiness of a phenomenological study. To have a manuscript peer-reviewed, the researcher asked the participants from the study (or others that work in the field) to review the transcriptions and respond with any inaccuracies. Other forms of peer-reviews include having a trusted colleague or an expert on the topic to check the consistency between the study’s methodology and the conclusions that the study claims (Bailey, 2007). Triangulation was the use of multiple sources of data or the use of a team of researchers to apply a variety of theoretical frames. This study took four theorists into account to understand the phenomenon of the student athlete experience. While this study primarily collected data through face-to-face interviews, other phenomenological studies often incorporate field observations (i.e. body language, tone, emotion, etc.) to help enhance the meaning of the participants’ experience.

**Saturation**

Saturation in qualitative research is referred to as the point in which no new data or concepts emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). If the researcher did not attain data saturation, any resulting knowledge could be unbalanced, incomplete, or inaccurate. In this study, saturation began to occur when no new or relevant information emerged from the data with respect to the generation of new knowledge. After analyzing the themes, codes, and subcodes with respect to answering the research question, it was found by the researcher that the data was able to explain the phenomena. Achieving data saturation can be difficult to conclude; however, Corbin and Strauss (2008) offered the following advice:
Though total saturation is probably never achieved, if a researcher determines that a category offers considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon. And relationships to other categories have been made clear, then he or she can say sufficient sampling has occurred, at least for the purposes of this study (p. 149).

**Biases**

Bias could have been introduced into the analysis by the reliance on one investigator for the majority of the data collection, transcription, analysis, and interpretation. The decision to focus exclusively on one university for all the participants in the study could have increased the risk of bias in the design. Certain characteristics of the university could have impacted the results (i.e. rural/urban campus, student population size, programs of study, athletic tradition/success, etc.) that can create results unique to the student athletes at the particular institution.

The researcher is conducting this study with the mind-set that student athletes are a unique population that are as capable of achieving success in college as their non-athlete classmates. A student athlete’s college experience is most certainly unique considering their time constraints, their isolation from the mainstream campus community, and in some cases, the segregation and discrimination from others. The researcher has a deep appreciation for the purpose of athletics within higher education, not only due to the personal enjoyment of athletics for the competition and the school pride that it creates, but for all of the positive character-building, leadership development,
determination, time management, and other skills that are learned by athletes through their participation in sport.

**Chapter Summary**

Using phenomenology as the methodology, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of student athletes as they transitioned into the institution. Eleven sophomore student athletes were asked broad questions pertaining to their academic, athletic, and social experiences in order to take a snap shot of what it is like to be a college athlete at the participating institution. The participant interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked multiple times for any inaccuracies. Every effort was made to protect identity of the institution and the participants.

The chapter provided a general description of the participants and an individual introduction of each participant. A demographic table (Table 3.1) provided a glimpse into the similarities and differences between the participants.

Descriptive coding was used as a first cycle-coding process to begin constructing themes that identified significant statements from the participants. Three themes emerged from the data analysis process: (a) Pre-College Goals and Expectations; (b) Transition; and (c) the Environment. These three themes and their associated codes represented the ‘phases’ that the athletes based their lived experiences. Participants related their pre-college goals and expectations to topics such as obtaining a college degree, earning a scholarship, and gaining a new experience. Examples of transitional topics included academic rigor, building relationships, and physical demands. The
participants discussed their environment in such terms as their perceptions from others in campus community, academic resources, and time demands.

The initial coding process produced commonalities among each participant that were sorted according to descriptive coding procedures. It was apparent that a second cycle of coding was needed to further organize the data so that the researcher could make sense of it through the analysis process. Focus coding was used as the second-cycle coding process to categorize the data according to the perspective from which it was being shared. The researcher noted that while the participants were sharing experiences in one of the three themes, they were also speaking from a particular perspective: (a) academic perspective; (b) athletic perspective, and/or (c) social perspective. In many cases, statements were shared from a combination of perspectives or even all three. The supporting codes related to the themes in order paint the picture of the athletes’ experiences. The results from each of the coding processes were displayed on Tables 3.2 – 3.8. Chapter Four discusses the findings of the study and further details of the themes that were discovered during the data analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are presented from the perspective of three main themes or that emerged through the analysis: (a) Pre-College Goals and Expectations; (b) Transition into the Institution; and (c) the Environment. Each of the research interviews followed a similar structure where the participants told their story, describing their experience as a student athlete at the participating institution. The researcher noticed a pattern as the participants addressed their experiences using each of the three themes as a framework.

Each of the participants began by describing their pre-college goals and expectations as they were generally eager to tell their story of how they became a student athlete at the participating institution. As the interviews progressed, the participants described their experiences through their transition into the institution, which served as way for the participants to describe their expectations and goals in relation to their environment. The transition theme refers to any academic, athletic, and social adjustments that were made by the student athletes in order to adapt to the college environment. The environment theme relates to how the student athletes’ viewed their perception and identity from the perspective of faculty members, athletic personnel, and non-athlete students. When asked to discuss their experience in the college environment, student athletes provided statements about their identities on campus, the resources that were available, the amount of institutional integration they experienced, and the demands they faced.
In addition to the three main themes, codes and subcodes were developed to sort and organize topics within the themes. Each of the codes and subcodes represented one, two, or three perspectives that the used to describe their experiences: (a) academic experience, (b) athletic experience, and/or (c) social experience. When the data was reorganized by phase, then by perspective, the analysis began to take shape.

Finally, the overarching essence of this study is to understand the student athletes’ experience during their transition to the institution and explore their balance or integration of experiences based on the perspective of the student athlete. It was the intention of the researcher to understand the student athlete experience and how they balance their roles. Upon looking closely at the data, it is apparent that the more the academic, athletic, and social experiences overlap, the better the student athlete described the experience. In the business world, value is created when employees were aligned with corporate strategy and fully engaged in making the enterprise effective, which was found to have a significant positive impact on performance outcomes (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). The researcher felt that the same concept holds true for a student athlete, which is to understand how the integration of experiences or their balance of multiple roles might have a significant positive impact on their overall experience. Table 4.1 displays a Venn diagram of the interaction of the student athletes’ academic, athletic, and social experiences. This diagram will be reused throughout the discussion to allow the reader to understand the relationships between the participants’ lived experiences.
The student athlete experience was captured by categorizing into three distinct perspectives: (a) Academic Experiences; (b) Athletic Experiences; and (c) Social Experiences. Any experiences that were exclusive to one of these perspectives are presented below, broken down by the original theme or phase and then sorted by perspective. Further, any experiences that appeared to be integrated or balanced by two or more of the perspectives (i.e. athletic perspective and academic perspective, academic
perspective and social perspective, etc.) are presented. The discussion of these experiences and their implications are discussed in Chapter Five.

Pre-College Academic Goals & Expectations

Table 4.2. Exclusive Academic Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Goals &amp; Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation: Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Institutional Factor: Degree Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Adjustment: Orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Resource: Study Hall &amp; Tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resource: Advising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demands: Travel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in this study expressed a variety of academic motivations and goals for attending the institution. Table 4.2 displays the themes, codes and subcodes that were described by the participants. Comeaux & Harrison (2011) stated that student athletes’ goals were typically not focused solely on academic achievements or athletic participation; however, a few of the participants in this study expressed their direct interest in academics. It is no secret that some student athletes attended college with the ambition to develop in their sport to eventually play professionally (discussed as a social perspective of goals and expectations), but there are plenty of other athletes that were attracted to the institution to fulfill academic goals.
When asked about her academic goals and motivations, Irene stated, “I just want to do well so I can get a good job after college.” Douglas also expressed his interest in academic programs at the institution although he did not consider himself to be the best student. He explained:

   So, growing up, I was always trying to do the most in school. I wasn’t always the greatest at school, but it took time and I really developed into it.

**Motivation: Family**

The participants expressed their parental and family influences as a significant impact on a combination on their academic, athletic, and social motivations. A majority of the participants in this study described how their parents were very supportive of the aspirations to play college athletics and were highly involved in the recruiting process. Douglas described his parents’ influence on his education:

   “I went to a good school growing up. My parents were always behind me with that.”

Parent involvement was an important and much appreciated component of the recruiting process as described by each of the participants. The participants were each highly recruited athletes that had offers from multiple institutions to enroll as a student athlete. This required the student athlete to make an important decision on which institution to attend. According to Erica, deciding on which college to attend “was the biggest decision I’ve ever had to make in my life.” Parents would often travel with their son or daughter to different campuses for official and unofficial visits to help them make these decisions. Irene explained her experience:
I really like how my parents kind of handled (college recruiting) because they didn’t really push me in any direction. They’d help me through things I needed help with because obviously when you are going through high school, you’re like, “college?” and kind of freaking out. But yeah, my parents were really encouraging and they went on all the visits with me and when I told them, “hey, this is it, I’ve made my decision” they’re like, “okay, we support it” because they came with me. And they’re like, “we obviously weren’t going to tell you, but if we could’ve picked a place for you to go, we would’ve picked (the participating institution)” so yeah, they really like it here too.

In some cases, parents were former student athletes themselves, which made it fun for them to be a part of the recruitment process all over again. Carrie explained:

My parents wanted me to go to a good school, not just a place that was just good with (my sport). But my dad played (my sport) at (another institution) so he is obsessed with (my sport) and came on every visit I went on and made sure I went to a really good school.

Anita also had parental support throughout the recruitment process. She explained:

I honestly had never heard of (the participating institution) and so, I told my dad there was no way I could go to the southeast, like I’m not going to survive there and so he told me let’s go look at it, it’s a good school.
Other participants in the study shared the value their parents put on education and how that influenced their decision to attend the participating institution over others. Fredrick explained:

My parents are both teachers so they were encouraging me to stay in school and so I did.

Institutional factors also impacted the pre-college academic goals and expectations of student athletes. The reputation of the academic programs at the institution was considered an important characteristic when deciding on which institution to attend and which degree program to enroll. Kevin, who came to the institution from a local high school and grew up in the area already knew the reputation of the school and had always wanted to attend the participating institution as a student athlete. He stated:

I’m from this area, I wanted to get a (participating institution) degree and that was a huge thing I guess, I just felt like the academics were better here than they were other places and it’s a renowned university. We’re an award winning university and that’s very good and to be proudful and stuff. I would be happy to tell people I went to (the participating institution) and talk about my experience.

Fredrick had unique goals and expectations since he was recruited to the institution from another country. He mentioned that he did not know as much about the academic reputation of the institution and explained:

I knew (the participating institution) was a pretty prestigious academic school. I think in my eyes at the time it didn’t cross my mind as much as because as far as I
was concerned I didn’t know the difference between universities. I didn’t know
the difference between a (small college) degree and a (big college) degree or even
a degree from (a community college).

**Institutional Factor: Degree Program**

Several of the participants expressed their interest in a particular field of study or
degree program. Among the eleven participants in this study, four of them were enrolled
in either civil or mechanical engineering programs. When asked about his interest in a
particular engineering program, Henry stated:

> When I got here, I switched over to engineering because I (originally) signed up
> for math. The engineering program at (the participating institution) kind of drew
> me into it…what it could do for me kind of drew me in. I knew I was going to do
> a math or science something out of high school. I’ve had engineers all through
> my family so (choosing a major) was a pretty easy decision.

Barbara was unsure about what she wanted to study, but narrowed down to what
eventually led to engineering as well. She stated:

> When I thought about what major I wanted to do, I thought well I like math. It’s
> an engineering school. That’s a good degree to have. Let’s just do it.

Carrie was unsure about what she was going to study and had to spend some time
thinking about it. She stated:

> I had no idea what I wanted to major in. I didn’t pick the school based on my
> major.
Much like Carrie, Fredrick was also not sure of his academic program, but he expressed how he had done some prior thinking about it which helped him make the decision he made. He explained:

In terms of what I wanted to study, I wasn’t really sure. Like I said, I did the English language (in high school) and kind of thought that I wanted to do a job that still relates to sport. I was interested in business. I did business when I was 15, 16 years old and did well in that. I’m just interested in that kind of stuff. I was also thinking communications is a good way to stay in sports, using language and things like that, and business. So I’m a marketing major with a communications minor.

The participants of the study expressed varied goals and motivations for attending the institution to play a sport. Some participants knew what they wanted to study while others were still working on finalizing their degree programs as late as their sophomore year, when the interviews took place. The participants expressed unique reasons for enrolling in their academic programs that helped to create unique academic experiences. However, academic experiences are only part of the pre-college goals and expectations as expressed by the participants.

The Academic Transition

The participants in this study expressed a variety of transitional experiences once they arrived at the institution as freshmen during the second summer session.
Adjustment: Orientation

Exclusive to the participants’ academic perception was their required attendance at a freshman orientation program hosted by the athletic department academic staff. The program, referred to by Kevin as “Immersion,” was designed to educate incoming student athletes on various academic resources and institutional policies. Kevin described the program as, “a great way to get tips of what to do to be successful in college.” Anita described the Immersion program as:

Where all the freshmen student athletes that were there (during the summer session) would go like once a week and they would just cover different topics such as study habits and time management.

To provide another description of the program, Kevin added:

It was basically a transitional program. We learned about all the academic integrity stuff. We learned about the dos and don’t around campus obviously and I met a lot of the other athletes there. Some stuff I already knew, like the dos and don’t if you are under 21.

Kevin also mentioned that the Immersion program took place in the summer and continued through the first three or four weeks of the fall. When asked if the program was useful, Jacob mentioned: “I was appreciative of the program as I was getting some good stuff out of it.” When asked about the “stuff” he learned, he mentioned:

I think they had a sex course one time and they talked to us about time management and other things we were going to face our freshman year.
Irene added:

There was the alcohol education thing and just things on how to utilize everything in (the Student Athlete Enrichment Services building). We also had to go through the whole Library 100 thing (a library orientation program) which kind of got you used to everything on Blackboard and how to submit things and other things like that to just kind of get adjusted.

Henry also discussed the orientation program:

We just had a bunch of different people come and talk to us from all different parts of athletics and academics, advisors and all that stuff. We just went over (study hall program) hours, what the (Student Athlete Enrichment Services building) has to offer, what is going to be expected of us as far as like grades and being eligible to play, and time management and stuff like that. That was really the basis for it.

Kevin and Jacob mentioned the course also discussed tips on how to avoid social media issues, even for student athletes that are not “football players” or play in other “high profile” sports. Kevin stated:

The program was talking about social media too, like what to post and what not to post because that’s a big thing, not for (my sport) necessarily, but for football players. If they post ignorant stuff, it will be posted and blown up in an article or
something, especially if you know who the guy is. So basically it’s just don’t be
dumb I guess. And yet people still do it (laughs).

Jacob also mentioned the session that focused on social media. He explained:

We had this one course where we talked about social media, like Twitter and stuff
like that, understanding that people are watching what we do. Things like having
drinks in your hand like while people are taking your picture. Even though I’m
not a high profile athlete, if I ever get a good job I don’t want some crazy picture
on Facebook that my boss might see one day.

Academically, the freshman orientation program hosted by the Student Athlete
Enrichment Services staff seemed to have a positive impact on the participants
interviewed for this study. While only one of the athletes could refer to the program by
name (e.g. Immersion), they each described similar topics that they were taught as well as
voiced their appreciation for the opportunity to be oriented to many aspects of the student
athlete experience on campus.

**The Academic Environment**

Student athletes are given the opportunity to take advantage of a full range of
academic resources designed to assist them with their academic responsibilities. Kevin
specifically described his experience utilizing the academic resources:

At (the participating institution) specifically, the resources we are given make the
college experience good. I’ve been given all the help at (Student Athlete
Enrichment Service building) with an advisor and I also have tutors that I can go to when I need them.

**Resource: Study Hall & Tutors**

Freshman student athletes were required to attend a study hall and tutoring program. Anita talked about how the study hall program operated:

So (the study hall room) is this big room that we would check-in and check-out and we would have to log a certain number of hours each week.

All first-semester freshmen student athletes are required to attend study hall for a set number of hours each week. Irene explained:

My freshman year is when I used (Student Athlete Enrichment Services) a lot because you’re required to have a certain amount of hours. Once they see that you’re on track and your grades are good, (academic advisors and athletic coaches) release you from the (assigned) hours.

Erica particularly found value in the study hall program based on her understanding of her study habits:

I’m the type of student where I need to be told to sit down and study type of a thing, so that really helped me when I first came here and I felt like that would really help me academically.

Fredrick found the tutors and study hall to be a really positive experience. He stated:

 Academically, my experience has probably been enhanced because of the availability of facilities and the tutors that we get and the organization that they
offer us. It’s probably helped me with all the time that I spend on academics there.

George also sang praises for his experiences in the student athlete academic facilities:

I think the academic support is great. I’m in there every day. I think it is by far the most helpful tool we have on campus for athletes and academics just because I’ve got tutors all the time because I’m not very good at math, so I’ve got tutors to help me out with math all the time.

Henry described his experience in study hall as a great time to get away from other distractions. He stated:

I come up to the rooms all of the time, I like having the room all to myself. I like using the white board and stuff like that. It’s just nice to get away from, well if I were at home, I’d be on my iPad or watching TV (laughs).

However, some of the participants tended to complain about the study hall requirements. Erica mentioned:

I don’t want to complain because it does make me do my work, but sometimes I would like a change of scenery and stay at my apartment.

Along the same lines as Erica, Carrie mentioned that, “at times, it helped me get my work done but other times I just didn’t like it.” Kevin did not like the required study hall hours either. He stated:
I’m not a huge fan of it, because when somebody forces me to study and I don’t have stuff, then I’d go in there and waste time. So that kind of took away from it.

Kevin recommended a method to where the current study hall system could be improved:

I like to be alone and just do it by myself or to work with one other person, so like that’s maybe something they could have done. Like if you wanted to, you can pair yourself with another person that has the same classes and go into one of the smaller rooms and have the integrity to like trust you to do your work and not screw around.

However, Kevin also mentioned why his idea might not be ideal:

I don’t think enough people would actually (study independently or with a partner). They’d probably go in there and text or get off Facebook or something, so that’s why they can’t do that so I guess its just motivation to get out of the (study hall program) altogether.

Jacob did not mind the study hall program but recommended that the athletes should try to earn less required hours to spend there. He stated:

I don’t like 10 hours, that’s way too much. Or even the 8 I have now. So maybe 6 or even 4 would be fine for me. But it forces you to study pretty much. After a while, when you’ve got nothing else to study for you just come here to waste time, and watch a movie or something. I like studying privately, I like to just go chill in my room and just relax, I just find that better than having to sit at a desk.
Carrie felt that the study hall program was helpful but sometimes “it was just a little bit too much.” Irene was glad that the study hall program was required during her freshman year as it “did kind of help me to not start out of the wrong foot, I guess.” After completing his freshman year in good academic standing, Henry offered advice to the incoming freshmen or any other athletes that are required log hours in the program each week. He stated:

My biggest advice to the incoming freshmen that were in (the study hall program) after I got here was that I like it, but I like to have my freedom more. So take advantage of it so you can have the choice. Because if you don’t take advantage of it the first time you’re there and really do well in school, then you know, if you are in it again for a second time, it’s going to be much harder for your coach and advisor to say, “oh look, he’s really shown that he can get out of it.” So my biggest advice to them was to make sure you do really well your first semester so you can have the choice, “hey, I want to stay in or you know, I just want to do it on my own.”

**Resource: Advising**

Another resource for student athletes through Student Athlete Enrichment Services at the participating institution was academic advising. Each athletic sport had a designated academic advisor that assisted the participants with their academic needs. Student athletes are assigned an advisor through their athletic team as well as an advisor through their academic degree program. For this study, the term ‘athletic advisor’ referred to the advisor assigned to the participant through their athletic involvement. The
term ‘academic advisor’ referred to the advisor assigned to the participant through their academic major program. While each of the participants described their relationship with their athletic advisor as a positive experience, some of the participants, especially those in the engineering program, found that their academic advisor was better able to assist them with their academic needs. While there seemed to be a relationship between the athletic and academic advisor, it was really up to the student athlete to negotiate the role they had with each to assist them with their academic needs. For that reason, both the athletic and academic advising resources for student athletes could be considered more as an integrated experience from the athletic and academic perspective.

When asked about academic support and advising resources, the participants began by describing their relationship with their academic and athletic advisors. Erica described the experience with her athletic advisor as being very supportive to her needs. She explained:

   My (athletic) advisor really helped me with managing my class times and dealing with stuff if I missed class for traveling.

Carrie also found the athletic advisor really helpful during the registration process. She explained:

   Before I would meet with my major advisor, my (sport) advisor would help me pick out the classes for my schedule and if I had any type of question, my (sport) advisor would just know it and help me with it.

Jacob seemed to enjoy the personal care that his athletic advisor showed him. He shared:
My (athletic) advisor is real big into our athletic games and has our record on the wall in her office. She even came to the first game of the NCAA Tournament. So I can tell that they care about both athletics and academics. They’re supposed to care about school more though, which they do.

Despite the help she received from her athletic advisor, Irene described her experience as frustrating at times. She explained:

Well, one thing is that my freshman year, you have to tell your (athletic) advisor every move. And at one point I was like “why?” I want to be independent. I’m in college. I feel like my (athletic) advisor is my mom sometimes and, you know, they are very on top of all the freshmen during your first semester.

Irene continued to talk about her experience and the difference in the intensity between the freshman and sophomore semesters. She explained:

This year (sophomore), I do go and pop in and say what’s up, but I don’t really need my athletic advisor to do things for me anymore. I’ve talked to all my professors and handle that on my own now so I don’t feel like they are clouded over me, watching my every move, and telling me what to do. My grades are good so they trust that I’m taking care of what I need to take care of. Once you get past that first little part, there’s more separation.

When asked about the “pop-in” visits that she made during her sophomore year, Irene described what the visits entailed:
The (athletic) advisor has your Blackboard password so they’d pull that up and they can see everything good and bad that you’ve done that week and all your grades and stuff. And then you just kind of talk about those things and let them know what you have coming up, how you’re planning to tackle it and all that kind of stuff.

Student athletes also have an academic advisor assigned to them through their program of study. The participants in this study spoke openly about their relationships with both their athletic advisor and their academic advisor and how they negotiate their roles. Fredrick offered his view of the dual advising relationship:

My academic advisor on campus also teaches a lot of classes. My athletic advisor is just an advisor, not a teacher, and I feel they can do more things and through their athletic department status can probably pull more strings.

Irene enjoyed using her athletic advisor more than her academic advisor, but still used both to take care of her academic responsibilities in the health science field. She explained:

As far as my major advisor for health science, she helps me out a lot if I have any questions. But normally I just go see the athletic advisors because they’re more geared to the questions that I have because they are typically about travel or like scheduling a tutor or something like that. Normally I just see my major advisor when I need to register and to be on track for my classes.
The participants enrolled in the engineering program did not use their athletic advisors as much as other student athletes in programs other than engineering. Douglas stated:

I’m pretty much on my own with engineering because there are not many (student athletes enrolled in engineering). My athletic advisor is there to check my grades and report my grades to coaches, but that’s pretty much all she does for me. The athletic advising staff doesn’t know anything about mechanical engineering so they can’t really say anything or do anything about it. In all honesty, they can’t handle it. My athletic advisor doesn’t know what to do with it. But that’s okay, I can find help elsewhere.

Whether it is true or not, Douglas suggested that there are probably less than 10 mechanical engineers that have come through as athletes in the last 15 years. He explained:

Athletes just don’t do (engineering) and especially the mechanical, especially the chemical and stuff like that.

When asked to describe his relationship with his academic advisor, Douglas stated:

My (academic) advisor in engineering tells me not to let my athletic advisor do anything. She handles probably about 300 students and handles them all really well. So when it comes time for courses and things like that, my athletic advisor doesn’t know where to go or how to start, so I always do everything with my academic advisor. There’s no talk, there’s no overlap or anything like that. My
athletic advisor knows that if I need guidance or signing up for the right classes, I’m not going to her, I’m going to (the engineering building).

Jacob, who was also enrolled as an engineer, stated, “I talk to my engineering advisor more often than my athletic advisor about like what classes to take.” Henry, another engineering major summarized his experience negotiating between his athletic and academic advisor. He stated:

I think the help from my athletic advisor that I get is more along the lines of, “oh look, it’s really busy, so let’s try and maneuver it” versus they don’t really know, “oh this class is harder than this class.” That comes more from my civil engineering advisor. I guess the athletic advisors help. They know that engineering is hard, but that’s about it. They don’t really know too much else about it. I have not had any conflicts, they’ve really let me choose the number of hours I want to take and stuff like that, I’m not really being pushed by either one to take more or do less or go to summer school or whatever. I guess I’ve shown that I’m able to manage myself so they kind of just let me know go (do my own thing). I don’t really have to meet with either of them unless I want to.

**Demands: Travel**

Carrie exclaimed, “we go on so many away trips!” Each participant in this study participated in an athletic sport that required him or her to travel away from campus throughout the athletic season to compete against other institutions. In some cases, if an athlete is injured and cannot participate in the athletic contest, they are exempt from traveling. However, each of the participants in this study traveled with their teams during
their freshman athletic season. Douglas summarized his travel experience saying, “the traveling is hard on us.” Anita added that, “(traveling) was difficult because sometimes we would be gone Wednesday through Sunday.”

When asked what was it about the travel that made it so difficult, Henry suggested, “I think my overall grades suffer a little bit because of all the travel all the time.” George also found that his academics were slipping due to his athletic travel schedule, so he suggested a solution, or at least a way for a little relief:

In the fall when we are in-season, we take some of the courses that we think we’d do better in and actually understand more. Because in the fall we’re traveling so much, it’s easier to do better in the easier classes than taking the hard classes in the fall when we’re going to be traveling. It is what it is.

Fredrick, the international student athlete had the easiest time with the athletic travel schedule. Before his experience at the participating institution, he spent several years with a traveling league in his sport. He explained:

Before my experience here, I was often away for 4 days at a time to go play in (other countries) somewhere and come back. So I was kind of used to it.

For first-year freshmen student athletes, the travel schedule seemed to have a direct impact on their academic experiences. Even those participants with good course and time management skills struggled at times to keep up with their academic coursework. Athletic advisors, academic advisors, coaches, faculty, and other athletic personnel should continue to provide academic assistance for freshman student athletes.
as they become acclimated and learn to balance elements of their academic, athletic, and social environments.

**Pre-College Athletic Expectations and Goals**

Table 4.3  Exclusive Athletic Experiences

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The participants in this study expressed a variety of athletic motivations and goals for attending the institution. Table 4.3 displays the themes, codes and subcodes that were described by the participants. Exclusive to the athletic perspective, the participants described their desire to play a college sport and, in some cases, to immediately get playing time on a team that is on the rebound. Although coupled with the desire to obtain a degree, elements of the athletic program and professional career aspirations were also discussed. These experiences are described below.

**Motivation: Play College Sport**

When Fredrick first arrived on the campus, he was “taken aback by how big college sports was” because he didn’t really know much about it coming from another
country where college sports are not as popular. In the United States, athletes compete year in and year out for the opportunity to participate in their sport on at the college level. Up to the point of college enrollment, many of the participants had participated in their sport for as long as they could remember. Douglas explained:

And as for (my sport) growing up, I started when I was 3. I played a lot growing up and I loved it. I just played all the time.

Irene also was so entrenched in her sport that she was drawn to any institution that would give her a chance to be a student athlete. She explained:

Well, (my sport) has been such a big part of my life for my entire life that I really could not imagine going and especially now that I’m here and playing, I know that it would be totally weird to me not playing. I mean it’s a lot of work, but definitely I mean I wouldn’t change it for not playing and I mean I worked my whole life for it, so this is kind of the reward I got for all the hard work.

During the recruiting process, Barbara assessed how important the role of being a student athlete was for her college experience:

(My sport) is my life. I never really knew anything different in that when I was thinking about school, I didn’t think about being a normal student. Anywhere I looked at for college was to look to play (my sport).

Douglas had his mind made regarding his involvement in college sport from the onset of the recruiting process. He stated:
I was going to play in college and I am now and I wouldn’t trade it for being a regular student.

Due to their extensive involvement in their sport, in some cases from a very early age, some of the participants expressed that their only interest in attending college was to play a college sport. Irene explained her experience:

(My sport) kind of came first. I probably wouldn’t really have considered (attending the institution) if I wasn’t playing a sport because I’ve played it since I was five. So you know, schools were looking at me and stuff so I wasn’t not going to play (my sport). I love it!

Barbara also shared a similar experience from the time she was being recruited by various institutions:

I wouldn’t have come to school here if I wasn’t an athlete, like I know that much because I wasn’t even thinking about it. I wasn’t even considering it.

Other participants shared different goals and motivations regarding playing a sport in college. George seemed to appreciate the opportunity to just attend the institution whether he was an athlete or not. When he was given the opportunity to play a sport as well as attend the college he grew up around. He explained:

It’s just awesome to have the opportunity to come here. But then to play, it’s even better. I probably would have still gone to school here if I couldn’t play (my
sport) more than likely, but just the opportunity to play (my sport) just made it a dream come true.

**Institutional Factor: Playing Time**

Some athletes were drawn to the institution for more specific reasons than just being a part of an athletic team, but to compete right away and have an impact on turning the team around. Carrie explained:

> When I first came, the (sport) team was not very good, so I thought I could help turn it around. Teams at the other schools that were recruiting me were really good and I wasn’t sure if I would be able to go in and play right away, but I knew I would be able to here.

**Professional Career: Development**

Many of the participants came to the institution to develop in their sport with the goal to play professionally. Douglas “always wanted to play professionally” and added that “many other kids that play sport in college” do as well. Jacob also mentioned that playing his sport in college to develop his athletic skills was everything to him. He explained:

> Pretty much I guess my goal playing (my sport) was not to get a scholarship to go to college or whatever or to get a regular job in engineering or something like that. My goal for coming to college was in order to improve in order to play professionally. So if I don’t graduate before I have an opportunity to go play pro, I’ll just graduate later I guess. I can always come back if I need to. School will always be there.
Douglas was told he has what it takes to play at the next level that acted as motivation for him to continue developing through the college ranks. He explained:

I’ve had coaches from home tell me I am talented enough to play (my sport) professionally and that’s very motivating and inspiring for me. Pretty much everyone who makes it to (my sport) in college has some quality that would be plenty good enough at the next level, but from what I’ve heard from coaches is that I can and that I have more than one of those assets to do it.

Some of the participants shared a more balanced approach. On one side the athlete was motivated to develop in order to play professionally. On the other side, the athlete held aspirations to obtain a college degree if a professional sport opportunity does not work out for them. Kevin explained:

Because a lot of people like me want to go play pro, the reality is, a lot of people won’t. There’s a very slim chance so you have to have something else to fall back on. You also have the opportunity for an education in front of you and they give it to us, which I’m grateful for. So you might as well get a good degree while you’re here and at least try your best in your (sport) and school.

Looking into the future, Fredrick had some good input on his goals and expectations of playing his sport in college:

So I suppose one of my goals coming over here was to play, keeping the door open to play professionally, and get a degree so once my (sport) career ends, because it’s obviously going to finish at some point, whether is (at the age of) 28
or 30. And at 22 (years old), I’ll be out of college and if I don’t get a contract, I’m going to need a job for the other 40 years of my life.

Erica transferred to the participating institution from a smaller school in her home state after her freshman year. Her reasons for transferring appeared to mainly be athletically driven, but she also mentioned unhappiness with her academic experience. She explained:

After my first year I just didn’t feel like I was being challenged enough I guess with (my sport). I wanted to go somewhere where I would keep developing as an athlete. So that’s when I decided to transfer. And I wasn’t real happy with the academics at the institution either.

Henry had a similar experience and went on to describe how important obtaining a degree was to him:

Growing up, I definitely wanted to play (my sport) professionally but getting here and being around guys who have gone on to the pros, I’m seeing how good guys are that don’t make it. So that’s kind of changed my perspective a little bit. I guess I realize now what it really takes to go. It takes a lot of luck to be seen. So I’d say I’ve become more focused on getting a degree and making sure I’m set up for a job. And then obviously I’m still going to try to do my best, I want to do my best playing (my sport) and if an opportunity comes, then I’ll probably take it, but don’t think I’m going to be putting all my eggs in that basket, for sure.
Some of the participants were not as interested in a professional sports career, especially once they saw how good the other athletes were. George shared his thoughts:

Before college I was looking at trying to play professionally and I’d still like to, but I think coming to college has made me realize that maybe professional isn’t something for me.

Student athletes shared a variety of personal motivations that related exclusively to their athletic experiences. Each of the participants described how important playing a college sport was as a personal goal and also shared some of their expectations coming into the institution. A majority of the participants expressed an interest in playing professionally in their sport after their college careers have concluded. They also recognized and discussed other opportunities they found in the college environment, mostly the importance of earning a degree if the professional career does not work out.

**The Athletic Transition**

Freshmen student athletes are generally required by their coaches to enroll in the second semester of summer school in order to begin working out and getting fit with their teammates. The participants mentioned that the athletic department takes care of the housing and tuition for them to come in during the summer which according to Henry was, “not a bad deal.”

**Adjustment: Physical Demands**

Upon entering the institution, some of the participants shared their experience adjusting to the athleticism and physical demands that were necessary to be successful in
their sport. George described his experience transitioning into the institution from the athletic perspective:

Well (my sport) of course is a huge step-up from playing high school level because this is the real deal. So definitely (my sport) was a huge challenge just because it’s so much faster, the kids are bigger, stronger, and everyone is just kind of the best kid on the teams they were on growing up, so it’s just a big combination of the best athletes if that makes sense.

Coaches were not permitted to work with the athletes until the pre-season preparation period began. For most fall sports, the pre-season usually began two to three weeks before the academic semester. George described his experience from when he came to the institution during the summer with the goal to get a head start on his athletic conditioning and getting fit. He explained:

From an athletic standpoint, I thought summer was great coming in because we get to work with our strength and conditioning coach which is huge advantage for us because we get to go in a month and a half early to start lifting weights and running to get fit for the upcoming season.

When George was asked about the nature of the summer workouts and what was expected from the athletic perspective, he stated:

When you come in as a freshman, you can hear former teammates and everyone telling you it’s going to be something you’ve never experienced, like it’s really
hard on your body because you’re not used to it. You do a ton of running and a
ton of weight lifting. And that first summer coming in really helped prepare me.

Jacob also found the athletic adjustment to be challenging. Jacob came to the institution
from outside of the region in the northeast which presented a challenge to adapt to the
intense summertime heat and humidity found in the area of the participating institution.
He explained:

Athletically speaking, first coming onto the team was a lot harder than I expected.
It was just a faster pace and everybody was so strong and fit and it was just a lot
different. Plus the heat of the summer, especially that year, it was ridiculous. Most
of the time, we would just spend time scrimmaging and playing some pick-up
games with teammates.

From the athletic perspective, college athletics was quite different than high
school athletics or club sports. While it was not surprising to the participants to hear
about the difference in athleticism, it still had an impact on their overall athletic
experience.

The Athletic Environment

Elements of the participants’ experiences that were exclusive to their athletic
environment included descriptions of the physical demands of their athletic sport. There
were several other environmental factors that impacted the student athlete’s athletic
experience that include study of play and physical demands.

Identity: Style of Play
Douglas came into the institution possessing a different style of play. He found it challenging to integrate his style of play with the athletic environment at the participating institution. Douglas explained:

I’m from (the southeast region of the United States) and nobody else is. My style of play is technical, possession oriented. Our team is possession oriented, it is, but the athleticism is very different. I’m used to passing and doing dribbling, but this is like bang, bang, bang, very quick, very fast.

**Demands: Physical Demands**

Playing a college sport was a physically demanding endeavor that required constant hard work and dedication. Jacob stated:

A lot of sports are physically demanding, track, football, soccer. But you know, teams like baseball, they don’t have to run. You know, they just lift weights, which is a lot easier than running in my book.

At times, the physical demands of the athletic environment also impacted the participants’ academic environment. Henry explained:

And a lot of times the physical demands play over into your studies because you are tired and fatigue is annoying. And a lot of times you just want to go to sleep but you can’t. So I think the fatigue factor and the time factor are both pretty specific to (my sport) and pretty intense compared to a lot of (other) sports.
Douglas described the physical demands of his sport as, “just pure athleticism, strength, speed, and fitness.” He described his experience settling into the physical demands of the athletic environment:

This shirt would probably hang off of me last year, I was 10 pounds lighter.

(Coaches) got me in the weight room, got me stronger, faster, and definitely fitter.

Fitness is huge in (my sport).

Douglas also discussed his development from freshman season to sophomore season in terms of what he accomplished:

Coming into (college), I can now run a lot more than I thought I could. I had no idea I would be able to do these physical things that I thought I’d never be able to do. And it’s kind of eye-opening because that happened all after my first spring which is the off-season, the real intense workout time. And so I’m going to go into another spring next semester and come out hopefully almost at the point where I can make a really big impact, so that’s what I’m excited for.
Pre-College Social Goals and Expectations

Table 4.4. Exclusive Social Experiences

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While the participants shared many pre-college goals and expectations from their social perspective, only the opportunity for a new experience was found to be exclusive to their social world. Table 4.4 displays the themes, codes and subcodes that were described by the participants.

Motivation: New Experiences

Several of the participants shared how they were drawn to the participating institution in order to start over or to get away. Irene described her experience and offered some insight into how she chose the participating institution over some others that were recruiting her. She stated:

I also got also recruited by (another institution) that is like 10 minutes my house and they have a pretty athletic program and so I went there and went on a visit,
but it just didn’t really compare because all of my friends went to there, it was just this little bubble.

Erica shared a similar experience. After completing her freshman year, she desired a change and decided to transfer to the participating institution. When asked about her motivations to transfer, she explained:

So (participating institution) came up into the picture again just because I wanted to transfer from (her first institution). I wanted to get a new experience. I wanted to kind of do everything on my own type of thing. I started looking at schools in the area just because I knew that I wanted to go somewhere else.

When asked to describe the differences between her previous institution to that of the participating institution, Erica stated:

(The previous institution) is a really small school so it was kind of like high school all over again type of a thing and I knew 6 of the girls in my recruiting class. So I think that played a role in me wanting to transfer, I just needed a change. I feel like everyone says college is a way to start over I guess and meet new people.

Other participants described their recruitment experiences as they were offered opportunities from institutions in different areas of the United States. When asked about why some athletes are brought in from other regions or countries, Douglas explained that the style of play in his sport is very different from region to region. The playing style of athletes will be discussed as an integrated experience between athletic and social
perspectives; however, Douglas’s experience is exclusive to his social perspective. He felt that he was recruited to the participating institution to bring a new style of play to the team and looked forward to gaining new experiences as well as to bring a different dynamic to the team environment. Douglas explained:

The style of (his sport) is just so different (where he is from) than it is here. Here it’s much more physical and a lot faster. (Where he’s from) it’s slower and it’s more technical. People’s skills are usually better but there are fewer athletes. So I’m used to, and that’s probably one of the reasons I was recruited here is because I’m a really good technician, like my skills are pretty good and I have potential to be a better athlete, so I’m working on that.

The social experience has limited exclusivity regarding pre-college goals and expectations. Most of the variables that were collected through the coding process are combined with other experiences, which are discussed in later in Chapter Four and in Chapter Five.

**The Social Transition**

Several of the participants in the study came to the participating institution from locations outside of the region in which the institution is located. Two of the athletes, Anita and Douglas, were from the southwestern region of the United States while one of the athletes, Fredrick, came to the institution from another country. From the social perspective, the participants shared some of the adjustments they made to adapt to their new cultural environment.
Adjustment: Culture Shock!

Fredrick, the international student athlete that participated in the study, had only been in the United States one other time, just a few months before he began his enrollment at the participating institution. Therefore, he was not aware of some of the cultural nuances that would require adjustments on his part. Fredrick shared some examples of what types of adjustments he needed to make to adjust to the American culture:

So our cultures are fairly similar, we share a lot of things. I don’t think it was a big a shock as someone, for example, from a non-English speaking country. Obviously the same language helps so that wasn’t too hard. I really liked American football and basketball and so that wasn’t too hard to get adjusted. But in terms of little things, walking and driving on the other side is different. If I’m walking towards someone, just like how we drive, and I want to go around them, I’ll make a move to the left and they’ll move to their right so we go to the same side, it’s a little awkward (laughs). Food is definitely different. Bacon over here I don’t like. Bacon back home is a little bit different. Food took a little getting used to. Everything is a lot sweeter and portion sizes are bigger. You come here and get something in a restaurant and a large (drink) is two feet tall. In my country, you have to pay for refills and there are no supersize meals, it’s like 10 ounces or something like that.

Some of these cultural differences were easier to adjust to than others. While Fredrick was able to quickly adjust to things such as food and driving on the other side of the road,
it took a little longer to adjust to the way American’s communicate, especially with their dialects in the southeast. He stated:

I also think the language barrier, although we speak the same language, there’s a lot of language things that are a lot different. The slang is different. At first I had to consciously think about what word I was using because people might not know what I was talking about. A lot of my friends outside of the team, especially people from the south, it’s hard to communicate with them. The strength coach that we have, we cannot communicate. He does not understand me. I cannot understand him. We actually kind of get each other now, but at first he’d say something and I’d say something and we’d both look at each other like, “what is he talking about?” So that was something I had to get used to. One of the biggest things, and there are still times when I say things now and people are like, “what?” I can often tell when people don’t understand me. They often look at me blankly. Sometimes I’ll get a “yes” or “no” reply to something that didn’t a require a “yes” or “no.” So, “what time are we meeting?” “Yeah.” That kind of thing (laughs). I think I’m used to that now, just about, but that was something that definitely took a bit of time.

Douglas, who came to the institution from the southwestern part of the United States also found himself making some social and cultural adjustments when he first arrived. He explained:

Socially, it was weird. I did not understand people. I thought people were way too nice and I thought just the southern style was odd to me. I mean people were
really friendly. Like too friendly. I’m not used to people just stopping and saying hello and asking how are you doing? Where I’m from, you just don’t do that. I guess the term southern hospitality is very present. It’s very comforting, people want to welcome you and want to meet you and stuff like that. So I was kind of creeped out at first.

Douglas also noticed the way people dress was very different than his home town. He described:

The other thing is the people’s dress style is very different. People are into the khaki’s, the button-ups, and the boat shoes. And you know I came in with long hair and everybody thought I looked like a surfer because I would wear jeans and Vans (shoes) and like some kind of surf shirt. And people would think I look weird and I would think they look weird. I couldn’t get over the style at first, I was like, “oh my gosh, meeting people here is going to be tough.” But it wasn’t. It was very easy. And I’ve gotten used to it. I like it. I’m taking advantage of it all the time because I like it when people are nice to me. It’s a very different feel.

Adjustment: Living With Athletes

During the second summer school session, all of the freshman athletes reported to the institution and began taking classes to get a head start on their total credit hours for their freshman year. The athletes were required to live in assigned on-campus apartments with other freshman athletes, generally from the same sport or team. When asked about this experience, Erica stated, “I think it’s good living with teammates.” Anita, who is from far outside of the region, also agreed and stated:
Once I got here it was super-easy, especially living with some of my teammates and training with them right away. I never really felt like I didn’t really know anyone, it was a smooth transition. I live with three other teammates and then right next door we have the rest of us (from the freshman class), so we’re always really close, like physically, so that made it easy.

Anita also described living around athletes from other sports. She explained:

There’s a lot of other athletes all around which also made it easy to meet people on other teams especially since we were all going to summer school. So I met all of the other freshmen athletes right away.

When asked about some of the challenges during the transition into the institution, Kevin described living around other athletes from a slightly different perspective:

I kind of wish we would’ve lived with other students to get integrated with them. A lot of us (athletes) say that too. I was talking to another guy that used to play here and he was like, “man, it would have been nice if we have lived with the other students.” Most of our apartment building is our team. And then we had 2 or 3 guys (from another team) but none of us really talked to them. The building is like three floors, one on each side with exits. So you just basically see the person next to you. I don’t know, but comparing it to (living in an apartment with non-athletes), that would be cool.

After transferring her freshman year, Erica found that living with completely new people presented its challenges as well. She stated:
Living with three girls, it can be difficult (laughs). My roommate I had at (my previous institution), I had known her and played (my sport) with her for 4 years, so living with her wasn’t hard. But living with three people you don’t know is different.

After student athletes have successfully transitioned into the institution through their academic, athletic, and social perspectives, they must learn to adapt to the environment. In this study, environment referred to the perceptions of others, athlete identities, academic and athletic resources, demands, and institutional integration. The participants’ experiences in their academic, athletic, and social environments are described below. Most of the environmental codes and subcodes appeared to be integrated with at least two, and in some cases all three perspectives of their experiences.

The Social Environment

In order to understand the social environment of student athletes, the participants were asked to share experiences and involvement in their sport, in the classroom, and in other campus activities. The participants in this study addressed the topics of team unity, missed opportunities, isolation, and role-balance exclusively from their social perspective.

Identity: Team Unity

Many of the participants shared their experiences striving to create a cohesive and tightly knit team culture. For the student athletes that participated on team sports, as opposed to individual sports, it is their belief that a tightly knit team is a successful team.
In many cases, the coaches’ leadership established the closeness that was desired.

Douglas summarized his coach’s philosophy regarding team unity:

Coach is very about the team togetherness and he’s about the team working together. To him, that is what creates a winning team.

Fredrick also commented on his coach’s philosophy regarding his philosophy on his athletes integrating with other athletes, even if they play other sports:

It’s like coach wants us to integrate (with other athletes). (My coach) is good friends with a lot of the other coaches like (head football coach) and (head baseball coach) and stuff like that, and (head basketball coach). He said you can learn from other athletes just like he learns from other coaches.

Kevin described a time when he and his teammates went to visit a different athletic team to understand what they do and the work they put into their sport as well. He explained:

We did a thing with the rowing team where we basically went and stepped into their shoes. When we went out there and rowed, it was a cool experience. You get more respect for others when you see what they do. They put in the same amount of work too, which is cool.

The very nature of different athletic sports regarding team togetherness was different depending on the athlete’s personal characteristics as well as the sport they played. Douglas described his sport as “the most team sport out there.” He added:
I don’t really know if you understand where I’m coming from, but (my sport) is the closest-knit team on campus, at least I believe it is. Well the football players are here too, but excluding football, it’s probably the closest-knit group of guys.

Fredrick also described the relationship he had with his teammates:

We are the most tightly knit team in I’d say the whole athletic department. I think it’s a cultural thing of our team.

When the researcher asked Fredrick to expand further on this idea of team culture, he responded:

There’s a good number of us, there’s probably 25 or 26 of us, there’s not so little of us that you get sick of everyone but there’s not so many of us that it’s impersonal. You’re not going to get sick of the same people and you know everyone personally because you’re with them every single second of everyday. Sometimes they get on your nerves but most the time you go out and you play well. So our team is really tight, obviously you have better friends than others and people you know better.

Irene shared a similar experience regarding her team chemistry:

Because we are athletes and we see a lot of each other, sometimes probably too much, (laughs), so sometimes we get sick of each other.

Douglas brought up some unique characteristics that, according to his perspective, encouraged team unity amongst his teammates:
Our locker room is a good-sized room but all of our lockers are right next to each other. We always show up early, we always talk. All of us room together. We all live in the same building on campus.

Because several of the participants spoke about the importance of team unity, the researcher asked what is so important about having a cohesive team. Fredrick responded:
You can be on a team that’s extremely talented that has whoever you want on it. But if you guys don’t know each other or how to play with each other, it’s not going to work. The best teams in the world and the best teams in (my sport) are tight and they know how to play with each other because they know each other and it’s a very cerebral game and also very based on trust. And if you don’t like someone or trust someone enough, then in competition, it’s going to show up and there is going to be a disconnect. So, that is why I think (my sport) is the most team sport.

Some of the participants expressed their determination to get to know athletes that played other sports at the institution. Kevin suggested:
It is natural to know other athletes. I would say that most athletes will know the other athletes because we’re all in the same (on-campus apartment), so you see each other and say, “what’s up man?” and stuff like that.

Fredrick also shared that he, “has many his friendships with other athletes,” having met them in his classes, in the athletic facilities, or in the Student Athlete Enrichment Services building. He also described how the tight-knit team environment created an opportunity
to socialize outside of the academic and athletic environments. Fredrick was the international student athlete that was not able to go home as regularly as some of his teammates, especially for holidays that occurred during the athletic season. Some of the guys on his team that lived locally however recognized that he did not have the family connections that they did and so, according to Fredrick, “they took me home with them for Thanksgiving, so that was great.”

Integration: Opportunity

Considering the commitments that student athletes made to their academic and athletic responsibilities, they surely missed out on opportunities that non-athlete students might experience. When asked about any missed opportunities, sacrifices, or trade-offs they experienced due to their participation in a college sport, the participants responded with football games, the party scene, and Greek life. There were also a couple of student athletes that mentioned missing opportunities to play intramural sports, which they could not do due to the risk of injury.

To begin, each of the participants commented on their missing out on football games. At the participating institution, athletics in general and especially home football games are, as Carrie stated, “a big part of the college experience.” They explained:

Anita: And you know, (my sport) season is the same as the football season so we didn’t get to go to a lot of football games or other social stuff like that we missed out a lot on.
Carrie: The only thing that sucks about having our sport in the fall is we pretty much miss all the football games. And that’s the only drawback because this year we could only go to two football games and they are just fun.

Erica stated, “I missed just being able to hang out with people and tailgate at the football games.”

While they realize how big football is at the participating institution, other participants were not as bothered to miss out attending home football games:

George: Well, we got to go to a few football games so that wasn’t a big deal.

Barbara: I’m not able to go to football games and that’s a big thing for everyone in the fall. You know, that’s what they do is go to football games. I personally don’t mind that I don’t get to go to all the football games because football games tire me out and I get to the point where I’m like, “okay, I’m ready to go sit in my bed and watch this on TV.” But other girls on the team definitely wish that they could go to more football games. And that does kind of suck when there is a huge football game coming up and we’re stuck and not able to go. But I’m not too concerned with that.

Some of the participants mentioned that not being able to go out downtown to the bars or restaurants to socialize with other students was a missed opportunity. Kevin described his experience:
So there’s the social life of the drinking and everything and I’m not really into that. I guess a lot of people will go out on weekdays. They’ll go out or go downtown, and I feel like I’m missing out on some of those things. I mean I’ll still go out and meet people like at a party or whatever, but I don’t have to drink to have fun to be completely honest.

Anita also discussed her social experience through missing out on some opportunities:

I don’t even go out the night before if we have practice the next morning, I’m not going to go out until 3am, so it’s just a time commitment I guess.

Some of the participants discussed their inopportunity to participate in Greek Life functions at the institution due to their involvement in college athletics. Greek Life is a big part of the campus culture at the participating institution which has various functions that occur throughout the fall and spring semesters. Kevin shared his thoughts of missing out on Greek Life functions:

Say you’re dating a girl that’s in a sorority and she wants you to go to a function, then you will miss out on that because usually those are on a weekday. I’m not into the whole Greek life or whatever, that’s not really me or my personality or anything, but I know some people that would like to do that I guess, but they don’t do any Greek life so then you don’t meet a lot of people that way. Some of that stuff though can help with jobs I think, like knowing people, and knowing having connections.
As for other missed opportunities, Kevin shared, “we don’t get to do intramural sports” despite the fact that he loved playing basketball and football and ultimate Frisbee in high school with his buddies.

Despite the missed opportunities that were shared by the participants, it was important for athletes to realize that they also gained opportunities through their involvement in athletics. Gained opportunities could be the development of team chemistry and friendships, the academic and athletic resources that were available for their use, their athletic and academic development, and in many cases, the opportunity to earn an academic scholarship.

Integration: Isolation

When asked about the general social experience of student athletes, four of the participants described feelings of isolation, which is feeling distant or removed from the general student body population. Anita suggested there was a lot of isolation with the athletes at the participating institution; however, she was “not complaining about that.”

As a student athlete, Kevin also reported feeling isolated at times. He suggested that it was more for the big-time athletes, such as football and basketball players. He explained:

It’s more for (big sport athletes) because I know a lot of the guys would like to meet other people and you meet other people your freshman year. Usually you can make different friend circles then.
Kevin and Barbara also discussed how different it could have been if they were to live around non-athlete students and made some different friend circles their freshman year.

The following accounts are reflections of their views:

Kevin: So I met some (non-athlete students) at (another on-campus housing facility) and it was cool how it was set-up because as you were leaving, you’d run into other people. I think your freshman year is huge for making other friends I guess because everybody is looking for friends if they are from out of state and don’t know anybody. So that kind of hurts a lot I guess with making other friend circles if you don’t reach out like during academic time. Like the only other time we’d see them is at the dining hall or if you are in academic classes with them.

Barbara: I really do feel like athletes are so separate from the regular student body. I was talking to one of my friends who is an athlete at (another institution), and she lives in like an 8-person suite where four of them were regular students and that like blew my mind. I was like, “what? You’re living with normal students?” And she’s like, “yeah.” I just don’t, that would never, I mean I guess it could happen here I just, we’re all in one place when we first get here for our freshmen season.

George stated that he felt isolated because he and his non-athlete friends are on “two different schedules.” He explained:

As an athlete, you’re not like a normal student where most non-athlete students, they’ll probably sleep in until like 10am or 11am and take classes from 11am to
2pm or 3pm. We’re always up at 8 in the morning. So I’ll try to see if my friend wants to go eat lunch one day and he might say no he can’t because he’s got class when we’re all done with class like most of the student athletes.

Jacob also shared his views on feeling isolated as a student athlete:

I am not involved in anything outside of my team. I would like to be a part if I had more time, but I just cannot seem to get involved in the regular student activities.

Integration of Experiences

Table 4.5 displays the how the integration of the participants’ experiences were broken down to be discussed as part of the analysis. The previous section presented characteristics of the student athlete experience that were mostly exclusive to only their academic, athletic, or social domains. The next section will present the findings of the data analysis where the participants shared their experiences from two or more of their perspectives.
Table 4.5. Relationship of Integrated Experiences by Perspective
### Academic & Athletic Experiences

**Table 4.6. Academic & Athletic Integration**

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<th>Academic Goals &amp; Expectations</th>
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<td>• Integration: Commitments</td>
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While the participants shared many pre-college goals and expectations, transition experiences, and characteristics of the environment from their academic, athletic, and social perspective exclusively, integrated academic and athletic experiences identified some additional areas of inquiry. The only pre-college motivation was to earn a scholarship. There were no unique experiences in the transitional phase from the participants’ academic and athletic perspective; however, the environment included the perception of the faculty, scheduling resources, and the integration of their commitment as a student and as an athlete Table 4.6 displays the themes, codes and subcodes that were described by the participants.
Motivation: Scholarship

When asked about their initial interest in playing a collegiate sport, several of the participants mentioned the opportunity to earn a scholarship. It was interesting to note that some of the participants referred to their scholarship as an academic scholarship while others used the term athletic scholarship. For this reason, the athletic/academic scholarship was considered an integrated academic and athletic pre-college motivation. Regardless of the terminology, the athletes referred to the same financial assistance that often included a combination of financial relief for tuition, books, and housing. When describing his overall experience at the institution as a student athlete, Jacob specifically mentioned his scholarship:

One of the good things is that I don’t pay as much money to go here as other people.

Douglas, who was recruited to the institution very late in the process, expressed his concern to still find a scholarship offer:

A big issue was finding a scholarship because they give scholarships to people that have committed early. And so that was real stressful for me and my family. But I did well enough my senior year to earn a pretty good scholarship to come to here. So we were all happy about that and it just kind of worked out pretty well.

As Fredrick told his story of being recruited to the institution, he specifically mentioned the appeal of earning a scholarship. He stated:
There was this guy that has a (sport) school in (another state) and he came and spoke with us and said there was a possibility to go to the (United) States and help pay your education with scholarship money and kind of started me on to thinking about it. I discussed it with my parents and they obviously didn’t know much about it and I didn’t know much about it, but that kind of set the ball into motion.

Once Fredrick received several offers from institutions in the United States, he explained:

I considered the offers I received and waved those against each other, and what percentages I needed because school out here is a lot more expensive than England so, my family couldn’t afford to fly me back and forth and pay for my school.

When asked how the scholarship system worked, the researcher understood from the participants that individual sports are allotted different numbers of scholarships that are often split amongst all members of the team. When asked to describe the scholarship breakdown for his specific team, Kevin responded, “there are 9.9 scholarships that go around 26 people” adding that it was very rare for an athlete on a non-revenue athletic team to receive a full-scholarship. When asked how the scholarship designation was determined, Kevin explained:

It can get taken away depending on your performance, or how you handle yourself off the field, or how you are in the classroom. And you can get awarded more, like if you come in your freshman year with not so much and you start
every game, they’ll give you more. So there are ebbs and flows of it. It changes from semester to semester.

Perception: Faculty

To remain eligible for competition and to continue to receive scholarship and other benefits associated with athletic participation, student athletes must attend and successfully pass classes while earning credit toward a declared degree program at the institution. Each of the participants described their interactions with their professors as positive experiences in relation to their role as a student athlete. The general concern of the participants was falling behind due to being absent from classes and rescheduling tests and make-up work. However, overall they described that the faculty were understanding of the student athlete and their busy schedules. They explained:

Jacob: Some teachers are a little nicer (to me) I feel like than a regular student and those teachers are pretty cool. They are more understanding of my situation and me missing so many days that sometimes I need extra help.

Barbara: My teachers have been lenient about (traveling/missing class) as long as I keep communicating with them about it.

Irene: I was kind of worried about some issues with professors as a freshman because the first day of class, I literally had to go up to my professor and be like, “I’m missing the second lecture, like I won’t be here” (laughs). And so it’s kind of nerve-wracking. And they were like, “ok, that’s fine, thanks for letting me
And so as long as you’re proactive about letting them know when you’ll be gone, every professor I’ve had has been more than willing to help me along.

Anita: So far I’ve been really lucky, (my professors) have all been really willing to work with me on (traveling/missing class). I have had to make up some tests either before or after, but none of my professors have ever given me any grief about it. They would let me know what they covered to help me get caught up, which was fine.

Barbara: My teachers have always been like, “oh, you can take the test at another time.” Like in my physics class, every single test I had this semester was on a game night. So if I’m at home or away, I would miss the test. So I took every test at a proctoring center. One of them I had to reschedule twice because of (my sport) events and my teacher was so lenient about it.

Carrie: Some of (the faculty members) probably don’t like student athletes so much because we have to miss so much class. And so I think that they get kind of annoyed by it, not that we can do anything about it. I think most teachers they seem to understand that it is hard. At least my teachers this year thought it was cool. They are just like bring the sheet, because we have a sheet to give them for when we are going to be gone. And they just give us the extra information for when we are gone. So at least the teachers I’ve had have been pretty understanding and make it easier.
Fredrick: At (the participating institution), athletics is a big part of the school’s history and the school’s culture, so I feel (the faculty) accept it more.

Some of the participants learned of various faculty and student athlete interactions through the experiences of teammates, coaches, advisors, and others in the academic and athletic communities. While these interactions did not reflect direct lived experiences by the participants, they became more aware of the academic and athletic relationship at the institution. Jacob shared from the perspective of his engineering advisor:

I was told about the engineering teachers when you get farther into the program that most of the teachers don’t care about athletics. Most of them are pretty nerdy, so they don’t care too much about sports. It’s like just make sure you’re in class and keeping up with it.

From the perspective of his athletic coach, Henry shared:

I heard from our coach that at (his previous institution), the professors were really unaccommodating for athletes because they see it as a negative thing if you are an athlete. You’re not just here for academics and it is an academic institution.

Carrie shared one of her teammate’s experiences with a professor that would not allow make-up work:

One of my teammates had to take some class because it was required. She was graduating in December and she was going to miss three quizzes that were a big part of the grade. And on one of the first days, (my teammate) asked if she would
be able to make them up and the teacher said, “no.” So, since she would get zeros on them, she had to take a different class.

Others felt that professors view student athletes the same as they view athletics in general. In some cases this view could have been due to their interest or disinterest in sports altogether while others may realize the place for athletics in higher education. The participants explained:

Henry: If I have a professor that loves football, loves baseball, and watches a lot of sports, I feel that professor would be more understanding with my situation as in missing a lot of class whereas the professor who you can tell maybe likes theater more than watching sports on the weekend, I feel like they are less understanding of my situation.

Douglas: Nobody in the mechanical engineering faculty knows anything about athletics except for one of my professors. He actually loves (my sport) so he asks me about it and everything like that. My other engineering professor could care less. Every time I’d send him an e-mail saying I was going to miss class for a (competition or game), he’d respond with “I don’t think you should go, you’re going to be missing some very crucial material, I would recommend coming to class.” And I was like, “I’m playing a collegiate sport, I don’t really have a choice, it’s not like I’m picking (my sport) over your class, it’s not the same thing.” So I’m pretty sure he thought I was on a club team or an intermural team the first time I e-mailed him (laughs).
Fredrick: I think my professors are really positive just because they understand athletic sports are part of what makes money for the school.

Other participants mentioned that their professors were not only tolerant and willing to work with them through any academic challenges, but were surprisingly interested in their role on their team and how the season progressed. They explained:

Anita: As far as my teachers go, sometimes they’ll be like “how did the game go?” or stuff like that. I haven’t noticed any special treatment from the faculty in a positive or negative way. Sometimes they’ll ask me a couple questions about it.

Barbara: Some of my teachers are interested in me being an athlete and ask me about the games. Others just take my travel excuse slip and they’re onto the next thing.

Jacob: All of the faculty that I have been will ask me how we did or say, “we saw your game.”

**Resource: Scheduling**

Considering the time demands of their athletic, academic, and social responsibilities, all student athletes are given the opportunity to schedule their classes at appropriate times so they are available to practice with their team. During different times of the year, an athletic team may switch from a morning workout session to an afternoon practice session. George described the way the scheduling works for athletes:
We get to sign up for classes a little ahead of everyone so that helps us out a lot. I think we get to sign up with the seniors, that’s how it works. So we get to kind of pick out the classes we need because if were going to register with normal students, we wouldn’t get in the classes at the times we need and we wouldn’t practice as a team, so it helps us out actually academically. Because it gets us to pick the teachers that we want in those classes, things like that.

Despite the opportunity to schedule desirable class times and professors, some student athletes face difficulties when only one section of a course or laboratory is only offered during their scheduled practice time. Irene described her experience:

I haven’t experienced (scheduling conflict) yet, but there’s always a chance I could run into it because especially as you get further along in your major and things get more specific, if I have to take something, I’ll have to take it. We’ve had a couple of girls who have had, you know on like a Tuesday they won’t be at practice because there’s a class and in order to graduate they have to take. And the coaches are really cool about it. They’re like obviously you’re major comes before the (sport) does, so they’re really cool about it and personally I haven’t run into that but I know one of the freshman did this year, and she was freaking out, and she was like, “I have to take a lab and it’s during the practice block.” But you know, if that happens it happens, you can’t really do much about it.

Some academic degree programs posed more difficulties to schedule around athletics.

Upon entering the institution, Barbara discussed different degree programs she was
interested in with her coach and found that some of the degree program schedules were going to be more difficult to manage. She stated:

There was no major where (my coach) was like “you can’t do this major.” I know, the first time I mentioned (civil engineering), he was like, “oh, wow, you’ve got to be really smart” because he knew it would be tough.

Barbara also discussed her major with her athletic advisor:

I actually met with my athletic advisor in (student athlete enrichment services) and when we went through the list of (degree programs), she warned me that (engineering) is going to be tough but they weren’t going to say you can’t do that. If that’s what you want to do that’s what you’ve got to do.

Barbara, Irene, and Henry discussed that some degree programs are not possible for student athletes due to their inflexible schedules of courses and laboratories. They described their experiences below:

Barbara: The only time I realized a major you can’t really do with sports is, one of the freshman, she is a semester ahead, but she was doing landscape architecture and that was going to be her degree and she did a semester of it and ended up looking at her future course-load and they were just like you can’t do it. I guess it’s just the way they schedule things and this, that, and the other thing.

Irene: I got into the nursing program (at the participating institution). And so I went to nursing orientation and then I talked to my advisor over at (student athlete enrichment services) because apparently a lot of the (student athletes) had to go
through this with nursing because it’s kind of impossible to do it with (my sport) because you have clinicals your junior year and traveling with (my sport), you know you’re going to miss and they don’t let you miss those at all.

Henry: (responding to being restricted to a certain major) No, the head coach actually used the academic programs as a recruiting tool to get me but his attitude is that he will let us do whatever we want because, I mean I’ve heard, I’m not sure, but that other schools will really push you to choose one major over another so that you have more time to do sports. From (the participating institution’s) perspective, they will make it known that you’re going to have to work very hard and you’re going to have to be prepared for conflicts, but they support it 100%.

Integration: Commitments

The participants were each asked to define their roles as a student athlete at the participating institution. The researcher felt it would be interesting to investigate how the participants felt about the term ‘student athlete.’ Fredrick began by describing how his time is divided:

In terms of dividing my time in season, it’s 60% athletics, 40% academics. In terms of time per day, I’m doing athletics for 4 hours a day, I’m probably doing the same kind of thing academically, but then everything else I’m doing in terms of my life is related to athletics. In terms of looking after my body, eating the right things, thinking about it. In the off-season, I’d say it’s more fifty-fifty.
Henry had an interesting perspective as he felt his role changed depending on where he was and how he was involved. He explained:

As for a student athlete or athlete-student, I think it depends on what building you’re in (laughs). If I’m over in athletics, it’s athlete-student. If I’m on campus, it’s student athlete. It’s the people that you’re interacting with. It’s like their perspective and their priorities are what they define you as. That is a big part of my life and athletes’ lives.

Jacob and Carrie felt they were athlete-students. They stated:

Carrie: I definitely think it’s an athlete-student. I think it’s funny because our coaches always say academics comes first but a lot of other times it seems like it’s the other way around, which is fine. I think they say academics come because obviously they have to say that. But a lot of times, it’s like I don’t really think they think that, I think it’s more they think that athlete comes first. I mean our coach has said that (my sport) is a class essentially which I would definitely agree with that.

Jacob: At the end of the day, (athletic personnel) say that school is important, but I think the athletes come first. It’s like even if I have a higher GPA than someone who’s playing or a captain on the team, I’m not going to go before him. So I just feel like they’ll say school is important, but I feel like at the end of the day, I’m here for my athletic role since I’m on a team and those standards have to be met
or raised above the standard. And then school-wise, it could be pretty standard, just as long as I’m not violating any NCAA code or anything, I should be good.

Kevin suggested that he was a student athlete, but realistically he wanted to be an athlete-student as his first dream was to go play his sport professionally and to fall back on a degree if not. He stated:

I invest the majority of my time in (my sport) but I obviously take into account that I have to make good grades because when you have an interview when you’re older, they’re going to look at what you’ve done in school too, it’s not like, “oh, he played a college sport, we’re going to hire him.” That’s not how it works. Some people may get that or think that, I don’t know, it would be ignorant for them to think that which is pretty stupid. We do have a hard time doing internships and whatnot due to our sport.

Irene recalled a seminar where the topic of student athlete and athlete-student came up in the conversation. She stressed the importance of keeping those two roles in balance. She explained:

It’s important not to be an athlete-student because if you don’t pass your classes, you can’t play. That’s some people’s motivation. But yeah, the athlete student thing, my parents were like, “you better put your academics first” and I’ve heard it all of my life and when you get here you kind of realize how important it is because yeah, you love your sport, but if you don’t have the academics, you can’t do your sport.
While the participants shared many pre-college goals and expectations, transitions, and characteristics of the environment exclusively from their academic, athletic, and social perspectives, only previous connections at the institution, their personal adjustment to the physical fitness of college sport, and attributes of the student athletes’ identity on their athletic teams in on the campus were shared from the perspective of the academic and social experience. Table 4.7 displays the themes, codes and subcodes that were described by the participants.

**Pre-College Goals & Expectations: Connections**

Arriving in a new place as an incoming freshman with no prior relationships or connections can be discomforting. The participants for this study came to the institution from as close as a few miles away to as far as crossing international borders. To ease the
social transition before arriving on campus, Kevin shared that many of his teammates met and communicated through social media. He stated:

A lot of us, like once we committed, found each other on social media, to kind of connect a little bit before we got here. So I’d like Facebook message them or whatever and say, “Hey, when you get here” and stuff, start small talk.

While not all of the participants in this study had previous connections at the institution, several of the participants described their previous relationships with coaches, friends, teammates, and family members. Barbara and Irene shared about their previous relationship with the head coach of their sport:

Barbara: Since I already knew (the head coach), when I found out he got the job (at the participating institution), I like jumped on it. That was a good opportunity for me to be with a team that is going to be getting better and to have a coach that I’m familiar with.

Irene: (My head coach) was my (former) coach and so he’d seen me play. I made a regional team and went out of the country with him and he was my coach there. I also knew him when he was at (his previous institution) and so when I heard he was coming (to the participating institution), he got me on an official visit, and so I was like, “okay.”

Barbara also shared that she had previous relationships with their teammates. She described her experience:
I knew, one of the girls was on my (previous) team, she actually ended up transferring but I knew another girl from (my previous team). So it was kind of a good transition in that regard because in (my sport’s) world, you know everyone. Like I even knew one of the other girls because she played on my (previous) team. So I had met her. So that was an easy transition in terms of meeting the team.

Several of the participants shared previous relationships they had with friends and family that were already attending the institution. It was interesting to note how some of the participants referenced how seldom they see these friends due to their involvement in athletics and academics. They shared:

Kevin: I had one good friend that came here and probably about 20 people from my high school class that went here. So a lot of them stayed local but I don’t really see them much on campus, because we’re both busy I guess.

Carrie: Yeah, there’s a couple people from my hometown that come here but I don’t see them very often.

Erica: Well my cousin does go here and I have yet to see during school (laughs) just because (my sport) is so hectic.

Irene: My best friend is actually here. She’s in the honors college. She doesn’t play sports but yeah, it was nice how she got to come here too. And there’s a guy that’s a year younger than me that went to my high school that is here now too.
George: In high school, I kind of had my mind set that I want to go to (the participating institution), like I want to do everything I can to get here and play here because I have tons of friends that came here as well. Socially, my best friend, he’s non-athlete and came here which is a huge plus to have him around here.

Both Anita and Erica shared similar stories about how they came to the institution not knowing anyone. Since Anita committed late and Erica transferred from another institution, they both missed out on meeting their teammates during the recruiting visit. They explained:

Anita: It was a little nerve-racking at first because I didn’t know anyone. I think there was only one person that I knew from (my hometown) that came to (the participating institution) and we weren’t really even that good of friends. Since I committed so late and my class had already met, I didn’t really know any of them either, so I was just kind of coming without even meeting anyone before.

Erica: I think that it was hard coming in because I didn’t know anyone. When I went to my first college, I did know a good portion of the girls that were going to be on the team and the coach there had coached me on my state team. So I was just surrounded by people I knew and they knew my personality and that was easier. My cousin wasn’t up here at the time for summer school and my closest relatives are like two hours away so it wasn’t a trip that I was willing to take. But just taking classes, moving in with 3 girls that I had never met before, and
normally the coaches will have you come in for an official visit and then you’ll get to meet the other recruits, but I didn’t get to be a part of that because I had just transferred and it was so late. So I guess just not knowing anyone made it pretty hard because they didn’t know my personality and I’m really shy, so I’m not really going to be the first person to come up and start a conversation or start anything, so that was kind of hard.

**Adjustment: Personal Fitness**

Kevin, George, and Douglas shared that they found the personal fitness to be a challenge when they first arrived at the institution. Douglas described the freshman summer school session as a time “to beef them up for the pre-season.” When asked about their level of fitness, they responded:

George: When I first came in, I was kind of scrawny and stuff, and so that helped me put on some weight and to see what I was getting into.

Douglas: I definitely wasn’t athletic enough, I needed to get there which I did, I progressed there so at least I can play with these guys, hang with these guys. So my style of play, integrating my skill with the athleticism, and that’s still a challenge now, I’m still working at it, getting fitter, getting to the point where I can really bring my athleticism to the same level of my skill to really reach my potential as a player.

Kevin:
As far as expectations coming in, I thought I would play. I told myself I was going to play and I just kept staying positive. I went home over the summer before my freshman year, got a workout packet, killed everything, came in, was one of the fittest kids here. I’m trying to take care of my body in every way I can just to try and give me an advantage.

**Identity: Pride**

When the participants described their perspective of the institution from when they made their official recruiting visit, several mentioned that they noticed the athletic pride coming from non-athlete students, student athletes, and others in and around the campus community. Barbara stated, “To me, (the participating institution) was about pride and school spirit!” Others explained:

Anita: Well, especially (where I’m from), it’s hard to find schools that have such a tight knit community and everyone is so involved. I mean everywhere you go within miles and miles is all about (the participating institution) and everyone comes to all the games and everything and so that was real neat to me.

Barbara noticed the athletic pride from the high quality of the athletic facilities. She described:

I mean there’s like mahogany wood in our locker rooms. I mean that to me was like so cool. Everything was just decked out in (our school colors), like the pride and whatnot. So I think I was really in awe by that. I was like this is it. I’m going here. And I’m happy I chose it.
Identity: Role-Model

When discussing roles and responsibility, many of the participants described they feel as if they are role models for the rest of the student body. They stated:

Anita: Well they always talk to us about how we represent our team and ourselves and our campus and our school because we are role-models. We must make sure when we are on or off that field that we are having a good attitude and doing and making the right decisions.

Henry: I think we represent the school. I think we definitely have to be more cautious with our actions and words.

Fredrick: As an athlete, you are held to high standards in terms of socially and ethically. You can’t go obviously out on a Wednesday or Thursday night and have a bender.

Identity: Leadership

Several of the participants expressed their development of leadership skills due to their participation in college athletics. When the participants mentioned the word leadership, the researcher asked them to describe their leadership roles in more detail. They explained below:

George: I think leadership is one of the main opportunities that athletics has given me because I mean, being a part of a team like this, we’re around these guys and we have to do our best everyday and we have to push others to do their best
everyday to get where the team wants to go. And I feel like that’s a huge opportunity for us because with those skills, that will help us in the workforce when most other kids our age probably aren’t doing that.

Henry: Since I’ve gotten here, our team has developed a leadership group. There are six of us that meet with coach each week where he recognizes leaders of the team. I’ve been in that since I’ve gotten here and gotten into that leadership role because I’ve opened up more and created better relationships with the kids on the team and the coaches and just the people on campus and stuff like that. So I’ve definitely been able to open myself up more and worry about others as well as just myself. So I’ve developed my relationships with them. It’s hard to explain. I just feel like I have more of a life than before.

Kevin: I kind of took a leadership role when I got here. I hold people accountable. It’s the way you talk to people I guess, not really what you say but how you say it. And there’s a way to get people to do things and I think a majority of that stuff I can do. I like to lead by example too. Like if you’re given a summer packet for athletics, I’m going to go back and do and it and say, “hey, it works, like I encourage you to do it, it helps out a lot.” I try to bring people up but humble people too. So like I’ll hold people to that standard but I also want them to hold me to that standard too. I’m not going to take it defensively, it’s more like, “hey you care about me.” You’ve got to look at it in a way of like, “I want you to succeed so I’m giving you the honest truth so you can develop faster.” So I
guess I kind of have a mature attitude about that because I know some of the older
guys would take things defensively and the biggest problem would be that they
wouldn’t want to hear it from a freshman, they wouldn’t want to hear it from a
sophomore, but the reality is, before I came here, they had 5-win seasons, or 6-
win seasons. And I don’t want that. Like I won’t be smiling after a 5-win season.
I don’t care individually if I play good and we win 5 games, I’d be the saddest kid
you’ve seen. Well, I won’t be sad, but deep down I won’t be satisfied, that’s no
good.

**Integration: Social Circles**

When investigating the social circles of student athletes, the researcher asked the
participants who they hang out with, why they hang out with them, and what they do
when they’re hanging out together in social settings? To begin, they described their
social interactions as:

Kevin: Nine times out of ten times, I’m usually going out with somebody on the
team. Everybody on the team is pretty tight because we’re a small enough team.

Anita: I have a couple of other girl friends like on other sports teams but mainly
it’s just like my team and we typically hang out with other athletes. I know
maybe a couple of non-athletes from classes and stuff like that, but I don’t
typically hang out with them outside of class.

Fredrick: I socialize almost exclusively with other athletes.
George: I hang out with some friends from high school still that are non-athletes but I mostly hang out with guys on the team. My best friend from high school and some of his roommates and people he lives with now are mostly guys I hang out with. And then there are some good friends that I’ve made through some of my classes that I’ll go eat lunch or dinner with and we’ll hang out.

Barbara and Douglas shared social experiences from the perspective of non-athletes in their courses. While they described their friendships with classmates, they also recognized that they did not hang out with them during other times. They explained:

Douglas: I don’t really have any friends outside of the engineering denomination, like that is who I spend time with. I don’t even think I know anybody in another major except for the kids on my team. And that’s just the way it is. It’s kind of like the same things as athletics, all athletes know each other and all engineers kind of know of who each other is. We don’t hang out outside of class though.

Barbara: I don’t have any other athletes in my classes so you’d think oh maybe I would make some friends, but class is not like a social atmosphere really. So I met two girls, one of them was my chemistry lab partner and another one was my physics lab partner. So it ended up I made friends with them because you’re in a three-hour class with them so you have to make friends. So when I’m going to class, I’m texting them like “oh where are you going to sit” and then we socialize in class, but I have never hung out with them outside of class.
After hearing the participants’ social experiences, the researcher investigated as to why they seemed to only hang with student athletes. Their responses are below:

Anita: Well, definitely my team is who I am consistently with.

Kevin: I’m really hanging out around (athletic facilities) all the time. Basically I feel like I’m here more than a lot of other places, I’m here more than I’m in class or whatever. I’m not complaining, I kind of like it. And everybody is close

Irene: We just find ourselves around each other all of the time because a majority of us live in (athletic facilities).

Barbara: I only socialize with the team just because I don’t really know anyone else. The good thing about being a student athlete is that everyone is pretty much on that same page. It’s not like every opportunity there is to go and party we want to go party. Or it’s not like we’re destined or set on going out all the time. Everyone is pretty much on the same page where we are fine watching a movie or things like that. So a little different in that, it’s good to be around people that are the same.

Douglas: You know who each other are. You meet everyone at your freshman athletic orientation and everyone is in study hall together so you get to know your sophomore class pretty well.

George: And when we come in during the summer, we know the football kids and become friends with them because we’re around them all the time. And I
think that’s kind of a cool aspect to the whole thing, is like we get to hang out and we’re friends with the football kids and we get to see them as our friends going to compete in other sports and they’ll come watch us compete in our sports as friends, not just like fans cheering hoping they do their best and if they mess up, you know how fair-weather fans are, and if you mess up, it’s like, “oh my gosh, I’m so mad, like why do you do that?” But with us, it’s like they’re our friend, we want him to do well and we hope he does well and it’s just kind of a different aspect than what most people get from football games. It’s like we’re going to see our friends when most people are going to see it as fans, which is kind of a cool aspect of it.

The researcher also asked the participants what they do when they socialize with others. Their responses:

Barbara: We go out to eat. We have parties. We do parties with our team and usually other athletes show up.

Kevin: My freshman year, we played a lot of XBOX. We played a lot of NBA2K. A lot of the football players would come over and we’d play that and just talk crap to each other and it was fun, just to kind of get away from things. After a game, after we win, we may go out together as a team. We usually go out and we’ll stay together at one of the guys’ houses and we’ll usually have house parties where other athletes show up. That’s the thing, when you have a house party and you’re an athlete, most of the time, it’s other athletes who come so
usually. It’s social life but it’s not the same social life as the campus life because I still don’t know a lot of the other people on campus. And that’s just different I guess.

Some of the participants described their team in terms of it serving them socially the same way a sorority or fraternity serves non-athlete students. They explained:

Carrie: Yeah, my team is basically my sorority. I don’t have many friends that are not within that student athlete part just because I don’t know regular students. They meet each other through classes and stuff, and I have friends that are athletes in my classes so I just don’t branch out to regular students. And like being in a sorority or a fraternity where regular students are, that’s how they make a ton of friends. I don’t meet anyone that way. And living, we live around all athletes, and regular students live with regular students, so that’s how they make more friends.

Erica: I think of my (sport) team as a sorority in a way. I do a lot of stuff with the team. We all hang out a lot. But we all live together. There’s definitely some girls I hang out with on the team more than others, but I hang out with a lot of student athletes, like golf and other sports, but mainly student athletes. I know people that are in my major that I’ve just met taking classes but a lot of them are part of the sororities or fraternities and they have their own little thing I guess. But since we are either in-season or out-of-season, (my sport) is really the major focus. And it takes up a lot of time.
Kevin: I don’t need to be in a fraternity because I’m with 25 other guys that I’m here with everyday and like closer than a lot of other people will be, which is cool. And I’ll look back too when I’m older and talk about it, and if we ever have a reunion or anything, it will be fun to talk about all the stuff that did happen, they didn’t think about this happening now, they think about it later, which is cool.
While the participants shared many pre-college goals and expectations, transitions, and characteristics of the environment exclusively from their academic, athletic, and social perspectives, the participants discussed only the adjustment to summer school and the adjustment from summer to fall as integrated academic and social experiences. Table 4.8 displays the themes, codes and subcodes that were described by the participants.

**Adjustment: Summer School**

When Fredrick first came to the institution for his freshman summer school session, he described his experience:

So I went straight into classes, straight into working out with the team, meeting the team and stuff. So I think I was so busy initially having to do jobs and jobs...
and sort little silly things out, I had to get myself medically cleared, I had to get
registered for classes, go do get the study halls sorted out. There are so many
things to do I think I was so busy for the first month I kind of forgot about
missing home, it didn’t cross my mind.

Kevin and Barbara were glad that their athletic advisor had already set up their classes for
them. They explained:

Kevin: My schedule was already built so I just used that just to see where the
buildings were and where my classes were. It was cool to take it in the summer
too because there were like 6 people in my class so it wasn’t nerve-wracking at
all, I knew everybody in my class. Our athletic advisor put several of us in the
same class and then he put others in other classes to kind of help each other.

Barbara: Well, we met with our advisor when we were on our visit. So we knew
who she was and had been communicating with her as she set us up in our classes
before we even got here. So I already kind of had a relationship with her. I ended
up having classes with the other freshmen. I had like a music class with one of
them, and then an English class with another…it was nice having them in my
classes in the summer, it made things easier.

Irene appreciated the opportunity to knock some credits out of the way prior to her first
full college semester. She stated:

Academically, I’m really glad I did summer school because I was able to get 6
hours under my belt before, because the summer was a little more relaxed. You
got some classes out of the way. I feel like I wouldn’t have been near as
prepared as if I came in during the fall, because freshman fall is an adjustment just
because you’re having all the workouts, and then just like all the traveling and
having to miss and communicating with your professors, and so I was really glad
I came in during the summer and I started out with a 4.0 (GPA) because summer
classes are a little more, you know, not as challenging. So I’m really glad I did
that and I feel like I made that adjustment really well.

When asked about her experience during her first summer session, Anita responded:

Summer school helped just to like get used to where the buildings were and kind
of how classes worked.

**Adjustment: Summer To Fall**

Some of the participants mentioned the night and day difference they experienced
from the summertime to the fall. Jacob stated:

Summer socially was empty. Nobody is on campus obviously so it feels a lot
boring and it’s a lot different than what an actual semester, the fall semester is.

Fredrick and Barbara were also taken aback once the summer ended and all of the
students came back to the campus. They explained:

Fredrick: I thought that summer was what campus was always going to be like. It
more hit me in fall when it started when I thought, “oh wow, there’s a lot of
people here” because I thought it was going to be just like summer the whole
time.
Barbara: I remember coming in, I was like where are all the people? There is no one here!

**Academic, Athletic, & Social Experiences**

Table 4.9. Academic, Athletic, & Social Integration

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While the participants shared many pre-college goals and expectations, transitions, and characteristics of the environment exclusively from their academic, athletic, and social perspectives, the participants discussed some of their experiences from all three perspectives of their experiences. While they did not mention any pre-college goals or expectations from all three perspectives, they did discuss how building relationships assisted in their transition and adjustment to the institution and several environmental characteristics. Table 4.9 displays the themes, codes and subcodes that were described by the participants and which are described in more detail below.
Adjustment: Building Relationships

During the summer transition period, the participants mentioned being introduced to the rigor of college courses and getting to know their teammates and other athletes before their seasons began. Carrie described her experience in the summer:

In the summer, we don’t have any mandatory practices. It’s all kind of optional. I only had one class in the summer because the other one was online, so I’d just go to that class in the morning. We could work out whenever we wanted, so I would work-out before my class and then go to class, and then I’d just have the rest of the day to pretty much hang out.

Anita also mentioned the fun she’d have with her free time just to “hang out” with her teammates:

When it was warm out, sometimes we’d go to the pool or the lake or something like that. And then when a lot of our team started to get here, we would play in the afternoons sometimes. But other than that, we would just kind of hang out.

The other participants also shared similar stories about their summer experiences:

Douglas: The time I came in during the summer was a really good idea, that made everything so much easier going into the school year because I was comfortable on campus, comfortable with teammates, and making friends and talking to people was a lot easier.

Erica: I think the summer, like the whole entire summer, it took me that long to really get to know the girls, and I think it was really good that I got to come in the
second session of summer school because if I would have just come in right at
pre-season not knowing anyone, that would have been awful. And so, the
summer really gave me the opportunity to know the team.

Since Henry finished his high school career a semester early, he was able to enroll
at the participating institution a semester early. He described his experience:
And so my first year, I came a semester early so I really didn’t do a lot of the
regular integration stuff like the freshmen that come in in the fall do, like courses
over the summer. I ended up doing the transfer student stuff so I was in for two
weeks with guys who were transferring in for their grad stuff. So that was kind of
scary being right out of high school.

Perception: Athletic Personnel

The participating athletes each expressed how their coaches and other athletic
personnel were very supportive of academics along with their athletic roles. The
participants explained:

Irene: Our coaches are pretty understanding of our academic commitments.
Classes have got to come first and the coaches are really supportive of that.

Fredrick: I know a lot of my other athlete friends, I won’t name sports, but their
coaches don’t care about academics. And if they say, “I’ve got a tutor at 7.”
“Well practice isn’t over until 7:30 so you can’t go to your tutor.” Whereas our
coach, if we have a tutor at 7, you leave at 6:35 or 6:40 and you get to your tutor.
But obviously you don’t schedule tutors at that time ideally, but if that’s the only
time it will work, then so be it. So again, by emphasizing to the schools that they should hire coaches that value education, that can kind of go a ways to helping or keeping the student part of the student athlete alive.

Henry: (Our coach) actually bases our practice schedule off of the three engineers on the team. Since our class schedule is so rigid, he looks at all of our stuff and then he makes the practice block, like the times for the spring, and then he tells the rest of the team when they can arrange. I’ve literally gotten the block before, “okay, here’s the week we want to have in the spring, schedule around it.” I’ve literally gone in and said, “listen, unless I want to change majors or wait an entire year to take these classes, I can’t do this.” And so the next day, he’s literally switched it all around and sent out a new one just because of my schedule. And I know he’s done the same for other engineers on the team as well. But there will always be a little bit of an overlap between the three of us and the practice schedule but he looks at us to get it all right.

Perception: Non-Athlete Students

The participating athletes each expressed how their non-athlete students they interacted with on campus in classes or out in the community were confused in some cases as to how the athletes can compete in a sport and yet still have time to get their coursework done. They explained:

Carrie: I definitely think that (non-athlete students) don’t understand how hard it is to be a student athlete and to just get all of our work done and just balancing everything, I don’t think they really understand.
Douglas: So yeah, I get people that think I’m insane, like everyday, they think I’m insane. But I’m fine, fine by me, I like it so I’m going to stick with it. People are amazed that I have made it this far. I mean I’m a year and a half in, most people, most normal students do not last this long in engineering. But people respect it.

George described an opposite feeling from the non-athlete student perspective as if he has an easier time with academics due to his status as a student athlete. He explained:

From the student’s aspect, I think they feel like we have it way easier than them but I don’t think they realize that we’re doing work while we’re traveling and turning it in. It’s not like we’re taking days off and we don’t have to make up the work. I think non-athlete students have a bad perception of us, like, “oh they just hand them their grades” which is not true at all. We have to work twice as hard. We’ll have to work on the bus ride home from a game to turn in our work the next day and I think the non-athlete students don’t realize the work we have to do outside of class just to stay with them because they’re going to fast.

Some of the participants shared their experience of making friends in their classes so they could study or work together; however, student athletes expressed they do have their fair share of difficulties due to their time commitments and travel schedules. In some cases the participants did not have any other student athletes in their classes either. They explained:
Jacob: Sometimes I get screwed over because when they are ready to schedule and meet, I can’t be there because of practice or whatever or maybe even in a game, so besides, I think one time I was in I think chemistry, and I had a group that I barely met with and that messed with my average a little bit because they ratted me out for not doing as much work (laughs). But besides that, everybody is pretty cool about it and understanding and support me.

Douglas: I have my engineering friends because I have to make them. Engineers do not get by alone. They always, you know you have a group or you have someone looking at your work. Engineering is kind of odd because you think engineers as a nerdy kid on his own doing work but in reality it is very hard to figure out and do everything yourself.

Barbara: I’m in engineering and there’s only one other girl on the team that’s doing engineering. No athletes are in my classes and that has kind of been difficult. It makes me feel really secluded because I’m like, “Okay, I don’t know anyone and I don’t have any connections in the engineering school and I don’t have any opportunity to have a connection for an internship and this, that, and the other, which I probably wouldn’t be able to do because I have (my sport), you know what I mean?” But for other people that are in majors that have athletes in their classes, they can socialize with the people they know. I’m sure for them it’s not as big of a deal.
Erica: Well, I had a class this semester and one of my teammates was in it and a baseball player was in it. And we sat together and studied together. And from day one, we sat together and I don’t think I even talked to anyone else in that class. And that sounds awful but I guess just because we all know or understand how much time we have to put into practices and then school and going to class, so I feel like it’s kind of a comfort thing when I see another student athlete in my class that I know, I’m probably going to go sit by them and we’re probably going to study together just because we have a better understanding. I had to do a couple of group projects with people that aren’t student athletes in my classes and I think they definitely respect the fact that I have to put in so much for (my sport) with practices, but when we’ve had to meet for projects and things like that I’m not as available, and I think that’s kind of frustrating for them.

Irene: The bigger gen ed classes have a lot of student athletes, like your biology and stuff like that that have like 300 people in it. I’m in a Psych course right now and I have a lot of student athlete friends in there. But there’s typically one in every class.

Some of the participants shared other perceptions from the non-athlete students. They described:

Henry: I stand out more I guess, well I’m the kid that is known that’s missing all the time in my engineering classes, because you know we’ll play a game on Tuesday and leave Monday and come back like Wednesday afternoon, so I’ll miss
three days out of the week, like every week almost. So, you know, and there’s only like 15 to 20 kids in most of my classes, so I’m known as the kid that just shows up every once and a while.

Fredrick: I’d say, as general student athletes, I think it varies from the team that you are in. I feel like people who maybe play football are perceived as being in class just to stay eligible to play, which in some cases is probably true. I feel like in our sport where it’s not quite as prestigious, we kind of have more of an obligation to be good on the academic side. So I would say the way we are perceived is being pretty good in the classroom. Personally, I’d like to think that I was not recognized as just being a stupid jock athlete, which may be the perception. I think most people on our team could have gotten into (the participating institution) on academics alone. They would have been eligible to get in. Obviously they wouldn’t have the scholarships but I think we have a pretty smart team. I don’t think I would be perceived as being lazy. I think a lot of people that I have class with would probably, I’d like to think they appreciate making good grades despite being gone a lot.

**Integration: Team Goals**

The participants each discussed their team goals from the perspective of their academic, athletic, and social experiences. George described how the three goals of his team were focused in all three of the perspectives:

We’ve got academic team goals, social team goals, and then (athletic) team goals. Academically we all want our team GPA to be above a 3.0. Socially, don’t get in
trouble with the law is definitely the main thing. And then in (my sport), we have team goals. This year it was to make it to the NCAA Tournament, which we accomplished. We made it to the Final Four of (our athletic conference tournament) which we accomplished and we wanted to win the (conference title). We would’ve liked to have done that but we didn’t accomplish that goal. But that’s alright. We’re definitely getting better.

Academically, Jacob and Kevin expanded on the goals that their coach set for their team. They explained:

Jacob: Since we’re on a team, we have a team goal of like 3.0 GPA or a 3.1. If I were a regular student, I wouldn’t have to have a certain GPA. As long as I pass, I’m still going to be an engineer, whether I have an A or a B or whatever. So that makes me work harder despite all the busyness.

Kevin: Our goal for the fall was to have a 3.0 average and that makes the academic award for the country. By making the list, our coach showed us the correlations between, I think he said the 35 of the 48 teams that made the tournament, or at least 30 something teams usually make that requirement, they usually have over a 3.0 average and (my coach) says basically how they correlate to success.

Fredrick explained how the coaches hold the athletes to a standard by setting academic goals. He stated:
I know some people on our team say that if I were a non-athlete, my grades would be bad. My grades aren’t terrible but they could probably be better. And I know some people that say the opposite. They say if they weren’t on the team, they wouldn’t care and they would go out on their Wednesday and Thursday benders and their grades would fall because no one held them to that standard. So I think it evens itself out overall in terms of if you have a standard, like we have academic goals for the team, you don’t want to let your teammates down by not reaching those goals but if you weren’t a part of the team, those goals wouldn’t exist and you wouldn’t care as much. So it’s just about yourself and that helps you more. So I think we are held to different standards but in a positive way.

The participants shared a few team goals that unique to their athletic teams but from a social perspective. Irene shared that her team would “go out as a team to five other sporting events throughout the year” to show support for her fellow student athletes. A few of the participants also shared their team goals to take part in a variety of community service projects. They explained:

Henry: We do a good bit of community service and stuff so I guess we kind of have a role in creating a good image for (the participating institution). We do it during the “random acts of kindness days” where we split up in teams and we do cool stuff, video it, and bring it back to watch together with the team. Some of us will go set-up the freshmen dinner out in front of the president’s house. So we had like 4 guys that went and did that. And just because they volunteer their time, the president had them in his house for dinner that night. A couple of us, we got
balloons and did balloon animals and stuff downtown and were just giving them to kids. And other things like that.

Irene: We did peer tutoring and Special Olympics and stuff and it’s really something that I find fulfillment from. So there’s things around that you don’t really think of that you just kind of run into just because there’s so much to do here.

**Demands: Time Management**

Each of the participants stressed that time management was among the most important lessons they learned in their first year as a student athlete. Many of the athletes in this study talked about the challenge of balancing their time in relation to academic and athletic requirements and social activities. They explained:

Anita: With (my sport), it’s obviously a huge time commitment so there are some times when you have to put in extra work and some times that’s hard when you have things to do for class or something else is going on. So just making sure you’re committed to putting that time in has been a little bit of a challenge.

Carrie: So during the season when we would have practice, it was like we were there for 7 hours and you only have 2 hours of class. So, at first, it was hard to manage when I would do my work and when I wanted to sleep more. But it’s not as hard as you would think as long as you just manage your time well and get your stuff done and don’t wait until the last minute.
Several of the participants compared their experiences as student athletes with the experiences of non-athlete students. Anita suggested:

It is a little difficult (being a student athlete) sometimes because you might not always feel like you’re getting the typical college experience like a lot of the other normal students who don’t have all the time commitments that we do. But it is still rewarding in its own way.

Some of the participants implied that if they were not student athletes, they would be “bored” with all of the extra time on their hands. They explained:

Douglas: I don’t see how (non-athlete students) do it honestly because I feel I’d be so bored and I’d have so much time, I wouldn’t know what to do with myself. I guess if you don’t play sports, they don’t understand how we do it. And I don’t think this is just for me, I think this is from everyone that plays a sport here. I don’t know how they live without something like that. So it’s the best thing. I guess I don’t know anything else and it’s impacted me well because it’s what I know and it’s what I like and I wouldn’t change it.

Barbara: I’m one of those people that if I have free time, I don’t even know what to do with it. I definitely don’t have as much time as normal students do. Maybe for other people it would be easier if they had more time, but for me, I’ve always been someone who gets bored if I don’t have something to do or when I have free time. I’m like, “I don’t even know what to do with myself right now.” I’m one of those people that doesn’t really know how to relax.
Henry: I haven’t really known any other college life besides the one that I have and I like the one that I have. I mean I couldn’t see myself not giving the amount of time to play in a sport. I think I’d be bored if I didn’t.

Erica: I don’t think I could handle not being a student athlete just like how college kids go out all the time during the week and everything, I couldn’t even imagine. I barely get out on the weekends. And then all the time they have to do their homework, I wouldn’t know what to do with all that time. So I feel like if I wasn’t a student athlete, I would probably play a club sport just because I couldn’t deal with not filling my time with something.

Demands: Role-Balance

Each of the participants expressed how they must balance their role of being a student, and athlete, and in some cases, a person with a social life away from academics or athletics. To begin, Irene stated, “my experience is definitely different than any normal student just because you have to balance a lot of things.” As far as the balance between academic and athletics, the participants expressed their difficulties keeping things in balance. They explained:

Henry: It’s just really hard to give maximum effort in both school and (my sport). I mean I came a long way from home. My main focus here is school and (my sport). And I think they both take us so much time that’s just so hard to balance because you know I’ll have one week where we have a huge game, and I’ll just be focused on (my sport) and then my school suffers so much. And then the next
week, I’m like, “oh no, I’ve got 2 tests” so even at practice, all I’m thinking about is that I need to study this and that, whatever, and I don’t play as well. So I think the biggest challenge is just being able to give maximum effort to both.

Irene: Well I’ve definitely given up on social life with anyone except for my teammates because we’re not around as much. We’re just with each other basically 24/7. But I’ve also gained how to kind of work, I don’t want to say work other friends into my schedule but just being able to plan things out better and be more on top of things so that I do have more free time to do things, like go to church and stuff like that.

Kevin: I think you make sacrifices when you play a sport and a lot of people think it’s real easy I guess, that athletes have it easy, but like you sacrifice social life and you sacrifice a lot of that stuff in order to play (a sport), but I mean, it’s give and take sometimes.

In some cases, the participants identified other roles they have beyond their academic and athletic roles. They explained:

Barbara: It’s pretty much school, (my sport), keeping up with my family, teammate is a big one. A lot of what we have addressed this season is coming closer as a team and looking out for one another.

Jacob: So it’s probably like family comes first, I always want to know if anything happens, and I’ll be there. Like my uncle passed away at the beginning of the season. And I had a game that weekend, our first game, and I ended up going to
the funeral instead. I always feel like family should come first. And then (my sport). And then school. And then probably my girlfriend. And my girlfriend usually comes before school (laughs), but besides that.

**Identity: Responsibility**

The participants also discussed their responsibility from their academic, athletic, and social perspectives. Kevin shared his thoughts on going out downtown before turning the age of 21:

When I’m going out, I worry about normal students whenever they have a fake-ID or whatever. I’m not going to take the risk of having one of those, go downtown and get an MIP (minor in possession) and potentially get kicked off the team for one night you know. You’ve got everything and lose it all in one day.

Kevin also shared an experience where he happened to make a wrong decision when in fact he felt like he wasn’t doing anything too wrong. He shared:

I guess the key to (responsibility) is making right and wrong decisions, when you can do stuff and when you can’t. So like when you can go out. So making decisions on when you can do stuff and when you can’t do stuff, kind of like knowing how the system will work and knowing when you can do stuff and when you can’t. Like I would like to go play basketball at (campus recreation facility) and obviously I played like 2 or 3 times last year. So I would go and play at there in the fall. I would play on like an off day when I should have been resting my body, it was kind of an immature thing I guess but you learn that too, and you
learn that you should go do that in the spring, so you can save that and just wait three more months and go play in the spring.

Anita and Jacob also shared their experiences of having to sacrifice a time to go out but instead stayed in and rested for the upcoming competition. They shared:

Anita: We have to be responsible, like we have a game in 2 days so we should just lay low. So definitely it makes you responsible to be responsible all the time because we are role-models for the campus. So, sometimes you always have to take that into account.

Jacob: So a tradeoff I have to make is definitely going out. I’m practicing a lot so I don’t get a lot of chance to like party and do a lot of that stuff because we have a game the next day or whatever so you can’t drink, you know what I mean? Or you can’t hang out too late with friends or whatever. So that’s one thing.

Chapter Summary

The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of first-year freshman student athletes’ as they transition into the institution. Additionally, the researcher sought to understand what experiences were integrated and how integration impacted their overall experience as they transferred into the institution as student athletes. This chapter outlined the findings of the research study by breaking it down into different stages. First, the chapter presented experiences exclusive to the participants’ academic, athletic, and social perspectives. These experiences, as further discussed in Chapter Five, were not considered to be as significant in explaining the overall experience of student athletes
as were the experiences that were integrated by two or all three perspectives. Each of the participants’ experiences were categorized and presented in an organized fashion to present their “lived experience” (Crestwell, 1998, p.52).

The next chapter discusses the results of the study according to the theoretical framework as well as a summary of the research findings. It also concludes the study by suggesting ideas for future research in the field and implications for theory and practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

There are a number of student retention and persistence models that have examined the student experience in relation to academic support programs, but have been primarily focused on a subgroup of athletes (e.g. African American male athletes) (Radcliffe, Huesman, & Kellogg, 2006). This research addresses the need for educational leaders to direct new and current resources toward programs that aim to integrate freshman student athletes into the life of the institution, thereby promoting a positive and well-rounded first-year experience. This study was qualitative, phenomenological in nature, and focused on the unique group of student athletes because they face numerous complexities to their schedules yet are also offered special resources to assist them. This chapter discusses the findings of the study related to the theories addressed in Chapter Three. After the summary of research findings are presented, this research concludes by offering recommendations to help administrators and policymakers consider both academic and non-academic factors in the design and implementation of retention efforts (Lotkowski, Robins, & Noeth, 2004) and methods of enhancing their overall experience at the institution. Implications for policy and practice are outlined as well as recommendations for future research.

Discussion According to Theory

This study aimed to form an understanding of the experiences of first-year student athletes as they transitioned into institutions of higher education. The theoretical
framework of this study utilized the ideas of four theorists, Tinto (1987), Astin (1984), Schlossberg (1981), and Chickering (1969). Each of the theorists offered a slightly different way to view the data to produce an explanation of significant elements of the participants’ experiences. The findings of the study were discussed according to each theorist and in relation to the characteristics of the student athletes’ academic, athletic, and social experiences. To begin, Schlossberg (1981) presented an analysis of the students’ transition into the institution and the support they sought or received. Next, the environmental factors were discussed in relation to academic, athletic, and social integration (Tinto, 1987), student involvement (Astin, 1984), and student identity (Chickering, 1969). In some cases, ideas of the theorists overlapped and were discussed in relation to various transitional and environmental experiences of the participants.

**Schlossberg**

Schlossberg (1981) stated that a transition is an event or nonevent that results in a change in behavior or relationships. To understand issues that student athletes experienced when transitioning into an institution, characteristics of the transition itself and the individual’s perceptions of transition and their environment were examined. A variety of pre-college factors were also useful to understand the student athletes’ experiences as they transitioned into the institution.

Successful transitions usually involved the individual to utilize available resources at the institution. Schlossberg’s (1989) theory described the effects of institutional support services on student transitions. Schlossberg’s (1989) concept of *marginality* was used to investigate the transition and interaction of the student to their
environment based on their pre-college expectations and the reality of their experiences in their academic, athletic, and social worlds.

Student athletes are offered extensive academic and athletic support services through their participation in athletics. The participants in this study shared positive experiences in regard to their transition into the institution based off of the available resources they utilized. In some cases, the student athletes’ expectations of college life were very different from the reality of college life; however, those participants described the adjustments they made and things they learned to promote a positive overall experience.

When broadly asked to describe their transition into the institution, each of the athletes addressed the support they received through academic, athletic, and social resources. Academically, the participants described their experiences using the resources provided through student athlete enrichment services. They discussed resources such as athletic and academic advisors, study hall requirements, the availability of academic assistance through the tutor program, and the freshman orientation program. Also, the opportunity to enroll in two or three courses during their initial summer semester introduced the freshmen to the academic rigor of college academics. Summer school also allowed the student athletes to get a head start on earning credits toward their degree program so they could take a lighter load of credit hours during their first full semester. Enrolling in summer school also allowed the student athletes to get acquainted with the college campus before the vast majority of students returned for the fall semester.
Athletically, the participants described their experiences as they participated in summer workouts to get fit before their first college athletic season, the strength and conditioning resources that enhanced their physical development, and the medical treatment that assisted to maintain their overall health and to rehabilitate from injury.

Socially, the participants described their experiences adjusting to the campus and community culture. Some of the athletes expressed their concern with culture shock, whether it was a student from the other side of the country or from another country altogether. The participants also shared how they were easily able to build relationships with their teammates through living together in on-campus apartments.

The support systems that were described from the perspective of a combination of two or all three perspectives (academic, athletic, and/or social) appeared to have a greater impact on the student athletes’ overall college experience. Integrated support systems that aided the participants through their transition to the college environment included parent and family encouragement through the recruiting process, the influence of high school guidance counselors, coaches, peers, and teachers in their transition to college, and institutional factors that included its geographical proximity to home, previous relationships with coaches, friends, teammates, and family members already at the institution, and the opportunity to play a college sport at a large university in a competitive conference.

Marginality was defined as “a sense of not fitting in” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 5). Schlossberg (1989) suggested that marginality occurred when a student’s pre-college goals and expectations of their environment (Tinto, 1987) were misaligned with their
experience in the environment. According to Tinto’s (1987) theory on student persistence and retention, students each possessed a unique set of goals and expectations that they brought into the institution. When the environment was expected to be one thing, and in reality it was another, a student could feel estranged, isolated, and dissatisfied with their overall experience.

When broadly asked to describe their transition into the institution, each of the athletes addressed their pre-college expectations when they arrived and the sacrifices or tradeoffs that surprised them. Academically, two of the participants expressed an inopportunity to major in a particular degree program due to their participation in sport. Upon further investigation, the research discovered majors such as nursing, landscape architecture, and different areas of education (early-childhood, elementary, and secondary) were not available degree programs for student athletes due to clinical requirements, off-site laboratory courses, and student teaching that were required for each program respectively. From the athletic perspective, several of the participants expected to earn immediate playing time their freshman year. In reality, they found they were not quite ready to compete at the collegiate level and needed time to develop into their role on the team. Some of the participants were also surprised by the physical demands of their sport as well as the integration of their particular athletic style of play into the team. Socially, several participants shared their experience managing their time demands and balancing their roles of being a student and an athlete. Some of the participants felt they are accurately titled as a student athlete while others shared at times they felt like athlete-students. Experiences that included multiple perspectives, thus describing more
significant factors of the overall college experience for student athletes included several factors. The participants described their social and academic responsibilities in their sport, on-campus in classrooms, and in the community. The student athletes also shared their commitment to athletic and academic team goals to include campus and community outreach and spoke about their identities at the institution from the perception of faculty members, athletic coaches and personnel, and non-athlete students.

**Tinto**

Vincent Tinto’s (1987) theory of student persistence and retention assumed that student athletes came into the environment of the institution with a certain level of athletic and academic commitments. According to Tinto (1975), this level of commitment was impacted by how well the student integrated academically, athletically, and socially into the campus environment. Tinto’s (1987) theory suggested that students were continually interacting through academic, athletic, and social communities and their college experiences were contingent on the extent to which they were incorporated into these environments (Chaves, 2006).

Tinto (1987) assumed that individuals arrived at college with “differing family backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, levels of academic preparation, and unique skills and abilities” (Chaves, 2006, p. 142). The participants in this study each shared their pre-college goals and expectations, which was identified by the researcher as the first theme of the analysis. Significant factors included motivations, institutional factors including prior connections, and the opportunity to develop in order to pursue a professional career. The participants shared that integrating into the academic and athletic environments at the
institution was already set up for them. The student athletes’ summer school schedules were arranged prior to their arrival on campus and they had already been acquainted with their academic advisors and athletic coaches. From their first day on campus in the summer, the participants were required to complete their academic work at a high level and attend all classes while practicing with their teammates to prepare for the upcoming athletic season. While the participants expressed that they felt very athletically integrated, they appeared to be slightly less academically integrated and even lesser socially integrated.

Throughout the data analysis, it was apparent that the participants were mostly integrated into the athletic domain of the institution. Upon entering the institution, they immediately felt pressure to develop their skills to perform at a high level and sought the approval and acceptance of their coaches and teammates. When discussing their identities within the environment of the institution, many of the participants expressed that athletics was their main purpose, not an academic degree program or hanging out at college parties. Anita stated, “by being an athlete, I actually feel a lot more involved in the school.”

Some of the participants felt as if they were more academically integrated into the institution than others. Student athlete involvement in academics is more complex than just attending classes and the occasional extra credit seminar to maintain acceptable grades and remain eligible for athletic participation. According to Figure 3.6, there tend to be significant fewer student athletes enrolled in engineering programs than English, sociology, or psychology programs. The participants that were enrolled in degree
programs that were more heavily populated with student athletes tended to socialize exclusively with their athletic peers. They described sitting together in class, studying together when they found the time, and even working together on group projects as required by the course assignments. The participants that were in academic programs with fewer student athletes stated that they were often the only student athlete in their classes and therefore had no choice but to work on class projects with non-athlete students. Some of these participants shared their frustration with their athletic time demands as it made it difficult to find time to meet with non-athlete students outside of class; however, they expressed that they felt like they had established a trusted group of classmates that assisted them when necessary to catch up on any course materials they missed.

As the participants in this study shared their experiences socially integrating into the institution, the researcher found this area to have the least amount of institutional integration. However, a significant overlap existed between the student athletes’ social and athletic experience in regard to institutional integration. According to the participants in this study, student athletes were not employable (at least during the academic year), were not able to get involved in sorority or fraternity life, and rarely had time or energy to get out and socialize with other students. Due to the significant time they spent together practicing, traveling, watching film, and reporting to study hall and tutoring sessions, a majority of the participants stated that their social integration is determined by their athletic integration. Several of the participants described their involvement in other activities at the institution such as going to church or religious
functions, attending the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) meetings, and grabbing lunch or dinner with friends. Some of the participants described their social involvement in activities that are very much a part of the athletic environment and only available for student athletes. Examples of these activities included serving on the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and participating in a “pen-pal” character development program where student athletes would write letters to children in the community about such topics as integrity, respect, and hard-work. Ultimately, the student athletes were least integrated into the institution from the social perspective due to their integration with all that is involved with their athletic sport.

Astin

Astin’s (1984) theory of student involvement is similar to Tinto’s (1987) theory on student persistence and retention as well as Schlossberg’s (1989) concepts of transitions, whereby students must utilize resources to be successful in college. Astin (1984) defined student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 134). This study revealed that student athletes were more likely to describe a positive college experience when aspects of their pre-college goals and expectations, experiences transitioning or adjusting into the institution, and characteristics of the environment were described using a combination of academic, athletic, and social perspectives. Through becoming involved in academic, athletic, and social activities, it appeared that student athletes better understood their role in the institution and described having a more balanced and positive overall experience. Astin (1987) suggested that student involvement occurred through five general
categories: academic involvement, faculty involvement, involvement with peers, involvement in work, and involvement elsewhere. These five categories were broken down and discussed in relation to how they impacted the lived experiences of the participants. Significant aspects to the integration of the participants’ experiences in Astin’s (1987) five categories of student involvement appeared to be time management, role balance, parent and family support, responsibility, and relationships with others in both the athletic and academic environments.

**Academic involvement.**

At the participating institution, student athletes were immediately involved in academics as they were required to attend summer school the semester before their freshman year. Since the participants knocked out some of their required credit hours prior to the start of their freshman year, they noted that they were able to take a lighter load of classes during their first semester. Due to their time and travel demands, the participants noted they were careful not to engage in too many activities during their first semester of college because they knew they would not have as much time as a normal student.

Also, some of the participants expressed their inopportunity to engage in extracurricular academic sessions or other special programs related to their academic degree due to these time demands. When a course required the students to do a group project, some of the participants noted that they were not as inclined to work with non-athlete students since they felt they would not have the time to meet with them. The participants broadly described academic involvement as going to class and attending
study halls and tutoring sessions (as required by athletic department policies), and occasionally meeting with professors to catch up on missed lectures, assignments, and/or tests. The next section describes more on the student athletes’ faculty involvement.

**Faculty involvement.**

Frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement (Astin, 1984). Due to their time demands, student athletes often missed classes and occasionally have to take tests at different scheduled times.

In general, the participants had a positive experience with faculty on campus. Only a couple of the student athletes in this study expressed difficulty when it came time to interact with professors. Upon coming back into town after missing classes for an athletic event, some of the participants shared that their professors would ask them about it, seeming to have an interest in their sport. Only a couple of the participants shared a negative interaction with a faculty member. One participant was in a class that had numerous “pop” quizzes, which, according to the course syllabus, could not be made up. After asking the professor about making up the grades due to his travel schedule with athletics, he found the professor unwilling to help. Another participant shared how she was too hesitant to ask questions in class for fear of “sounding dumb” in front of her classmates. She did not take the time during her first year at the institution to interact with her professors; however, she suggested that she was getting better at initiating that interaction.
It is important for athletic and academic administrators to encourage greater student athlete involvement with faculty, and vice versa, because as Astin (1984) suggested, students who frequently interacted with faculty members were more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience.

**Involvement with peers.**

When asked about social involvement with peers, the participants expressed that their peers were mainly other student athletes, whether they were direct teammates or others that play a different sport. Student athletes spend a majority of their time with teammates. Much of their time together is spent in practices and meetings as well as traveling to away competitions. Others shared that they have some classes with their teammates and will also overlap their study hall hours and tutoring sessions with their teammates. The participants also shared that they hang out with student athletes that play other sports as well because they know what it is like to be a student athlete with all of the physical, mental, and time demands. The participants shared that they socialize almost exclusively with student athletes, whether it be their teammates or athletes that play other sports. In one case, a student athlete from an area near the institution took one of the participants that was from far outside of the region of the institution to his family’s house for the Thanksgiving holiday. Another participant shared that her team does a lot of things together outside of school and her sport, such as spring break trips and spending time on the lake or at an area swimming pool.
The participants shared how easy it was to meet, befriend, and get involved with other student athletes when they arrived at the institution because they all lived near one another in on-campus apartment housing. Astin (1984) suggested that living on-campus substantially increased the student’s chances of persisting and of aspiring to a graduate or professional degree. While there were other non-athlete students in other buildings within the same on-campus apartment complex, one of the participants shared that the buildings were designed in such a way that they would not see anybody except their roommates and perhaps the people that lived next to them. As she visited some non-athlete student friends in one of the large on-campus dormitories, another of the participants noted that interacting with others was much easier in that setting. She was able to interact with other students in the lobby of the building, in the elevator, and on each floor of rooms. It appeared that living on campus was found to be an important aspect to college life as well as setting goals and promoting a successful academic, athletic, and social experience. As Astin (1984) suggested, on-campus residents are more likely to achieve in such extracurricular areas as leadership and athletics and to express satisfaction with their undergraduate experience, particularly in the areas of student friendships, faculty-student relations, institutional reputation, and social life.

**Involvement in work (athletics).**

Similar to the student athlete’s involvement in academics, the participants were immediately involved in athletics as they were required to attend summer school the semester before their freshman year to begin preparing for the upcoming season. Student athletes that were not enrolled in a summer course and therefore were not on campus
during the summer were given a home workout plan to maintain athletic fitness during the off-season. The participants described the personal fitness and physical demands as challenging from the first summer workouts. During parts of the year, athletic coaches were not permitted to be present at any of the team workouts. The participants shared how they would get together with their teammates to train, whether they play a pick-up game or just simply run or lift weights. Because of their intense involvement with athletics, the participants suggested that they did not get the opportunity to socialize with many other student groups or organizations. While some of the student athletes were satisfied with their involvement mainly in athletics and academics, it is important for student athletes to get involved elsewhere while in college to promote a more well-rounded and balanced college experience.

**Involvement elsewhere.**

When asked what they do with their free time, some of the participants smirked and responded with, “what free time?” Student athletes, whether they wanted to admit it or not, did experience free time. Astin (1984) stated that it is important for students to establish their identity within the institution through the transition process. While all of the participants identified themselves as athletes at the institution, some of them shared identities from the academic and social perspective. Participants described their use of free-time as going out to eat with friends, attending FCA meetings, playing video games, and socializing with other student athletes at house-parties or other social functions. According to Astin (1984), involvement elsewhere is contingent upon cultural factors as well as environmental factors. Student athletes had a unique culture of commitments and
responsibilities that when combined with the institutional environment, provided unique opportunities and set limitations that impacted their overall experience. Some of the participants described their experiences missing out on certain activities due to their athletic demands. For example, student athletes are required to spend certain number of hours each week practicing their sport and studying in the on-campus student athlete academic facilities. One of the participants described not being able to attend one of the home football games because her coach did not want her out all day wasting her energy for their upcoming game. Another participant described his reluctance to go out with friends on a free night before a game in order to rest and be ready to compete.

**Chickering**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) presented a broader way to view identity development through the use of what was termed the “seven vectors.” The seven vectors were: (a) developing competence and ability; (b) managing emotions; (c) movement through autonomy toward interdependence; (d) development of mature, interpersonal relationships; (e) establishing identity; (f) developing purpose; and (g) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Although several of these “vectors” have been previously discussed by Astin (1984), Tinto (1987), and Schlossberg (1981) in the preceding text, a summary of the student athlete experience through the lens of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) seven vectors of identity development was used to summarize and pull together theories of college students’ transition or adjustment to the academic, athletic, and social environments (Schlossberg, 1981), the amount of
institutional integration (Tinto, 1987), and student involvement and engagement (Astin, 1984).

The first vector of identity development was the students’ development of their competence and ability. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), it was important for students to produce intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence through their transition into the institutional environment. As discussed through Schlossberg’s (1981) theory on student transitions, it was important for student athletes to seek involvement in academic, athletic, and social activities to produce a well-rounded experience. The athletic department at the participating institution established a framework for its student athletes to develop competence and ability in each of these domains. It was important to note that once enrolled at the institution as student athletes, the participants were required to utilize academic resources for a predetermined weekly amount of time and attend all athletic meetings, practices, and competitions to promote their athletic development. The institution also encouraged interpersonal relationships as they required the incoming student athletes to live with their teammates in on-campus housing to begin building relationships with teammates and coaches, among others.

The second vector of identity development was the students’ ability to manage emotions. Chickering & Reisser (1993) recommended that students recognize, express, and control their emotions. Each of the participants in this study expressed their concerns balancing multiple roles and finding time to devote to each of their commitments (relates back to Schlossberg’s theory on student transitions). Without proper time management, the athletes shared feelings of overwhelming stress, which could hinder in the
development of their identity at the institution. It is important for student athletes to recognize when emotional situations arise and find ways of expressing and controlling it. Some of the participants suggested that through their participation in their sport, they are able to blow off steam and cope with difficult situations in their academic or personal lives. It is also important for all others in the institutional community to understand the demands that student athletes encountered in order to assist them in times of emotional duress.

The third vector of identity development was movement through autonomy toward interdependence. According to Evans, Forney, and Guilfo-DiBrito (1998), this vector refers to the students’ “freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance, affection, or approval from others” (p. 39). As discussed throughout this study, student athletes came into the institution with a wide variety of goals and expectations. Many of the participants in this study expressed that they wanted to play at a big-time athletic school and in a superior conference for their sport. Due to the nature of the athletic program at the participating institution, most of the athletes recruited were among the best athletic talent available during their time of recruitment. Many of the participants spoke about their high school, regional, and in some cases national teams they participated on prior to college. Kevin stated:

Sometimes, freshmen athletes will come in with expectations of like, “hey man, I want to play right away. I was a start at my place in high school” and they’re kind of shocked once they don’t (get to play) and they kind of get down.
In short, all-American athletes from high school may find themselves having to re-earn their athletic identity once they transition into the college environment which requires them to be dependent on the others around them to lift them up and provide them with new opportunities.

Academically, it is also important for student athletes to move through autonomy toward interdependence. Some student athletes shared their hesitation to ask for academic help from their professors, waiting on others to assist them. Kevin offered an example of this behavior:

I feel like I’m hesitant to ask questions in class sometimes. I don’t really ask too many questions I guess if I feel confused unless I go to the teacher after, but during, I feel like you’re judged, like if I’m asking a question I might sound stupid and I might have missed class and not have heard or something. And like if I ask a question, everybody will like turn and look at you and like, especially because I don’t speak up much in class, so when you do, they’ll all turn around and you turn red and think, “why did I ask a question?” (laughs). But I guess you are hesitant to ask a question because you are an athlete in class, maybe based on what other people might think or whatever, it shouldn’t really matter, I should be more mature and not really care. I should just learn it, but oh well.

Some students, like Kevin, were afraid to speak up and waited for another student to ask his question to get the information. It is important for student athletes to initiate communication with their professors and to not be afraid to speak up if there is something that is confusing or needs more clarification.
Socially, it was important for student athletes to establish who they were (Astin, 1984). As previously discussed in the Astin section above, there are cultural and environmental concerns for student athletes to establish their identities. It is important for student athletes to understand their commitments and requirements through their participation in a college sport in order to best establish who they are in the campus community.

The fourth vector of identity development as outlined by Chickering and Reisser (1993) is the development of mature, interpersonal relationships. Student athletes are recruited to institutions from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The college environment is designed to expose students to a very culturally diverse setting and athletics is no different. Considering the number of out-of-region and international athletes that are enrolled at the participating institution and their socialization with one another regardless of sport, student athletes could potentially be exposed to more cultural diversity than non-athlete students. Fredrick, the international student in the study, expressed his feelings of culture shock once he arrived. Others such as Anita and Douglas that came to the institution from far outside of the region of the participating institution and expressed similar feelings when adapting to their new surroundings.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh vectors of identity development involve establishing an identity, developing a purpose, and developing integrity. To establish identity, the student athlete often finds themselves in various roles in the campus community. First and foremost, student athletes are considered just that, students, and athletes. Several of the participants mentioned they felt as if they were role models on the college campus as
they represented their sport. Others pointed at responsibility and leadership roles that they assumed through their participation in athletics.

To develop purpose, athletes must have clear vocational goals and persist in their completion (Chaves, 2006). The participants shared a variety of goals that incorporated the first theme of the coding analysis. Some of the goals and expectations included motivations, institutional factors, previous connections at the institution, and to pursue a professional career in their sport.

Finally, to promote identity development in college students, Chickering & Reisser (1993) recommended the development of integrity. Evans et al., (1998) defined student integrity as the development of humanitarian and personalize values as well as achieving congruence so that “self interest is balanced by a sense of social responsibility” (p. 40). When discussing their team goals, several of the participants mentioned the component of community service or community outreach. As student athletes faced complex time demands and the challenge of balancing multiple roles, it was admirable to see that community outreach projects were included in the yearly goals for the team. The participants shared several stories of times they got involved in the community and seemed to be appreciative of the opportunity.

Conclusions

This study aimed to form an understanding of the freshman student athlete experience as they transitioned into the institution. Student athletes have a unique identity at the institution considering their athletic and academic demands. The participants in this study consisted of eleven sophomore student athletes, each with
differing pre-college goals and expectations toward their involvement in athletics at the institution. They each shared unique personal and educational backgrounds, which appeared to impact the way they viewed and experienced their interactions with others in the campus environment. Despite some complexities and challenges to their daily schedule and routines, the participants expressed positive transitioning experiences and were satisfied with the academic, athletic, and social environments at the institution.

The student athlete experience is rooted from three areas or perspectives: (a) academic interactions; (b) athletic interactions; and (c) social interactions. As the participants described their pre-college goals and expectations, their transitioning experiences, and their view of the campus environment, they spoke from one, two, or even all three of these perspectives. The described experiences that were exclusive to a singular perspective appeared to be less significant to the overall student athlete experience of college life. The described experiences that were integrated with two or all three of the perspectives appeared to be more significant to the student athlete experience of college life.

Student athletes are required to enroll at the institution as full-time students. Some of the participants took fewer courses during the semester when their sport was in-season while others continued to take at least one additional course to further progress toward earning their degree. Each of the participants in this study made good grades and seemed to be academically driven to continue to make good grades and maintain a high GPA.

Many of the participants shared how their attraction to the institution was based on the degree programs offered. Douglas shared that he was always a math and science
person so he decided to attend the participating institution for that reason. The participants also mentioned the influence of their parents and other family members. During the recruiting process, a couple of the participants shared that their parents seemed to know more about the participating institution than they did.

Each of the participants described having a strong academic background and family support and encouragement to attend an institution that offered more prestigious academic degree programs. The participants also described their experiences with academic resources exclusively from their academic perspective. This included the use of study hall and tutors, athletic and academic advisors, and the freshman orientation program where athletes learned the ins and outs of what is required to be successful as a student athlete at the participating institution. While these described experiences were noteworthy of the student athletes’ transition into the academic environment, they did not appear to be as significant as other factors to understand their overall college experience.

When asked about their initial interest to participate in college athletics, many of the participants shared their extensive athletic background in their sport. One of the participants started competing in his sport as early as four years old. While each of the participants seemed to be academically motivated, some of them mentioned that they were attracted to the institution more to secure playing time on a successful team in order to develop their skills and abilities to continue playing their sport on a professional level. Some of the participants noted their style of play was different than that of their teammates and the physical demands of their sport were more strenuous than they had expected. In short, these exclusive athletic experiences seemed to be more individually
based than what the general consensus was on their athletic experiences. Other athletic factors that were integrated with academic experiences and/or social experiences were found to be more significant to impact the student athletes’ overall college experience.

Exclusive to the social experience of student athletes in this study were mainly described as gained or missed opportunities. Some of the participants were excited to gain a new experience by coming to an institution where they could essentially start over, making new friends and connections and living in a different environment. One of the participants wanted to go to an institution that she did not know anyone because everyone at her high school went to the local state college in her hometown. Another of the participants shared that he was interested in the institution because it was located in an area with a warmer climate than his hometown. The international student athlete experienced culture shock when he first arrived. He shared that people did not always understand him due to his accent and that he had to make conscious efforts to speak slowly and to change his word choices so people knew what he was talking about. A few of the other participants described their experience adjusting from their home life in a large city to their student life in a small college town. Some participants experienced elements of isolation where they were not able to find the time to associate in social circles outside of their teammates and the other student athletes that they lived around or regularly saw in required study hall and tutoring sessions. Other participants seemed to appreciate their social isolation and shared positive experiences pertaining to their team unity; however, other participants expressed frustrations not being able to be as involved with their classmates and other non-athlete students. Other social factors were integrated
with athletic experiences and/or academic experiences and were found to be more significant to understand the full student athlete experience of college life.

Academic and athletic perspectives combined to reveal the participants’ motivation to earn what was termed as both an ‘athletic’ or ‘academic’ scholarship. The participants also shared that their perception through interactions with professors and other faculty members were different due to their status as an academic student that also participated in a sport at the institution. Participants in this study also negotiated between their commitment to academics and athletics through their description of their identity as a ‘student athlete’ versus an ‘athlete-student.’ In some cases, the participants felt that they were committed more or less to their role as a student and as an athlete depending on the time of the year through the fluctuation of their athletic and academic demands.

Athletic and social perspectives combined to reveal several significant elements of their experience. In regard to pre-college goals and expectations, some of the participants’ shared their previous connections with coaches, teammates, friends, and family members that were currently or previously enrolled or employed at the institution. In regards to the transition into the institution, the participants’ mentioned that their personal fitness was in some cases and eye-opening experience as they were faced with a much higher level of physical demands at the college level. The participants shared how their personal fitness impacted their social experience fitting in and be accepted by their coaches and teammates. Concerning their athletic and social experiences in the institution’s environment, the participants shared that they were proud to be student athletes and in some cases, they were considered role models in and around the campus
community. The participants also shared various leadership roles they assumed on their athletic teams and in their social circles.

Social and academic perspectives combined to expose the adjustments that the participants made through summer school and as they progressed from summer into fall. Summer school was a time where the athletes could enroll in a couple of classes to get a head start on earning credits toward their degree program as well as to get acclimated with their teammates and begin to build relationships. Summer school was portrayed as a time that not many other students are on campus or in classes. It was also a good time for the participants to learn their way around the campus and get to know their faculty and academic advisors. Once summer school ended and the rest of the student body arrived to begin the fall semester, many of the participants shared that they were shocked at how different the campus community became.

The findings of this study could potentially help current high school athletes that are interested in playing a college sport to understand the student athlete experience from the participants’ perspectives. The conclusions of this study could provide an advantage for incoming student athletes to prepare them as they look to transition into an institution as well as what to expect once they arrive from the aspect of their academic, athletic, and social perspectives. While the participants shared multiple elements of their goals and expectations, the researcher determined through the analysis that there were no explicit characteristics of pre-college experiences that were rooted in all three perspectives. This showed that student athletes tended to come into institutions for a variety of reasons, mostly balanced between their academic and athletic goals. It appeared that goals and
expectations that are unique to student athletes have a less significant impact on the overall college experience than some of the factors of their transition and the institutional environment.

The most significant factors to describe the overall student athlete experience were discovered through the participants’ experiences transitioning into the academic, athletic, and social environments of the institution. From the participants’ academic perspective, building relationships existed through their interactions with faculty and non-athlete students they met through their classes. From their athletic and social perspectives, the participants were able to build relationships with their teammates, coaches, and other student athletes through their involvement in athletics as well as the opportunities to associate with other non-athlete students away from classes through their involvement in extra-curricular activities. During their first-year as a student athlete, each of the participants shared that the most important thing they learned was how to manage their time. Time management became a running theme throughout each of the participants’ experiences. While some of the participants were aware of the time that was demanded of student athletes, others were completely caught by surprise. Even those athletes that came into the institution with expectations of learning how to manage their time were not always able to cope with it very easily.

In summary, the most important advice for incoming student athletes to gain a positive and well-rounded first-year freshmen experience was informed by the participants’ integration of experiences based on their academic, athletic, and social perspectives. First, a prospective student athlete should come into the institution with
established goals and expectations. During their transition, they should learn to build relationships, not only with their teammates and coaches, but with faculty members and other non-athlete students through their classes or other social activities. An incoming student athlete may not realize that many teams had goals that incorporated academic, athletic, and social responsibilities. These goals included the achievement in academics, the time and physical demands of athletic participation, and the involvement in community service and other campus outreaches. Prospective student athletes must also realize that they were required to balance multiple roles, which each needed proper management of time and resources. Throughout their interviews, the participants alluded to multiple roles, such as an academic student, a student athlete, a boyfriend or girlfriend, and as a son or daughter, to name a few. Each of these roles required an appropriate amount of time to properly manage; however, in many cases, managing their multiple roles was easier said that done due to the time and physical demands of their involvement in athletics.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study could be repeated countless times to understand the experiences of student athletes based on any number of characteristics. A researcher could further investigate into one of the themes that were revealed in this study. For example, a research project could look more closely at the student athletes’ pre-college goals and expectations to understand more about their motivations (internal) or institutional (external) that impact their decision to attend a particular institution.
The same study could be accomplished by selecting an athlete based on his or her unique status at the institution. For instance, rather than selecting non-revenue athletes as was done for this study, revenue sport athletes could be investigated for any differences in how their pre-college goals and expectations impact their experience transitioning into the institutional environment. Another possibility could be to select only athletes that compete in a spring sport with the assumption that they have extra time to get further acclimated into the academic, athletic, and social worlds at the institution. Researchers could also select student athletes based on their degree programs to understand differences in academic rigor and motivations.

A cross-case analysis could be done to compare the knowledge that was generated in this study with that of a different population group or at a different university altogether. A researcher could select non-athlete students to investigate how their pre-college goals and expectations might impact their transition into the institutional environment, thus impacting their experiences. Researchers could also explore the student athlete experience at an institution located in a very different setting, such as a large city where there are many more activities for which they can get involved outside of their student athlete responsibilities.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of the findings of this research project are applicable to many different areas of the university setting. As coaches recruit athletes to join their athletic programs, they may consider communicating the significant findings of this project to
help the perspective student athlete understand what it is like to be a student athlete at the participating institution.

While pre-college goals and expectations did not produce the most significant findings, it may be important for a coach or recruiting coordinator to assess the goals and expectations of the student athlete. In some cases the athlete may be interested in a particular degree program or have the aspirations to play their sport professionally if given the opportunity. Others may have always wanted to attend the participating institution and are well aware of the institutional environment. If athletes become aware of the important factors and elements to the student athlete experience in their transition into the academic, athletic, and social environment of the institution, they could be better prepared to handle any hardship, thus enhancing their experience of college life.

Significant factors included building relationships, being responsible, balancing multiple roles, practicing time management, and integrating with team goals.

Although the student athletes in this study mostly shared positive experiences interacting with academic faculty and administrators on campus, administrators should continue to encourage faculty members to integrate the student athlete with other non-athlete students in the classroom environment. Currently, when student athletes are traveling and not able to attend class, they are often given their work to do on their own or with other students outside of class rather than with other students in class. Through collaborating student athletes with non-athlete students, there is a chance that the academic experiences of student athletes could be enhanced.
Many of the participants shared their inopportunity to get involved in activities outside of their academic and athletic commitments. Student affairs officials should try to incorporate student athletes in campus activities. During the athletic season, student athletes would not be able to participate in as many extra-curricular activities, but through the coordination with the athletic department, student affairs professionals could identify periods throughout the year when student athletes are not as busy with athletics and can get involved.

Athletic departments can also play an important role in enhancing the overall student athlete experience. Providing freshmen student athletes with on-campus housing where they can socialize and build relationships from their first day on campus is a great way that the athletic department has encouraged their social involvement. Athletic departments should continue to bridge the gap between athletics and academics by encouraging the academic achievement of student athletes and communicating their accomplishments with all others in the campus community. Athletic administrators could also encourage coaches to incorporate elements of academic, athletic, and social actions within their team goals. Incorporating more community outreach programs for athletes where they can interact with non-athlete students and others in the community will only help to enhance the social experience of student athletes.

There are also some academic majors that are unavailable for student athletes that created a frustrating situation for one of the participants in this study. Further steps should be taken to allow student athletes all the educational opportunities that other students are given. Athletic teams and academic programs are not very flexible;
however, a conversation between athletic and academic administration could help to find a way for student athletes to be able to major in such programs as nursing, education, or landscape architecture, or even have the opportunity to study abroad for a semester. In short, campus administrators should encourage student athletes to get involved in as many areas as they can to promote and enhance their overall experience of college life.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to how the pre-college goals and expectations of student athletes impacted their experience transitioning into the institution and how the academic, athletic, and social environment interacted to impact their overall experience of college-life. The findings were presented and related back to the works of Schlossberg (1981), Tinto (1987), Astin (1984), and Chickering (1969). These scholars produced theories that explained the student experience from the perspective of their transition into the institution as well as their integration, engagement, and involvement with the academic, athletic, and social life of the institution. The general conclusions of the study were presented according to the themes that were produced through the descriptive and focus coding processes. Experiences that were exclusive of one perspective (whether it be academic, athletic, or social) were found to be not as significant to understand the overall college experience of student athletes than experiences that shared a combination of two or all three of the perspectives. Implications for theory and practice as well as suggestions for future research were discussed in order to provide ideas for educational leaders and researchers to advance the knowledge of the student athlete experience in higher education.
Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Structured Interview Description

Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol:

1) Introduction
2) Present consent form and purpose of research to interviewee
3) Provide interviewee with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
4) Upon completion of consent form, begin recording and proceed with interview

The following questions will guide the interview:

1. Can you begin by telling me about yourself? Tell me a little about your academic program of study as well as your athletic experiences.
2. How have you managed to get to the point where you are right now?
3. What background information or experiences would you like to share? (i.e., athletics, academics, family, etc.)
4. How have you managed the transition from high school to college?
5. What does your typical day look like?
6. What tradeoffs have you had to make due to your status as a student athlete?
7. Looking at your experience as a student athlete, what has been the greatest challenge for you?
8. How is being a student athlete impacted your experience of college life?
9. In addition to your role as a student athlete, what are other roles that you have to manage? How do you balance these roles?
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study
Clemson University

An Examination of the Role that Social and Academic Integration Play in the First-Year Freshman Student Athlete Experience

Description of the study and your part in it

Dr. James Satterfield (principal investigator) and Adam McFarlane (student performing the research under the direction of Dr. James Satterfield) are inviting you to take part in a research study. Dr. James Satterfield is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Clemson University. Adam McFarlane is a student at Clemson University, running this study with the help of Dr. James Satterfield. The purpose of this research is to understand how the student athlete’s college experience is informed by the integration of their social outlets, academic requirements, and athletic demands.

Your part in the study will be to provide the researchers with qualitative data captured through interviews and field notes identifying a variety of academic and non-academic factors that aim to integrate freshmen student athletes into the life of the institution, thereby promoting a positive and well-rounded first-year experience. The audio of your interviews will be digitally recorded.

To be a part of this study, it will take about 50 minutes of your time on two occasions.

Risks and Discomforts

We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

Possible Benefits

We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand how the nature of institutional integration on campus as described by your experience affects the transition to college and your experiences of daily student life.

Incentives

Due to NCAA and institutional rules and policies regarding extra benefits for student athletes, we are not able to offer any incentives to you for your participation in this study.
Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. Because in-depth interviews can often include sensitive and individually specific information that might identify you to the reader, we will do all within our ability to insure that your privacy remains protected. Your name and the institution will be given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. You will also be given the opportunity to choose your pseudonym.

Digital audio files of your interviews will be kept in electronic format and locked in a password-protected file folder on the researcher’s personal computer. Back-up audio files of your interviews and text files of the transcriptions of those interviews will be kept in a password-protected file folder on the researcher’s personal portable hard-drive. Any paper copies of transcriptions or field notes will be securely kept at the researcher’s residence. Once the research project is completed, the audio files of your interviews will be deleted and only one set of paper transcriptions will be kept. All other paper copies of your interviews and any field notes will be shredded.

Choosing to Be in the Study

You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. James Satterfield at Clemson University at 864-656-5111.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

A copy of this form will be given to you.
Appendix C

IRB Notice of Approval

Dear Dr. Satterfield,

The chair of the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) validated the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on October 17, 2013 that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as Exempt under category B2, based on federal regulations 45 CFR 46. The approved consent document is attached for distribution. Your protocol will expire on May 31, 2014.

The expiration date indicated above was based on the completion date you entered on the IRB application. If an extension is necessary, the PI should submit an Exempt Protocol Extension Request form, http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/forms.html, at least three weeks before the expiration date. Please refer to our website for more information on the new procedures, http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/guidance/reviewprocess.html.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB’s approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately. All team members are required to review the “Responsibilities of Principal Investigators” and the “Responsibilities of Research Team Members” available at http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.

All the best,

Nalinee D. Patin
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REFERENCES


